



## Recensioni / Reviews

**Citation:** Recensioni / Reviews (2024). *Sijis* 14: pp. 285-318. doi: 10.36253/SIJIS-2239-3978-15537

**Copyright:** © 2024 Recensioni / Reviews. This is an open access, peer-reviewed article published by Firenze University Press (<https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/bsfm-sijis>) and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within the paper and its Supporting Information files.

**Competing Interests:** The Author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

Chris Arthur, *Hidden Cargoes*, Rochester, EastOver Press, 2022, pp. 232. € 20.00. ISBN-13: 978-1-958094-03-7

*Hidden Cargoes* is the latest collection from Irish essayist Chris Arthur. This substantial collection of essays is a treasure trove of thought and ideas, presented in a volume which is beautifully designed by E.K. Larken for Eastover Press. The current volume again showcases Arthur's experimentation with the essay form. It is Arthur's eighth collection. Twelve essays offer readers the chance to slow down and meditate on the meaning to be gleaned from close observation of various phenomena and experiences. The starting points for the essays vary, ranging from languid recollection of childhood memories of nature to moments of insight or observation inspired by interactions in everyday life.

In all cases, the import of the essays consists of two strands. Firstly, there is a unifying theme of there being an inherent meaning in all things. Secondly, this sense of meaning is amplified and distilled in Arthur's luminous prose, where the *mot juste* is coupled with an elegant style and interesting meditations, both the author's own, and those of various savants. In "A Kist o' Whistles" the author recalls being "anchored, grounded" to the woods of his childhood, "as if this was somewhere the voltage of my youth could be safely grounded" (19).

For Arthur, all life is connected, and there are multiple starting points for finding meaning. We must, however, slow down. Slowing down is necessary in order to follow the carefully composed logic and description, and involves effort. This is also a deeply humanistic collection, whose philosophical framing is the idea that humans belong to a cosmos which can be observed in small details, which are beautifully described. William H. Gass has described how the essay form "convokes a community of writers" and makes use of the writers like "instruments in an orchestra" (1985, 27). The essays in *Hidden Cargoes* echo this musical metaphor: they strike up a note, develop a theme and then amplify and diversify the originating inspirational material by introducing further meditation on, and exploration of the initial source - by citing the work of others, and reflecting on this. So it is that in an essay called "Leaf" we meet George Steiner, and must stop to reflect on his observation that metaphors offer "new mappings of the world" (67). Elsewhere we meet linguists, historians and philosophers, both well-known and less known, all of whose voices are offered to us in the context of Arthur's everyday observations.

In many essays the elegance of Arthur's style mitigates the sometimes serious tone and occasionally ponderous reflection. (The gentle meandering is always worth it). Elsewhere there is humour. In "Earpiece" for example, the musings that follow meditation on a fellow passenger's ear are interrupted by the interpolation of "His Brother's Voice", where Arthur's brother, in the guise of being a critical friend, impatiently asks for more detail and a more conventional telling:

'Ok I get it that you stared at a pretty girl's ear to pass the time on your bus journey. I'd still like a name for her though, and to know more about her story'. (38)

A thread of decentring is weaved throughout the collection. In "Still Life with Witch Hazel" we move from our short-term and individualistic perspective to that of witch hazel. Witch hazel holds various memories for Arthur. It becomes the catalyst for his imaginings of his parents' marriage. It brings us to an interrogation of the phenomenological theories of philosopher Edward Husserl and thence to memories of the author's gardens. The effect is both moving and meaningful. "Life is bigger than us" is the enduring theme; meaning comes from perspective.

Arthur himself provides a succinct summary of his book's approach and theme:

Meaning-making, that unnoticed industry we're perpetually engaged in, the process by which we make the world make sense to us, depends on cutting down the gargantuan scale of time and space that faces us into moments, objects, relationships, making stories that are sized to fit the constraints of consciousness and the limits of our language. (212)

In a world where the craving for instant gratification and instant "knowledge" is being deliberately promoted by algorithms cut off from community, nuanced and thought-provoking contributions such as *Hidden Cargoes* are needed more than ever. This is a generous intellectual offering, clothed in humour and lyricism, like a warm coat on a cold day or a magic cloak to shield us when we travel too near to the sun.

#### *Works Cited*

Gass W.H. (1985), "Emerson and the Essay", in Id., *Habitations of the Word*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 9-49.

*Róisín Ní Ghairbhí*

Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History*, Syracuse, Syracuse UP, 2004, pp. xxxi+256. \$45. HB. ISBN: 978-0-8156-3044-9.

#### *1. Introduction*

Joseph Lennon's *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* is a compelling exploration of the complex relationship between Ireland and the Orient. In this groundbreaking book, Lennon takes readers on a thought-provoking journey through Irish literature and intellectual discourse, shedding light on how the Irish imagination engaged with and interpreted the East. With meticulous research and insightful analysis, Lennon presents a comprehensive study that challenges traditional perspectives and narratives, deepens our understanding of Irish cultural identity, contributes to ongoing conversations about the dynamics of Orientalism and post-

colonialism, and offers new insights into Irish cultural identity. This review examines the key themes, strengths, and contributions of Lennon's work, highlighting its significance in the field of literary and intellectual history. Scholars, students, and anyone interested in Irish literature and intellectual history will find this book to be a valuable and thought-provoking resource.

Lennon's writing style is accessible and engaging, making his book an enjoyable read for both academic scholars and general readers. His meticulous attention to detail, combined with his ability to present complex ideas in a clear and concise manner, ensures that readers are able to grasp the intricacies of Irish Orientalism without feeling overwhelmed by jargon or dense theoretical frameworks. Additionally, the book is well-structured, with each chapter building upon the previous ones to create a cohesive narrative that guides readers through the evolution of Irish engagement with the Orient. Moreover, Lennon's research is commendable, as he draws from a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including literary texts, historical documents, and critical studies. This comprehensive approach not only strengthens the validity of his arguments but also provides readers with a rich and diverse collection of materials to explore further. Lennon's thorough analysis of both well-known and lesser-known texts ensures that his study encompasses a broad spectrum of Irish Orientalist discourse, avoiding any oversights or omissions.

## *2. Thematic Exploration*

Lennon masterfully examines the multifaceted aspects of Irish Orientalism, exploring the intersections of literature, politics, religion, and nationalism. By delving into both Irish writing about the East and Irish encounters with Oriental cultures, he provides a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play. The book explores a wide range of themes, including exoticism, cultural borrowing, religious encounters, political ideologies, and postcolonial perspectives, all of which contribute to a nuanced understanding of the Irish engagement with the Orient.

Lennon's work raises important questions about the nature of cultural exchange and appropriation. Through his examination of Irish writers' engagement with Oriental cultures, Lennon prompts readers to consider how ideas, symbols, and narratives are borrowed, reimagined, and reinterpreted across different cultural contexts. This exploration of cultural borrowing and exchange adds depth to our understanding of the dynamics of literary and intellectual history, emphasizing the fluidity and interconnectedness of cultural production. In his analysis, Lennon skillfully navigates a vast array of literary works, from canonical figures like Jonathan Swift and W.B. Yeats to lesser-known writers who contributed to the discourse of Irish Orientalism. By examining poetry, fiction, travel writing, and intellectual debates, he reveals the diversity of perspectives and motivations that shaped Irish responses to the East. This breadth of coverage ensures that readers gain a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

## *3. Intellectual Contributions*

One of the key strengths of Lennon's work lies in his ability to uncover and analyze the often overlooked connections between Irish literature and Orientalism. He illuminates how the Irish engaged with the Orient in a manner distinct from their British counterparts, forging a unique path that reflects Ireland's historical, religious, and political context. Lennon's research fills a significant gap in the scholarship on Orientalism, showcasing the distinctive contributions made by Irish authors and intellectuals to this discourse. Lennon's examination of the inter-

sections between Irish nationalism and Orientalism is particularly enlightening. He skillfully demonstrates how Orientalist tropes and ideas were incorporated into the construction of Irish national identity, challenging the assumption that Irish cultural identity was solely based on opposition to British imperialism. By highlighting the ways in which Irish nationalists drew inspiration from Oriental cultures and narratives, Lennon prompts readers to rethink traditional notions of Irish identity formation.

Another noteworthy contribution of Lennon's work is his incorporation of postcolonial perspectives. He deftly analyzes the power dynamics inherent in Irish encounters with the East, interrogating the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer. By exploring the ways in which Irish writers and intellectuals negotiated their own position within the global hierarchy of power, Lennon offers a valuable contribution to postcolonial literary studies.

Further strength of Lennon's work is his attention to the nuances and complexities within Irish Orientalism. Rather than presenting a monolithic view, he highlights the variations and contradictions that exist within Irish literary and intellectual responses to the Orient. By doing so, Lennon avoids oversimplification and acknowledges the diverse range of perspectives and motivations that shaped Irish engagement with the East. This nuanced approach challenges the notion of a singular Irish identity or a uniform Orientalist discourse, and instead reveals the intricacies and tensions inherent in the subject matter.

Another commendable aspect of Lennon's research is his incorporation of marginalized voices and perspectives. He not only explores the works of well-known Irish writers but also delves into the writings of lesser-known figures who contributed to the discourse of Irish Orientalism. This inclusion of voices that have been historically marginalized provides a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of the topic, enriching the overall narrative.

Additionally, Lennon's analysis of the religious dimension of Irish Orientalism is particularly enlightening. He examines the encounters between Irish Catholicism and Eastern religions, shedding light on the ways in which Irish writers and intellectuals navigated the complexities of religious identity and spirituality in the context of Orientalist discourse. By exploring the interplay between religion, culture, and literature, Lennon offers a fresh perspective on the Irish engagement with the Orient, further deepening our understanding of the complexities of Irish cultural history.

While Lennon's work is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to the field, one potential limitation is his interpretation of Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817) as an Arabic romance, "discussing the similarity in Irish and Arab temperaments and natures" (156), which is surprisingly untrue. *Lalla Rookh* is a Persian romance with Persian characterisation and setting, and is set in the context of a romanticized portrayal of Persia (present-day Iran).

#### 4. Conclusion

Lennon's *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* is a significant addition to the field of literary and intellectual history, offering a comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationship between Ireland and the Orient. It is thought-provoking work that sheds light on an often overlooked aspect of Irish cultural history. Through his meticulous research, insightful analysis, and engaging writing style, Lennon challenges traditional perspectives and offers new insights into the complexities of Irish engagement with the Orient. By examining the intersections of literature, politics, religion, and nationalism, he uncovers the multifaceted motivations and implications of Irish Orientalism. This book serves as a valuable resource for scholars and students interested in Irish studies, literary and intellectual history, postcolonial studies, and Orientalism. Lennon's work not only deepens our understanding of Irish cultural

identity but also contributes to broader discussions on the complexities of cultural encounters and the power dynamics inherent in the construction of national narratives. *Irish Orientalism* is an invaluable resource for scholars, researchers, and readers interested in Irish studies, literary and intellectual history, postcolonial studies, and cultural exchange. By illuminating the multifaceted nature of *Irish Orientalism*, Lennon invites us to critically examine the dynamics of cultural encounters and the construction of identity in a global context.

*Hamid Farahmandian*

Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press. Volume 1. Beginnings and Consolidation, 1640-1800*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2023, pp. 728. £ 195. HB. ISBN: 978-1-4744-9917-0.

The first volume from the series *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press* documents the history of the press of these nations between 1640 and 1800. At the outset, the 1640s were chosen as a starting point because this was the decade when news publications including both foreign and domestic news began to appear on a more or less regular basis (Raymond 1996). Moreover, the decision to end the volume in 1800 is sensible: the final decade of the eighteenth century witnessed important new directions in the print media that were to shape the news in the following century. In relation to *The Sunday Press*, for instance, it was no earlier than 1791 that Britain's oldest extant title (the *Observer*) was founded, the move towards Sunday newspapers becoming ever more prominent in the years to follow, when a handful of papers' owners turned them into successful entertainment papers (Conboy 2010, 69).

The volume is an ideal combination of core chapters and case studies. On the one hand, chapters are concerned with the business of the press, production and distribution, legal constraints and opportunities, readers and readerships, with a well-balanced overview of the emerging identities and opportunities of news writers and journalists. On the other hand, case studies zoom in on particular people, titles and other press-related phenomena. The overall thematic coherence of the volume reflects great credit on Nicholas Brownlees, the editor, and individual contributors alike, with some contributions focusing on specific national contexts – notably Scotland, Ireland and Wales – and others with more of a cross-national dimension.

First and foremost, the volume addresses the issue of news production and transmission, with a view to both periodical news publications and the specialised press as instantiated by essays, literary and review journalism, and medical journals. Among the aspects explored in most detail is the extraordinary dynamism of the British and Irish press in the first years of the eighteenth century due to, among other things, the new legislative framework following the collapse of the Licensing Act in 1695. In the aftermath of the demise of the Act, a freer and more competitive market was to emerge as legal restraints were no longer in place preventing potential publishers from launching and running publications they believed might be profitable. In this type of scenario, the volume sheds light on the complex business of managing news publications. Besides advertising, which played a critical role in ensuring newspaper viability, due emphasis is therefore laid on business considerations such as costs, distribution, how many people to employ, taxation and, last but not least, the management of contents, design and formats.

Against this backdrop, readers interested in Irish studies will not fail to show their appreciation for the volume. Accordingly, the strategic importance of advertising is assessed with regard to the

island of Ireland as well. The relationship between advertising revenue and journal sustainability would become ever closer as the word “advertiser” itself made its appearance in newspaper titles, with examples of name changes being very common in response to the increasing financial interdependence between mercantile interests and newspaper profitability. Not surprisingly, therefore, a Dublin paper established in 1736 with an eye to attracting ads did not hesitate to proclaim itself the *Dublin Daily Advertiser*, “entrepreneurial print specialist Francis Joy” following suit “in Belfast with the *Belfast News-Letter, and General Advertiser*” (Brownlees, Finkelstein 2023, 38).

More generally, the context to the development of the press in Ireland is provided by Toby Barnard’s contribution (“Irish periodical news”). He notes that, compared with Britain and other western European countries, Irish print media got off to a sluggish start. Their late arrival is accounted for by Barnard as due to a relatively small and scattered population, “generally meagre incomes and low levels of literacy” (Barnard 2023, 239), along with linguistic disunity. With bilingualism on the increase in the seventeenth century, the majority of Irish men and women still spoke Irish, while printing in the latter posed technical and ideological difficulties, and far more people were able to speak (rather than read) the language.

What the volume meticulously examines is the trajectory followed by the press in Ireland in the wake of such first, tentative steps. From Yann Ryan’s study of form, layout and reader demand in relation to Irish news in the late 1640s, with perceptive insights into news coverage of Ireland within London newsbooks, to Colum Kenny’s research into *Mercurius Hibernicus*, Ireland’s first newspaper gaining traction in the second half of the century, the volume carefully traces the evolution of the Irish print media in subsequent decades. Kenny’s thorough analysis helps clarify the point as the author convincingly shows how different Samuel Dancer’s *Mercurius Hibernicus* was in style from earlier titles. As a commercial venture aimed at an English-speaking readership, the paper had “some of the hallmarks of a modern newspaper”: hence, it was “informative in a general way, including news from Ireland and abroad” and most importantly, it revealed details about the controversial Court of Claims in Dublin, which itself was “the first example of regular Irish court reporting” (Kenny 2023, 257).

Moving on to a later period, a further merit of the volume is that it aptly describes the radicalisation of the Irish press in the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Amidst renewed demands for a complete break from England, the House of Commons made use of available legislation to open actions for breach of privilege against the *Volunteer’s Journal* and the *Freeman’s Journal*. At the same time, the attorney general set out to proceed against newsmen in the Court of King’s Bench. In this context, the government vowed to support private suits for libel and mobilised significant resources “to entice newsmen away from opposition”: in this vein, the increase in the duty on newspaper stamps and the tax on advertisements had the intended effect “on the oppositional press as notices placed by the government in friendly newspapers were exempt from the duty” (Kemp, McElligott 2023, 82). This was the framework within which the *Freeman’s Journal* would navigate its course after it broke with the government, it regained an independent voice and eventually managed to become the prominent newspaper it was by the mid-nineteenth century, as rigorously investigated in F.M. Larkin’s (2023, 267) case study.

It would be wrong, to conclude, to assume that the volume only focuses on the production of news. In fact, contributors also turn their attention to the reception of the press by discussing key issues such as who read the news and why, along with the impact the press had in early-modern society. Authors such as Sophie H. Jones and Rebecca Shapiro engage with these topics while at the outset, the editor advocates an interdisciplinary approach on which the volume effectively delivers. To name but a few more chapters, Kemp and McElligott examine the legal contexts in which the press operated in Britain and Ireland in the years between the fall of the

Star Chamber in 1641 and the passage of the Act of Union in 1800, while Brownlees and Bös focus on the language of periodical print news as it transformed from the short pamphlets of the 1640s to the ever more heterogeneous British and Irish newspapers of the eighteenth century.

The first volume of *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press* is therefore an impressive collection of excellent pieces of solid research, and it represents a more-than-welcome addition to the well-established field of historical news analysis.

*Works Cited*

- Barnard Toby (2023), "Irish Periodical News", in Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press. Volume 1. Beginnings and Consolidation 1640-1800*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 239-255.
- Brownlees Nicholas, Bös Birte (2023), "The Evolving Language of the Press", in Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press. Volume 1. Beginnings and Consolidation 1640-1800*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 195-215.
- Brownlees Nicholas, Finkelstein David (2023), "Business of the Press", in Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press. Volume 1. Beginnings and Consolidation 1640-1800*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 28-50.
- Conboy Martin (2010), *The Language of Newspapers: Social-Historical Perspectives*, London, Continuum.
- Jones S.H. (2023), "Readers and readerships", in Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press. Volume 1. Beginnings and Consolidation 1640-1800*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 101-122.
- Kemp Geoff, McElligott Jason (2023), "Legal Contexts: Licensing, Censorship and Censure", in Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press. Volume 1. Beginnings and Consolidation 1640-1800*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 77-100.
- Kenny Colum (2023), "Ireland's First Newspaper: *Mercurius Hibernicus* and the Court of Claims, 1663", in Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press. Volume 1. Beginnings and Consolidation 1640-1800*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 255-262.
- Larkin F.M. (2023), "The Early Years of the Freeman's Journal, 1763-1806", in Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press. Volume 1. Beginnings and Consolidation 1640-1800*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 262-267.
- Raymond Joad (1996), *The Invention of the Newspaper: English Newsbooks, 1641-1649*, Oxford, Oxford UP.
- Ryan Yann (2023), "Form, Layout and the Digitised Newspaper: Irish News in 1649", in Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press. Volume 1. Beginnings and Consolidation 1640-1800*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 188-194.
- Shapiro Rebecca (2023), "Women and the Eighteenth-Century Print Trade", in Nicholas Brownlees (ed.), *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press. Volume 1. Beginnings and Consolidation 1640-1800*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 406-418.

*Davide Mazzi*

Wei H. Kao, *Irish Drama and Wars in the Twentieth Century*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022, pp 314. £ 75.99. HB. ISBN: 978-1-5275-8864-6.

*Irish Drama and Wars in the Twentieth Century* by Wei H. Kao offers a challenging exploration of Ireland's twentieth-century history through the lens of theatre and conflict. Kao, renowned for his extensive research in Irish theatre, brings together various facets of Irish dramatic works, shedding light on often overlooked pieces within the Canon.

The book delves into how class conflict or master-slave dynamics in the context of the Anglo-Irish Big House occurs, how historical events such as the Easter Rising and the thirty-year Troubles of Northern Ireland are represented on stage, as well as the portrayal of Irish experiences by women playwrights. Kao's dedication to excavating lesser-known works adds depth to the discourse surrounding Irish literature and theatre.

In Part I, comprised of two chapters under the title "Dramatizing Anglo-Irish Conflicts", the author initiates discussions with Iris Murdoch's *The Servant and the Snow* (1970), perhaps the least known of the plays covered in the book. The first chapter is significant as it analyzes the play from the perspective of Anglo-Irish class struggle, integrating it into the context of Irish literature and theatre. The subsequent chapter also addresses plays set in Anglo-Irish big houses, providing informative insights into a less-discussed aspect of the literary genre. It's worth noting that while much discussion exists about Anglo-Irish Big House Novels, the examination of their theatrical equivalents is relatively sparse. However, there arises a question regarding the portrayal of class struggle in the Anglo-Irish Big House in the context of "wars". While class struggles and master-slave dynamics in colonial situations can be construed as part of "wars" in a broader sense, they may not align with readers' expectations from the book's title.

Part II, titled "Theatrical Voices from the South", delves into various "history" plays by prominent Irish playwrights, such as W.B. Yeats, Sean O'Casey, Denis Johnston, Brendan Behan, Donal O'Kelly, Tom Murphy, John Arden (with Margaretta D'Arcy), Larry Kirwan, and Terry Eagleton, each chapter offering significant discussions. However, the section's organization could be enhanced for better coherence. For example, in Chapter 3, a comparison between O'Casey's *The Shadow of a Gunman* (1923) and Christina Reid's *Joyriders* (1986) in terms of intertextuality seems noteworthy. Yet, discussing Reid's work within the framework of "Theatrical Voices from the South" raises some discomfort, given her usual categorization as a Northern playwright. Additionally, Part II's independence from Part III, where Reid is further examined, hampers the overall cohesion of the book.

Also in Part II, many plays related to the Easter Rising of 1916 are discussed and analyzed. For instance, Chapter 4, entitled "Staging The Easter Rising" deals with works by Yeats (*Dreaming of the Bones*, 1919), O'Casey (*The Plough and the Stars*, 1926), and Tóibín (*Beauty in a Broken Place*, 2004), while Chapter 5, "Performing 'Easter 1916'", explores plays by Johnston (*The Scythe and the Sunset*, 1958), Murphy (*The Patriot Game*, 1991), and O'Kelly (*Operation Easter*, 1995). Three plays in Chapter 8, "James Connolly on Stage", by Arden and D'Arcy (*The Non-Stop Connolly Show*, 1975), Kirwan (*Blood*, 1993) and Eagleton (*The White, the Gold and the Gangrene*, 1993), are included as plays about the Easter Rising. These chapters juxtapose lesser-known plays with those considered canonical, revealing shifts in historical interpretations over the century. However, it is unfortunate that the chapters are entirely independent, lacking interaction between them. A holistic analysis across these chapters could have showcased the "continual adjustment and modification" of historical events "in new circumstances and contexts" (Carlson, quoted in Kao, 2).

In Part III, which focuses on female playwrights from the North, Anne Devlin, Marie Jones, and Christina Reid are prominently featured. This perspective offers a valuable re-examination of the Troubles of Northern Ireland from the viewpoint of women playwrights. The choice of these playwrights is highly compelling, since they are equally important playwrights, both in terms of the number of works they produced and in terms of their importance. However, there appears to be some imbalance in chapter allocation, with Devlin receiving more attention compared to Jones and Reid.

These organizational concerns may depend on the fact that each chapter is actually based on previously published journal articles, as mentioned in the Acknowledgements by the author.



This may explain the inherent incoherence when compiled into a book format. However, there remains room for improvement in structuring the book for a more cohesive narrative.

*Hiroko Mikami*

Manuela Palacios, *Us & Them: Women Writers' Discourses on Foreignness*, Berlin, Frank & Timme, 2023, pp. 240. € 39.80. ISBN: 978-3-86596-489-2.

Manuela Palacios' latest publication, *Us & Them: Women Writers' Discourses on Foreignness*, is an interdisciplinary work that combines topics with which the author is well acquainted, such as the study of migration, post-colonialism, ecofeminism, Irish and Galician studies, or translation. These are subjects with which Palacios has engaged in some of her previous publications; she is the editor of several anthologies, among which we can find *To the Winds Our Sails: Irish Writers Translate Galician Poetry* (2010), co-edited with Irish author Mary O'Donnell; *Forked Tongues: Galician, Basque and Catalan Women's Poetry in Translations by Irish Writers* (2012); *Six Galician Poets* (2016), an anthology of Galician poetry translated into English by Irish author Keith Payne; *Los ritos de los sentidos* (2015), a volume of translations of Arabic poetry co-edited with Jaouad Elouafi, Takkouche Bahi and Arturo Casas; or *Migrant Shores: Irish, Moroccan and Galician Poetry* (2017).

*Us & Them* is neither an anthology nor a translation project, it is instead an ensemble which seeks, as the title announces, to explore the construction of foreignness in literary pieces from Galician and Irish women authors and its intersection with national identity and gender. This multifaceted book is divided in three sections, and only the first one is devoted to the study and comparison of the notion of foreignness in both Irish and Galician literary works. The second section of this book explores the contribution of translation as a mechanism to bind nations and contest some of the existent concerns over globalization. The last part of the volume concludes on a more personal tone by featuring several Galician and Irish women authors' comments on their own experiences abroad, with the Other and their renegotiations with identity.

Galician scholars' lasting interest in Ireland's culture and society can be traced back to the nineteenth century, with the observation of similar traits between the two nations. In absence of a Galician Celtic lore, this encounter with Ireland inspired a Celtic renaissance that has proven to be significantly influential in the formation of the Galician national identity, demarcated from the homogenizing Spanish power which recurrently fought against the singularities of the Galician culture. As Palacios explains in the introduction to her book, Galician scholars have long looked to Ireland as an "inspiring Other" (12), as they considered Ireland's fight for independence from England – and English identity – of relevance for Galicia. Ireland's impact was remarkable and its influence in Galician literature, especially in the twentieth century, remains noticeable.

To better comprehend the emergence of Irish-Galician studies, we must take into consideration the similarities between the two nations that go beyond the Celtic imaginary, their geographical situation, or the identity struggle. The importance of landscape, a common history of emigration due to economic crisis and political hostility, and the linguistic conflict (Galician-Spanish and Irish-English) are amongst the shared circumstances that accompany the ongoing surge of women authors in both literary panoramas and the increase of environmental, feminist and post-colonial awareness that challenge established discourses of androcentrism, colonialism and racism.

In the first section of the book, “The Genres of Foreignness”, Palacios explores the debates about cultural difference and the encounter with the Other through the analysis of works of poetry, short fiction, novels, and drama authored by Irish and Galician women. *Us & Them* exhibits the differences and similarities between these literary fields, suggesting that the congruences and disparities spotted may complement one another, helping readers gain comprehensive insight into women’s configuration of foreignness and identity. What is particularly relevant is the privileging of female voices regarding the issue of migration and nomadism, a topic that was mostly concerned with male displacement and positioned female migration as an afterthought. Furthermore, women’s observations about the subaltern can be extremely revealing, considering their own plight as the alienated individuals in society and their subjection to double colonization in colonized nations.

Palacios launches her analysis assessing poetry with Mary O’Donnell’s anthology *Massacre of the Birds* (2020), and Galician author Alba Cid and her work *Atlas* (2019). Through these very recent publications we have access to contemporary debates concerned with topics such as the encounter with the Other in foreign countries and the West’s imposition of a perspective of the Other that dehumanizes and stigmatizes those considered too exotic or alien. The works selected by Palacios demonstrate both O’Donnell and Cid’s awareness and consideration regarding new forms of colonial discourse that objectify and impair vulnerable and migrant subjects. O’Donnell’s clear ecofeminist approach to displacement and foreignness addresses the animalization and sexualization of women and migrants while Cid’s intertextual work emphasizes the “spectacularization of the Other” (46) and the predicament of portraying foreign countries and cultures which are vulnerable to essentialism and misrepresentation.

*Us & Them* aptly allots short fiction its own space for discussion, which is a manifestation of the particular relevance of this genre, an extremely prolific one, for emergent literatures which can be explained on the basis of its immediate nature. Fiona Barr’s “The Wall Reader” (1979), Anne Devlin “Five Notes After a Visit” (1985) and Mary O’Donnell’s “Twentynine Palms” (2008) are the Irish texts selected for an examination of the interiorization of English colonial discourse and the construction of an Irish national identity. Palacios interrogates here the existing tension in Irish identity as a predominantly emigrating country, with the exception of the Celtic Tiger years, and their past as a colonized nation and, subsequently, as the Other. This section emphasizes and probes the prevalence of dualism and hierarchy in Western thought, and Palacios draws attention to a possible “nomadic nature” (93) withheld from women, trapped by an androcentric binary system that chained them to the domestic space and rendered a public life unreachable. The Galician short stories chosen – Ánxela Gracián’s “As noites en que o vento asubía o teu nome” (“The nights when the wind whistles your name”, 2000), “Lola” (2000) by Rosa Aneiros and “Meghalaya” (2019) by Iria Collado López – underline the interaction with the Other, human or nonhuman, through travel practices, as a broadening experience for women and their configuration of identity, one that may challenge and decompose this alienating logic that opposes and privileges the self over the Other.

Palacios brings to the forefront the discussion of gender in confluence with diaspora studies via Evelyn Conlon’s *Not the Same Sky* (2013), a novel which fictionalizes the stories of Irish orphan girls that were displaced to Australia during the Famine years and Eva Moreda’s novel *A Veiga é como un tempo distinto* (2011; published in English as *Home Is Like A Different Time* in 2019), about the Galician diaspora in London around the 1960s and 1970s. These novels examine the construction of collective identity in the diaspora, the resulting contradictions between the nation and the self, and the tension between trauma, xenophobia, and memory that problematizes dual identities. Despite the possibility of forming community in exile, Pala-

cios ponders on the likeness of such a community to be destroyed by prejudice that surpasses national identity, vulnerable to class, gender, or sexual discrimination, “no matter how strongly the notion of us is desired or reaffirmed by migrants, its repressed heterogeneity surfaces before long, as families are reshuffled and migrant’s networks undergo wrenching tensions” (127).

The analysis of discourses of foreignness in drama begins by drawing attention to the deep-rooted underrepresentation of women playwrights in both literary fields, and the overwhelming exclusion of their works in anthologies and theatre productions. This chapter focuses on the use of distance as a literary technique to engage the reader in the permanence of issues in past and present. Lorna Shaughnessy’s *The Sacrificial Wind* (2016) and Luz Pozo Garza’s *Medea en Corinto* (2003; *Medea in Corinth*) are the plays selected for analysis and they revisit two different Greek myths, the stories of Iphigenia and Medea, respectively, partially relocating the latter to the Galician landscape. Palacios reflects on the prevalence of the dramatic revision of classical myths in certain literary traditions to find in the past a reflection of contemporary issues and expose their permanence through time. *Us & Them* does a splendid job of addressing and pointing out the implications of these re-examinations for Galician and Irish discourses of identity and its application to the exploration of foreignness and feminism from a detached perspective.

Galicia’s already mentioned interest in Ireland has not been equally required, and despite the efforts of Galician authors and the cultural and social similarities that seem to tie both nations, Galician culture has remained rather obscure for Irish authors and scholars. In the second section of the book, “Glocal Identities in Translation”, Palacios articulates Ireland’s lack of reciprocal activity towards Galician authors and explains that translation has accomplished the bridging of both nations. Although the Galician tongue has achieved the status of co-official language of the autonomous community (1981), it continues to be a minoritized language, underprivileged and belittled, in particular by the more conservative faction of the Spanish society. Palacios points out the relevance of translation in the diffusion of local cultures expressed in minoritized languages. This section acknowledges the well-grounded concerns regarding globalization and the use of English as the vehicular language – the Irish language was precisely replaced by English and the latter has become the primary language of Irish literature – but the author also posits its potential utilization to rapidly establish transnational bonds. Emphasis is fixated on the importance of the local to assuage some of the uneasiness regarding globalization and the author of *Us & Them* remarks that translation practices have the capacity to assist “in the dissemination of the local through transnational projects that involves both stateless nations and nation-states” (181).

*Us & Them* closes with a last section titled “Mixing Memory and Desire: Women Writers’ Emigration and Wanderlust”, in which Palacios inquires of Irish and Galician women authors about the topics handled in this book, in particular, their personal experiences as migrating subjects and the implications in the construction of identity. These heterogeneous answers belong to Galician authors Marilar Aleixandre, Yolanda Castaño, Lupe Gómez Arto, María do Carme Kruckenberg, María do Cebreiro, Eva Moreda, Teresa Moure, Chus Pato and Luz Pichel; and Irish writers Celia de Fréine, Mary Hosty, Rita Kelly, Lia Mills, Mary O’Donnell and Lorna Shaughnessy. From this conglomerate of perspectives, the reader is able to acquire a more clear and intimate vision of the nomadic aspect of women authors from Irish and Galician communities, addressing the influence of travel practices and experiences in foreign countries on their works. This section brings up discussions about the ramifications of displacement, the marks left in these authors, and their communities in general, and the ensuing effect on the shaping of the self, whether as migrating subjects themselves or due to an episode involving relatives. Finally, Palacios will inquire about the experiences of the authors regarding funding

from institutions to go abroad, alluding to a potential structural struggle that impedes, among other issues, accessibility to collaborative work between artists from different literary fields.

The appeal of *Us & Them* hinges on its multifaceted approach to the topic of foreignness, not limited to the comparative analysis of texts. This versatile contribution is the product of the author's expertise and background managing translation projects, her experience collaborating with writers from different nations, and her informed observations drawing on sources from authors such as Edward Said, Julia Kristeva, Rosi Braidotti, Marisol Morales Ladrón or Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Palacios advances the studies attentive to the interaction of Irishness and Galicianness, further balancing the not always reciprocated exchanges between the two cultures. The author also calls attention to the configuration of identity in nations encompassed by colonial and national discourses and the resulting predicament for societies that are veering toward multiculturalism, most notably illustrated in Ireland's case. The present book introduces understated questions about women's migratory identity and the interaction with the Other, vindicating women's stifled nomadic character and travelling as an expanding practice to contest female paralysis. Thus, despite any possible misconceptions about the content being too niche, the relevancy of the subjects raised and its applicability to other literary fields render *Us & Them* engaging for an ample readership.

*Olalla Santos*

William Wall, *Ti ricordi di Mattie Lantry?*, traduzione di Stefano Tettamanti, Milano, Ugo Guanda Editore, 2024, pp. 315. € 19. ISBN: 978-88-235-3363-9.

È un passato che non passa quello al centro del nuovo romanzo dello scrittore irlandese William Wall, o meglio, un passato che ritorna come un blocco emotivo rimosso con tutta la sua carica perturbante. *Unheimlich* per dirla con Freud, a significare la componente di spaesamento che si porta dietro e che provoca. E se è vero, per dirla sempre con il padre della psicoanalisi, che "l'inconscio non ha tempo", questa sorta di noir che Wall costruisce con una sapiente tessitura narrativa, ha il potere di riportare lo scrittore Jimmy Winter, protagonista dell'azione scenica, al nucleo rimosso della sua adolescenza.

Il plot è ingegnoso. Durante il lockdown in Irlanda, Winter si ritira con la moglie Catherine in un piccolo borgo di pescatori irlandesi battuto dal vento e dalla pioggia, dove aveva trascorso la giovinezza e dove i due possiedono una casa, decidendo di dar vita a un workshop di scrittura online con una selezione che porterà ad ammettere solo cinque candidati, coperti da anonimato così come il docente.

Ed è proprio in questa diversità di stilemi proposta dai corsisti che l'autore dimostra la sua capacità plurilinguistica, l'attitudine a rendere multiforme la sua prosa, circostanza che, forse, lo autorizza ad alcune apprezzabili divagazioni metaletterarie, incentrate sul senso della scrittura, secondo una tradizione che vede nel romanziere spagnolo Javier Marías il più autorevole e convinto rappresentante.

Un esempio significativo a pagina 307 del noir che – è bene sottolinearlo – è uscito in traduzione prima in Italia che in Irlanda, a conferma di un amore dell'autore per il nostro Paese, dove ha scelto di vivere con la moglie Liz, alternando periodi a Camogli ad altri nella nativa Cork:

In un saggio sul rapporto tra letteratura e menzogna, Mario Vargas Llosa sostiene che scriviamo libri per consentire agli altri di vivere vite diverse da quella che vivono, dal momento che l'essere umano non

accetta di dover vivere l'esperienza di una singola vita. E se il vero obiettivo della letteratura fosse invece l'opposto? Determinare la singola vita di ognuno, avvolgere chi legge, o chi scrive, con uno sciame di vite alternative che non sono le loro e che loro non possono vivere, in altre parole affinare ininterrottamente, attraverso un continuo processo di eliminazione, una definizione quanto più possibile della vita di ciascuno? La sua assoluta ineluttabilità esistenziale.

Man mano che il protagonista riceve il lavoro *in fieri* degli aspiranti scrittori, dalle pagine di una di essi (Deirdre) cominciano a prendere corpo e a filtrare luoghi e particolari di un passato fin troppo familiare a Winter che, in una spirale di congetture, finirà col sospettare che quelle pagine siano costruite e dirette a lui non come scrittore, ma in quanto persona.

Da questo momento la ricerca di Winter, volta a scoprire chi si cela dietro il nome di Deirdre, diventerà ossessiva e motore del prosieguo del romanzo, con tutta la sua carica destabilizzante che porterà a mettere in crisi anche il suo rapporto coniugale e a rivelarci la caratura umana dell'affermato scrittore che, novello Edipo, si trova a rincorrere la verità sepolta di un passato che torna con prepotenza a fare sentire la sua voce, anzi, le sue voci.

Perché ognuno ha il suo segreto, una consapevolezza che diviene l'aspetto centrale del romanzo insieme al tema della memoria. Ci sono ricordi che vanno dimenticati per poter sopravvivere – questa sembra essere la consapevolezza che il lettore acquisisce procedendo nella appassionante narrazione tesa a rivelare il mistero che si cela dietro l'identità di uno degli scrittori anonimi.

Wall è abile nel tratteggiare il carattere delle *dramatis personae*, soprattutto quello di Mattie e dello stesso Winter che, per dirla con Musil, si rivela un "uomo senza qualità" o, meglio ancora, un insieme di qualità senza uomo.

Sullo sfondo la pandemia, un morbo che sempre più si caratterizza come metafora della condizione umana e sociale del nostro tempo, e un paesaggio duro, a tratti burrascoso e violento, che funge da contraltare alla vicenda e che Wall descrive magistralmente. Nelle pagine finali si consuma il dramma personale di Jimmy Winter, messo a confronto coi fantasmi, anche sordidi, della sua giovinezza, capaci di portare alla luce la ferocia di una condizione umana dalla quale sembra non esserci riscatto, almeno per il protagonista.

Daniele Serafini

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, *Selected Stories*, Belfast, The Blackstaff Press, 2023, pp. xxvii + 337. € 14.99. ISBN: 978-1-7807-3369-2.

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's *Selected Stories* is not her first collection of selected stories. In 2003 Attic Press published *Midwife to the Fairies. New and Selected Stories* with a "Preface" by Anne Fogarty; as the title says, some new unpublished stories were included together with a selection from Ní Dhuibhne's first two collections, *Blood and Water* (1988) and *Eating Women is not Recommended* (1991). Fogarty's "Preface" provided a precious critical journey into the way the Author moves in the realm of short story writing, following a narrative form that best responds to her artistic needs.

In 2017 a second volume of *Selected Stories* appeared with Dalkey Archive Press, presenting twelve stories written over the span of nearly thirty years and chosen from the five volumes published until then: *Blood and Water*, *Eating Women is not Recommended*, *The Inland Ice* (1997), *The Pale Gold of Alaska* (2000) and *The Shelter of Neighbours* (2012). Interestingly, the stories "Blood and Water" and "The Flowering" are included in both volumes, as a sort of manifesto of Ní Dhuibhne's writing in their search for the past, the complex relationship between past and present, and a statement of artistic expression.

Now a new collection of *Selected Stories* is published in 2023 by Blackstaff Press, gathering fourteen stories from all the volumes that came out between 1988 and 2020, thus including her latest collection, *Little Red and Other Stories*. This is a happy return after the publication of her moving memoir, *Twelve Thousand Days: A Memoir of Love and Loss*, in 2018, and *Little Red and Other Stories* in 2020.

As a matter of fact, considering that her first story, “Green Fuse”, was published by David Marcus in the “New Irish Writing” page of *The Irish Press* in 1974, these *Selected Stories* mark nearly fifty years of Ní Dhuibhne’s short story writing, thus anticipating the celebration of the special Spring issue of the *Irish University Review* dedicated to her work and due to come out in 2024. A hint at a celebratory mood is implicit in the critical frame the volume offers, with Margareth Kelleher’s “Foreword” and Ní Dhuibhne’s “Introduction”, which distinguish these *Selected Stories* from previous selections and publications and provide keen insight into the development of over four decades of Ní Dhuibhne’s short story writing.

Kelleher opens her “Foreword” with a quotation from one of the stories in the collection, “The Banana Boat”, aptly choosing it as a programmatic critical intent, but also as a statement of Ní Dhuibhne’s writing as a whole: “It is precarious and delicate, our dull and ordinary happiness” (ix). She thus points out the interlacing of fragilities, the fragility of human lives and human happiness and the fragility of the oral stories Ní Dhuibhne collected as a professional folklorist, which often provide a basis or a starting point for very personal re-elaboration and retelling. References to and quotations from critical studies of the short story as a genre (Raymond Carver, William Trevor, Frank O’Connor, Joyce Carol Oates) anticipate the intertextual layers that characterise Ní Dhuibhne’s writing, in which the patterns of traditional stories are juxtaposed to their modern counterparts, and explicit or more implicit literary references act as textual markers. Kelleher also points out the richness of Ní Dhuibhne’s writing in occasional sources, such as Elizabeth Boyle’s study *The Irish Flowerers* (1971) in “The Flowering” or the real episode of the sinking of the ferry *Estonia* in 1994 in “Estonia”. Her double roots in English and Irish characterise her versatility as a writer and provide a springboard to delve into liminality.

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s own voice in her “Introduction” completes and counterpoints Margareth Kelleher’s “Foreword” and leads the reader into the patterns and point of view of the writer. Ní Dhuibhne recalls her first steps into writing paying tribute to David Marcus for his encouragement, and describes how she writes, where stories come from, stating that “Stories are everywhere” (xxvi): “I think I feel the urge to write a story when something I encounter resonates with some feeling or thought buried inside me. It is that conjunction that generates the spark, and if I grab it before it fades, I get the story” (*ibidem*).

Choice is always hard when making a collection that is also a selection, necessarily something has to be left out, and Ní Dhuibhne focuses on the criteria followed in selecting the stories for the present volume. For example, stories that “tend to get anthologised regularly” (xxiv) are passed over, which explains the absence of one of her most poignant stories, “Midwife to the Fairies”, her first experiment in the juxtaposition and interpolation of a traditional story and its modern version. The Author underlines the relevance of her discovery of Alice Munro (*ibidem*) as well as of “cultural feminism in the 1980s”, which led her “to focus on women’s experiences, in contemporary Ireland and in the past”, attracted by the concept of “herstory” (xxv). Personal features underlie the stories, for example the importance of place, Donegal in particular, and she closes on a further personal note mentioning the support of her husband, Bo Almquist, who “seldom read my work but was totally supportive of it” (xxvii).

The selection follows an even distribution of stories taken from the various collections, roughly two stories from each volume, with the exception of *Little Red and Other Stories*, from

which three are chosen. “The Coast of Wales”, instead, was first published in *The Long Gaze Back*, edited by Sinéad Gleeson, in 2015, and was included in the 2017 *Selected Stories*. The stories are arranged in chronological order of publication thus offering an overview of her whole career and providing a glimpse of her development as a writer. An exception is “Blood and Water”, which – Ní Dhuibhne says in her “Introduction” – “we placed ahead of the earlier ‘The Postmen’s Strike’ (1979)” (xxiv), a suitable option for a collection that is representative of a whole writing life.

In fact, in this fine story past and present interlace in the first-person narrator’s voice, alternating the perspectives of childhood and adulthood in a game of memories and recollections. Ní Dhuibhne says in her “Introduction” that “Blood and Water” is “representative of the style of story I began to write from the 1980s” (xxiv). It is thus seminal work in the contrast between the country and the city, the persecution of the past, family roots and family ties, the sense of shame of the young protagonist of having an aunt who is “not the full shilling” (1). The story introduces the feature of the Irish college which will later become the narrative core of her 1999 novel *The Dancers Dancing* and its version in the Irish language *Cailíní Beaga Ghleann na mBláth* of 2003. The choice of placing “Blood and Water” as the opening story also highlights Ní Dhuibhne’s academic background as a folklorist, as the “big splodge of a dirty yellow substance” (6) the young protagonist sees in the scullery is for her the epitome of Donegal backwardness as well as the objective correlative of the past and its continuity. She will need academic work in the form of a course in ethnology to make sense of a Donegal tradition as the spot is “nothing other than butter, daubed on the wall after every churning, for luck” (*ibidem*). The conclusion of the story retrieves this obsessive image of her childhood as a metaphor for the malaise and heaviness of the past: “I feel in my mind a splodge of something that won’t allow any knowledge to sink in. A block of some terrible substance, soft and thick and opaque. Like butter” (14).

“The Postmen’s Strike” is a dystopian story set in the future of 1999, somehow anticipating Ní Dhuibhne’s 1990 novel *The Bray House*. Matilda has started a new life in Denmark just before a ten-year-long strike cut Ireland off from the rest of the world. While Matilda was thriving in Denmark, the long years of isolation have changed the country into a nightmarish Big-Brother New Ireland. The arrival of Matilda’s husband, Michael, when the strike is over brings tidings from the old country, where the Irish language has been “unofficially banned since 1994” (23) and where the Irish past has been rewritten, deleting Old Irish and Middle Irish, the Book of Kells or “anything commonly masquerading under the title of Irish History” (24). Michael is now a perpetrator of the new *status quo* in his position as “Chief Poet of the New Ireland” (26) and the perspective of a return to Ireland creates a picture of a grim future from which it is necessary to escape.

“The Flowering” is another pivotal narrative in Ní Dhuibhne’s career, it revolves around a young woman of today, Lennie, trying to discover her roots in order to discover herself. She thus gets to know the story of her ancestor, Sally Rua, whose ability at crochet, the “flowering” of the title, goes well beyond the opportunity of earning a living: it is a form of art. When deprived of it, she falls into madness: “She went mad because she could not do the work she loved, because she could not do the flowering. That can happen. You can love some kind of work so much that you go crazy if you simply cannot manage to do it at all” (49). The story is Ní Dhuibhne’s personal statement on creativity, weaving together different layers, the discovery of personal and communal past, art, and the conscious use of fiction.

Creativity is embedded in “The Wife of Bath”, in which a pub manageress, Dame Alisoun, welcomes the first-person narrator “to beside Bath” (54) and proudly speaks of her skill at em-

broidery in a playful Chaucerian direct quotation from *The Canterbury Tales*: “I passeth ’em of Ypres and of Ghent” (58). This accidental encounter mixes echoes of Chaucer and of Jane Austen, references are made to the Pump Room (62) and Catherine Morland (65), which mark the story as an explicitly postmodern statement on the fiction of narrative. Notably, Alisoun gradually becomes aware of her artificiality as a fiction straddled from a medieval text. “You don’t even exist”, the nameless protagonist says to her at some stage, “you are just a figment of some man’s imagination” (62). Alisoun reinforces these words by repeating them, making them a form of identity: “I was just one man’s invention. I’m made of parchment”. (65). On the other hand, the protagonist too, like Alisoun, is an invention, a product of imagination, a literary character in a story of postmodern self-reflexivity.

Something similar happens also in “Gweedore Girl”, a story of emigration which casts attention on transformation into text and implies a reflection on the conscious artificiality of the story. The first-person narrator, Bridget, leaves her native Donegal to take up a position as a servant in Derry, where she is courted and then seduced by Elliot, the butcher boy. Robbed of the only two pounds she possessed, Bridget sues him in court and thus becomes a story: “They wrote about me in the paper” (94). Likewise, just before the end of the story, she describes a dream. While waiting for Elliot, she is approached by a woman who “was not any woman I know but... she looked like someone I knew” (93), her *alter ego*. In the dream the woman dissolves into paper: “She had turned into a piece of paper. She was a large cut-out doll, drawn in heavy black ink, [...] She was folded in two on the ground and I opened up and spread her out and read her” (94).

Concern with art characterises several stories in a variety of ways, but “Estonia” is probably the most openly engaged with issues of art. It takes inspiration from the sinking of the ferry *Estonia* travelling from Tallin to Stockholm on September 28, 1994, a disaster in which over nine hundred people lost their lives. The story alternates between the disaster and Emily’s brief love story with Olaf, who died on the *Estonia* with his family. However, “Estonia” is intertwined with literary references due to Emily’s work as a librarian, something she does not particularly enjoy since it is deprived of passion and curiosity but is based on automatization. Yet, like Sally Rua, Emily is also an artist, a poet. She stays “in the same job, doing the same things, year after year” (102), clinging to “her secure, familiar work as a drowning man clings to a straw” (*ibidem*). The simile based on drowning anticipates the actual drowning of the *Estonia* victims, at the same time introducing writing as rescue, a life belt, as Emily becomes “in her spare time, a poet”, and “the words she wrote at home, late at night” are more than an “outlet” (*ibidem*): “The poems erupted, like volcanic dreams, full of strange, exotic images” (*ibidem*). Ní Dhuibhne also introduces in “Estonia” the commitment to writing and the relationship between a writer and his/her own writing: “Writing is art; writing is work. The artist simply does the work – simply, with total concentration, makes the thing itself... And then it is finished... The writer goes back to the empty page and stays there. The work is its own highest reward” (103).

The following story, “The Pale Gold of Alaska”, is like “Gweedore Girl” a story of emigration, from Donegal to the United States, loosely based on Míic Mac Gabhann’s memoir *Rotha Mór an tSaoil*, translated into English as *The Hard Road to Klondike* (1959). Set during the gold rush, the story features the character of Sophie, a young woman leaving Donegal like Bridget and falling in love with Ned while crossing the Atlantic. Her expectations of married life happiness are thwarted by reality and only her native Indian lover, North Wind, makes her feel alive again, teaching her a new language of nature and freshness: “The names of the months. The month of the melting snow. The month of the greening grass. The month of the rutting stag. He told her about the animals in the mountains: the great brown bears, the thin mountain lions” (147). When the baby she has had from him dies, she turns into an



animal madwoman, like Sally Rua in “The Flowering”, walking “around the shanty town, wrapped in her sealskin coat, chanting... incantations, without cease” (157), interlacing to the litany the name of North Wind.

In “The Banana Boat” the routine of a family holiday in Kerry is broken by the possibility of disaster and tragedy. The danger of losing her son who risks drowning off the coast of Castlegregory evokes Peig Sayers who “lost several sons to the sea” (178) and arouses a storm of emotions in the protagonist narrator, who realises she is losing her adolescent children anyway as they grow up and change. The story is also an interesting experiment in intertextuality and an alternative to Ní Dhuibhne’s use of postmodern rewriting of traditional tales. The first-person narrator openly acknowledges Mary Lavin’s story “The Widow’s Son”, a story with two endings, which Ní Dhuibhne paraphrases: “I realize right now that there are two ends to the story, two ends to the story of my day and the story of my life. I think of Mary Lavin’s story about the widow’s son...” (172). Likewise, Alice Munro is also openly present in direct quotation from the story “Miles City, Montana” (179) as an acknowledgment to a writer she discovered at the beginning of her career.

The literary establishment looms largely in “A Literary Lunch”, a story set in the context of a board meeting, whose aim is to assign funds and bursaries to writers. The setting of a fashionable bistro provides an occasionally sarcastic and entertaining insight into the world of Dublin’s literary life, in which discussions about productions at the Abbey Theatre are a mask to conceal patterns of authority and power. Francie Briody, “a writer whom nobody read” (188), already in his fifties, is refused financial support once again, in spite of having been awarded several prizes. Bitterly, he ponders that “Nobody was interested in a writer past the age of thirty”, “It was all the young ones they wanted these days, preferably women with lots of shining hair and sweet photogenic faces” (*ibidem*). Francie takes his revenge murdering the head of the board he deems responsible for his failure, yet in spite of this tragic conclusion, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne takes the opportunity to play with the fashionable clichés of literary criticism, describing Francie’s latest novel as “a heteroglossial polyphonic postmodern examination of postmodern Ireland, with special insight into political corruption and globalisation, beautifully written in dark masculinist ironic prose with shadows of *l’écriture féminine*, which was exactly what Fintan O’Toole swore that the Irish public and Irish literature was crying out for” (189).

A longer format characterises “The Moon Shines Clear, the Horseman’s Here”, and “Bikes I Have Lost”, both of them organised in various sections. In “The Moon Shines Clear, the Horseman’s Here”, the protagonist, Polly, comes back to her native place in the West of Ireland after thirty years of absence, as she was rejected by her own family for being an unmarried mother. The various sections in the story (twelve in all) are uneven in terms of length, ranging from a single paragraph to several pages. This sort of textual fragmentation is consistent with Polly’s journey home, an attempt at reconciliation with place and family, especially with her deaf and half-blind mother, to whom she intends to tell the story of her life: “Until Polly tells this story to her mother, she will be unfree, ununited, unwhole” (206). The story of Polly’s past is set alongside the story her old mother tells herself, an old legend the end of which she has forgotten, and which strikingly resembles or retells Polly’s own. “The Moon Shines Clear, the Horseman’s Here” is also a tale of loss, as the memory of Paddy’s death, her one-time boyfriend and father of her child, still marks Polly’s life.

A similar experiment in form is represented by “Bikes I Have Lost”, which shares with the previous story the theme of loss. It is organized in four different parts, each of them bearing a different subtitle, so it is a sequence of self-contained parts. Bikes are a metonymy for a journey into the past as the story recounts Helen’s life through the stories of her bikes, starting with the theft of a three-wheeler, going on with the bike she uses to go to work in the Green’s bookshop,

moving to her first boyfriend's Honda, a witness of their consuming love relationship as well as of the young boy's tragic death. The organization in single episodes is an interesting insight into the fragmentation of the protagonist's memories, at the same time keeping the unity of the fictional autobiography intact. The use of a present perfect form in the title highlights the account of past episodes that have an impact on the present. Interestingly, the four parts are in increasingly longer stretches as the protagonist grows up and the language develops from the nearly baby talk of the first part "The Buildiners" to a greater language awareness, thus following the protagonist's development. Interestingly, a direct quotation among others from *Midsummer Night's Dream* acts as a commentary or metatextual reflection on the organization of the story as a whole: "Seeming parted, but yet an union in partition" (Act III, Scene 2). In fact, the apparent "partition" or fragmentation of the story contributes to its "union", while cycling metaphors intensify in the final part of the story. The simile "falling in love is not like learning to ride a bicycle. It's more like falling off one" (282) develops into losing "balance" and "tumb(ing) off the wheel" (286). Helen gets lost and falls off life after being rejected by Sean and literally disappears becoming anorexic. The structural organization of the story highlights this process, as quite short paragraphs overlap with Helen's consuming herself and thinning out. The text thus thins out together with its protagonist.

"The Moon Shines Clear, the Horseman's Here" and "Bikes I Have Lost" introduce the two subsequent stories, "The Coast of Wales" and "New Zealand Flax", both revolving around the theme of loss, grief and bereavement. In "The Coast of Wales" the divergent settings provide a meditation on grief and represent an echo of Ní Dhuibhne's own personal experience in recent years. The graveyard where the first-person narrator visits her husband's tomb is the background for the nearly funny episode of another widow's little dog almost being run over by a hearse: "How ghastly. First your husband, then your dog" (305). The dog is spared, but the thoughts of death haunt the protagonist. The other setting, Wales, is evoked as a special place for the couple, and it is there that she would like to leave some of his ashes, as an act of love: "Some of yours (your ashes) are at home too. I am planning to scatter them on a nice headland near the place where *we* went on holiday on Anglesey, where almost everyone speaks Welsh" (302). Wales is invisible now, "There is a coast that you can't see over the horizon. Wales" (304). Wales is as invisible as her husband is, still existing in the ashes, tomb and lawn cemetery that mark the story.

"New Zealand Flax" opens on the richness of Frieda's house garden in Kerry, "The early purple orchids are plentiful this year" together with "the other flowers of June, the clover, the buttercups. The yellow one, bird's-foot trefoil" (307). Such opulence in flowering marks a sharp contrast with Frieda's sense of loss. She has travelled to the cottage in Kerry on the pretext of cutting the grass, but mostly to feel the presence of her husband. As a revenant, the dead husband makes his appearance when the sun goes down (315), Elk comes back as a comforting presence, to share the evening meal and the wine, "he looks like himself... wearing his navy blue jumper... His voice is his voice... He is blurred, like a photograph that is not in focus" (*ibidem*). The use of simile makes the world of the living and of the dead closer, Elk's voice is "like a mellow burgundy" and "Like a purple orchid" (*ibidem*), a coreferent to the Chablis on the table and the orchids Frieda has been looking after in the garden.

In the final story, "Little Red", the reference to the fairy tale of "Little Red Riding Hood" is implicit in the title, though it openly appears only at the end of the story, when Fiona thinks of the way her little grand-daughter Ellie wants the story to be told, "the version that is not scary" (336). Yet she finds herself inside the scary story, when on a Sunday afternoon a man comes to her house, a possible contact of her online dating: "A figure appears outside the patio door", "He is tall, with

a long pointy face, a crest of grey hair springing back from his forehead, a sunburnt complexion. Neat clothes – jeans and a pale grey shirt, a grey anorak” (329). He introduces himself as Declan – “Is that Declan the plumber or Declan the electrician or Declan the serial killer?” (330) – and gets inside uninvited expecting something to eat. His ambiguous desire for food makes him a wolf in disguise, and his direct requests – “Is there anything to eat?”, “I wouldn’t say no to a sandwich” (332) – are evocations of the wolf eating Little Red Riding Hood and her Grannie in the fairy tale. The open ending leaves the story undisclosed with the undefined intentions of going for a walk.

As a fairy tale, “Little Red Riding Hood” has its roots in folklore, and by placing this particular story at the end of the volume a circle comes to a full end. The volume opened with the disturbing splodge of butter obsessing the first-person narrator in “Blood and Water” in a disguised evocation of folklore tradition. It closes with a reelaboration of echoes of a traditional fairy tale in a contemporary context, exploiting variations of the plot yet displaying veiled references to it. The volume thus offers new readers an enjoyable corpus of stories and provide affectionate readers with a keen insight into Éilís Ní Dhuibhne’s development as a short story writer over years and decades. In her latest *Selected Stories* each of the fourteen stories included is a step in a fascinating chronological journey through four decades in the writing of a “master storyteller” as Margaret Kelleher introduces her (ix). It is a gift of storytelling.

Giovanna Tallone

María Teresa Caneda-Cabrera, José Carregal-Romero (eds), *Narratives of the Unspoken in Contemporary Irish Fiction: Silences that Speak*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2023, pp. xix + 246. € 42.79. ISBN 978-3-0313-0457-6.

Silence has many faces, many shades and hues capable of conveying meaning in a variety of ways, often contrasting with one another. It is an expression of powerlessness and oppression but also a form of communication that can be louder than sound, language or words. Silence could be a form of pain, of refusal, of reticence, resistance, fear or control, but also of detachment, denial, or acceptance. In his tragedy *Thyestes*, Seneca said that “Silence is a lesson learned from the many sufferings of life”. And these words lie in the background of the fine Open Access volume edited by María Teresa Caneda-Cabrera and José Carregal-Romero, *Narratives of the Unspoken in Contemporary Irish Fiction: Silences that Speak*, who have gathered a stimulating collection of provocative essays on the issue of silence, of what is not said or has been kept unsaid and unspoken in Irish history, society, culture and literature.

The ten essays cover different aspects of silence in contemporary Irish fiction from a variety of critical perspectives. However, a *fil rouge* underlies them all, as the impact of the past on the present and of silence, hidden truths, secrets that have marked distant or recent history in the country reverberate in the discussion of their disturbing or violent legacy.

The paratextual frame of the volume paths the way to the various essays. On an unnumbered page the dedication to “the victims of institutionalised silence” is preceded by a double quotation as epigraphs; one is by the Nobel prize poet Louise Glück: “I am attracted to ellipsis, to the unsaid, to suggestion, to eloquent, deliberate silence. The unsaid, for me, exerts great power...”, therefore shedding light on the more intimate and private aspects of silence. The second, in Spanish, is by Latin American journalist and essayist Eduardo Galeano, and focuses on the impossibility of history to be silent, thus giving prominence to a more public dimension

of silence: “No hay historia muda. Por mucho que la quemen, por mucho que la rompan, por mucho que la mientan, la historia humana se niega a callarse la boca”.

This looms largely in the “Foreword” by Paige Reynolds, who points out that many of the writers considered in the volume “make vividly public topics that once were regarded as strictly private” (ix) highlighting the complexity of silence. She introduces the volume as “indispensable”, and plays on the irony of announcing a book that is a study of silences. Breaking endemic silences that have characterised Irish history and society implies breaking a taboo, though silence is also a “means of expression” (x). Reynolds also provides a personal anecdote regarding the impact of silence in literature, making reference to her own experience of applying silence as a reading key to her teaching of Joyce’s *Dubliners*, “a collection famously ridden with silences” (x-xi).

Echoes of Reynolds’ words resonate in the Editors’ “Introduction. Silences that Speak”, which displays clear focus of the volume’s critical intentions. The multifacetedness of silence is considered in a triple perspective, “as an aesthetic practice, a key narrative element or a textual strategy” to speak of the unspeakable (1), and these features are in communication with one another in the various essays. After a theoretical overview of studies on silence from George Steiner, to Julia Kristeva to Susan Sontag and Michel Foucault, the “Introduction” considers various facets of silence as examined by Irish contemporary fiction writers, it is used for characterisation, as an aesthetic principle, to cover “inconvenient truths” such as institutional abuse, but it can also be ambiguous and subversive. The conclusion is thus that silence is a site of analysis and enquiry, if silence speaks, so all the essays in the present volume also speak.

Emma Donoghue is the object of Marisol Morales-Lladrón’s opening essay, investigating two historical novels, *The Wonder* (2016) and *The Pull of the Stars* (2020), from the perspective of cultural history approach. “Conspicuously Silent: The Excesses of Religion and Medicine in Emma Donoghue’s Historical Novels *The Wonder* and *The Pull of the Stars*” takes into account interconnected themes related to silence and the unveiling of silence questioning the role of the past. Morales-Lladrón points out the continuity of both novels in Donoghue’s writing, bringing to the forefront liminal and marginalised characters, controlled and silenced by figures of authority, namely in medical care and religious morality. The setting of *The Wonder* in post-famine rural Ireland interweaves the assumedly miraculous self-imposed fasting of eleven-year-old Anna with the unwanted fasting of the famine a few years earlier. The control of a male local committee to verify if this is fraud is sustained by English nurse Lib, who as an atheist cannot accept or understand the new environment she finds herself in. The silence that surrounds Anna’s fasting is conducive to other forms of silence to hide incest, of which Anna feels guilty, following the moral code of the place and the time that certain truths cannot be disclosed. Early in the essay, Morales-Lladrón highlights the role of riddles in the novel, in the form of “untold secrets, lies and violence perpetrated by the conspicuously silent family, religion and society”, which turn “the novel into the true riddle” (26). The setting of *The Pull of the Stars* is the Great Flu pandemic of 1919, focusing once again on silenced female bodies, imprisoned in marriage and the health system in a patriarchal system of values. Donoghue breaks the silence on the female experiences of pregnancy and labour at a time when the First World War “overshadowed” the “appalling circumstances” (33) of the pandemic. In her conclusion, Morales-Lladrón emphasises Donoghue’s contribution in retrieving past experiences from oblivion and “disclosing the silence around the experiences of women throughout history” (39) in very sharp historical narratives.

The following contribution by María Teresa Caneda-Cabrera, “‘To Pick Up the Unsaid, and Perhaps Unknown, Wishes’: Reimagining the ‘True Stories’ of the Past in Evelyn Conlon’s *Not the Same Sky*”, is ideally connected with the previous one in genre and theme, as Conlon’s

2013 novel retrieves lost stories of women in the aftermath of the Great Famine. In the first section of her essay, Caneda-Cabrera introduces academic studies that point out the blanks and gaps in history and the silence that surrounds the Great Famine, a phenomenon that, quoting Margaret Kelleher, is unspeakable and unspoken, thus an “inexpressible reality” (44). Evelyn Conlon’s concern is to turn to forgotten and silenced voices, in particular to the Irish Famine Orphan Girls, transported to Australia between 1848 and 1850 under the supervision of Superintendent Charles Strutt, the colonial officer entrusted with them, who is also a translator. In her analysis of the novel Caneda-Cabrera recurs to issues relevant to translation studies, in particular to the concept of “transmigration” (47) as migration, or in this case forced migration, is also a process of translation between places, languages and cultures. Language issues come to the fore in the girls’ inability to speak and make themselves heard in a narrative “written in the imperial language” (52) and Caneda-Cabrera considers the ship a metaphor for translation. The novel is a famine narrative but also a travel narrative in which displacement and dislocation play a relevant role and in reappropriating a silenced story Conlon retrieves the Orphan Girls from historical neglect in an “imaginative act of memory” and a “retrospective textual creation” (49).

José Carregal-Romero discusses the use of silence as an aesthetic and a narrative element in the fiction of Colm Tóibín. His thorough essay, “‘He’s Been Wanting to Say That for a Long Time’: Varieties of Silence in Colm Tóibín’s Fiction”, takes into account the use of silence as a form of continuity in Tóibín’s fiction underlining the “importance of silence in artistic creation” (65) as a relevant marker of significance. Carregal-Romero covers Tóibín’s production from his first novel *The South* (1990) to his short story collection *The Empty Family* (2010), considering also the silence of “unverbalised desires and unsolved dilemmas” (67) in *Brooklyn* (2009). The essay focuses in particular on the use of silence in his gay writings, in which “secrecy, reserve and gloomy introspection” (67) are part of the dynamics of concealment and emotional tension in the complexity of the self. After considering Tóibín’s collection of essays *Love in a Dark Time* (2001), attention is given to *The South* as a novel with a gay subtext, in which expatriation is liberating for the protagonists. Interestingly, references to different versions and drafts and to the suppression of specific parts belong to the discourse of silence that underlies Tóibín’s first openly gay novel, *The Story of the Night* (1996), which connects sexual and political oppression highlighted by an aesthetics of silence. Sexual taboos and traumas mark *The Blackwater Lightship* (1999), whose protagonist, AIDS-affected Declan, is characterised by silence. The final part of the essay analyses some of the short stories in *The Empty Family*, which Carregal-Romero says are “round things unsaid” (78), considering also the silence around the Church scandals in the 1990s.

In “The Irish Short Story and the Aesthetics of Silence”, Elke D’hoker discusses the genre of the short story as an art of silence. Referring to various definitions of the short story, D’hoker emphasises Claire Keegan’s assumption that the short story is “a discipline of omission” (87), a “place to explore that silence between people” (88), which creates a space of interrelation between the short story and silence. Recalling what Susan Sontag called the aesthetics of silence, this rich and thorough essay focuses on the formal strategies of silence and the brevity of the short story in connection to the treatment of silence as a theme, and considers how Irish writers have investigated silence connected to trauma, taboo and secrets. Starting with the many forms of silence present in James Joyce’s *Dubliners* (1914), D’hoker discusses the use of ellipsis, eclipse and epiphany as technical devices characterizing the brevity of the short story, and then considers and analyses some contemporary writers whose fiction exploits silence to communicate the unsayable. Edna O’Brien’s “A Scandalous Woman” (2003) points out silence as a consequence of the personal trauma of rape, while in Maeve Kelly’s “Orange Horses” (1991)

silence is part of domestic abuse in the traveller community. Secrets and silence are at the heart of William Trevor's narrative and of his *Last Stories* (2018) in particular. However, D'hoker points out, "in several of these posthumous stories silence is connoted positively" as a form of respect and sympathy (98). This is what underlies the final part of the essay, which examines the ambivalence of silence in three stories by Claire Keegan. Secrets are at the core of "Walk the Blue Fields" (2007) and "The Forester's Daughter", both based on illicit love affairs and on deception, and are built on narrative eclipses. In the long short story *Foster* (2010), secrecy and silence are a form of self protection in the aftermath of sorrow.

Thomas O'Grady's "Infinite Spaces. Kevin Barry's Lives of Quiet Desperation" sheds light on the incapacity of male characters to articulate the complexity of their feelings in a failure of language beyond the surface. This comes to the fore with the analysis of the 2019 novel *Night Boat to Tangier*, pointing out the "malaise of maleness" (110) and the discrepancy between the characters' loquaciousness and their difficulty of using language at an emotional level, so that speaking becomes a sort of silence. Some short stories taken into account reflect for O'Grady Frank O'Connor's famous issue in *The Lonely Voice* (1963) of a "submerged population group" marked by loneliness, and in the case of Barry's stories "Atlantic City" (2007) and "Across the Rooftops" (2012) by the incapacity of going beyond the shield of a façade (112) they have built for themselves. The dystopian novel *City of Bohane* (2011) plays on "the stereotypical strong silent male" (118) and emphasises the difficulty of "translating" (119) emotions and feelings into words. In *Beatlebone* (2015), a fictional John Lennon recurs to the "Primal Scream therapy" the real Lennon and Yoko Ono practiced in the 1970s breaking silence with a "torrent of words" (122). The essay closes with a recent story published in *The New Yorker*, "The Pub with No Beer" (2022), set in an empty pub during the COVID pandemic, in which "lost voices" (125) of dead or absent customers fill the void of loneliness, making the silence speak to the protagonist.

In his contribution, "The Silencing of Speranza", Eibhear Walshe speaks in his double role as a literary critic and as a writer of fiction engaged in bringing back to life lost voices from the past. Making reference to his own experience of writing his 2014 novel, *The Diary of Mary Travers*, and then of carrying research for his 2020 *Selected Writings of Speranza and William Wilde*, Walshe sheds light on and discusses the silence that surrounds the career of Jane Wilde after the 1895 scandal and trial which convicted her son, Oscar Wilde, to hard labour. Walshe takes the reader along a journey into the silencing of a voice whose scholarly and intellectual career had many facets: a nationalist, a poet, renowned for her writing on the Famine and for her Saturday literary salons, editor of *The Nation*. The trial was in a way a watershed whose consequence was that her "place in literary culture was compromised" and her "valued reputation was eroded" (136). As an imaginary first-person account of the libel of Mary Travers against William and Jane Wilde, *The Diary of Mary Travers* gives voice to a young woman who at the time had the courage to speak and was then silenced. This enterprise led Walshe to collect the writings of Lady Wilde in a "fruitful interchange between writing fiction and archival recovery" (147). He thus investigates the lost voice of Jane Wilde in an essay in which he breaks barriers between genres with a specific aim: "art and historical research can be deployed to recover lost voices" (*ibidem*).

Sean Crosson's essay, "'A Self-Interested Silence': Silences Identified and Broken in Peter Lennon's *Rocky Road to Dublin* (1967)", points out the climate of oppression and censorship in which cinema and film developed in post-independence Ireland. The film under scrutiny, Lennon's *Rocky Road to Dublin*, leads the critic to self-reflectively question his own contribution: "why include a consideration of documentary in a collection concerned primarily with *Narratives of the Unspoken?*" (152). As a matter of fact, *Rocky Road* was in a way silenced in Ireland when it was released precisely because it broke silences, while it was well received outside the

country. The contrast between inside and outside emphasises the “groundbreaking” role the documentary had in the “process of critical examination” (152) of diverse aspects of society, in that multiple silences imposed by Church, State and society are taken into account. Exploiting Antonio Gramsci’s concepts of “hegemony” and “common sense” (154), in other words control and submission, the essay considers the format of the documentary as criticism of Irish society making use of distinctive cinematography. Interviews with leading figures in the world of letters and politics (the film opens with Sean O’Faolain) interact with Peter Lennon’s voice over as critical standpoint (159), with significant contaminations of the Nouvelle Vague DOP Raul Cotard (160). The contradictions and ambiguity of the figure of the priest are thus highlighted by the use of light and shadow (161), while relevance is given to the female perspective. This is however disclaimed by the scene at Trinity Crosson describes, in which female voices are not allowed to enter the discussion by male counterparts (159). In *Rocky Road to Dublin*, rereleased as DVD in 2005 (153), the “camera could be used as a weapon” (159) aims at critically bringing back to life silent voices of oppression and censorship.

In his deep essay, “Silence in Donal Ryan’s Fiction”, Asier Altuna-García de Salazar examines Ryan’s preoccupation with representations of silence as an ubiquitous presence in a variety of forms, from trauma to secrets to violence. Exploiting the theoretical framework of Pierre Macherey, Pierre Bourdieu, George Steiner and Michel Foucault, the essay explores the relationship between silence, taboos and hidden truths. The setting of the novel *The Spinning Heart* (2012) around the time of the post-Celtic Tiger recession provides a background of incommunicability as the twenty-one characters express themselves in monologues, overwhelmed by individualism and by the inability to react and interact as a community. Silence as the representation of a community returns in *The Thing About December* (2013), a novel which, Altuna-García de Salazar says, “represents the inability to articulate new realities at individual and community levels during the Celtic Tiger times” (179). Three further novels are examined, *All We Shall Know* (2016), on the prejudice surrounding the female protagonist who keeps silent about her unborn baby’s father; *From a Low and Quiet Sea* (2018), dealing with the unspoken reality of multicultural Ireland (181); and *Strange Flowers* (2020), on the realities of lesbian lives in in the 1970s. All of them provide variations of the issue of silence and fathom the relevance of silence, trauma, secrets, prejudice in individuals and communities.

María Teresa Caneda-Cabrera’s second contribution to the volume, “‘Sure, Aren’t the Church Doing Their Best?’ Breaking Consensual Silence in Emer Martin’s *The Cruelty Man*”, opens making reference to the conspiracy of silence around the graves of the Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, discovered in 2017, as well as to the cases of institutional abuse which were kept secret for many years. Highlighting the historical context, documents and studies on these silenced topics, Caneda-Cabrera points out the “conspiracy of silence” (192) or the “consensual silence” (196) in the development of national narratives. Emer Martin’s novel *The Cruelty Men* (2018) focuses on the untold stories of an Irish-speaking family literally dislocated to a different part of the country in post-independence Ireland, allegedly to keep the language alive, as a matter of fact in a “plan of social engineering” (199). As the family members are dispersed, their language is also lost and forgotten, forced by necessity to use English in a socially constructed silence. *The Cruelty Men* rescues the lost voices of victims of institutional abuse, and denounces the institutional practices of Madalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes and the traumatic experience of marginalised and excluded women. Only the power of storytelling is a form of rescue and healing, an act of resistance to the oppressive silence of the past.

José Carregal-Romero returns once again in the final essay in the collection, “Unspeakable Injuries and Neoliberal Subjectivities in Sally Rooney’s *Conversations with Friends* and *Normal*

*People*”, thus closing the volume with his analysis of vulnerability, silence, dysfunction and miscommunication in Rooney’s two novels. The study draws on research on neoliberal value system culture (214), which in Rooney’s work represents a failure (215) and lies behind the protagonists’ unsteady behaviour. In this context silence is a structuring principle and speaks for the generation of millennials depicted in the novels. The fluidity of “speech” in virtual communication is contradicted by the characters’ inability to express themselves, made vulnerable by the competitive and individualistic world neoliberalism is responsible for. Silence is a refusal to conform (215) and in *Conversations with Friends* (2017) what remains unsaid or cannot be said is repeatedly emphasised, thus turning into “a gesture within communication” (218) manifesting itself on the body, such as actual self-imposed bodily harm. Marianne’s dysfunctional silence and Connell’s class-related silence in *Normal People* (2018) conceal and express their vulnerability in a social context imposing expectations.

In its variety of original essays, marked by critical sensitivity and careful and detailed analysis, *Narratives of the Unspoken in Contemporary Irish Fiction: Silences that Speak* is a significant contribution to an area of study that is provocatively ambiguous, and penetrates areas of research that in history and culture have been variously neglected. Not by chance do expressions like “lost voices”, “silenced voices”, “acts of silencing” recur throughout the various essays, which highlight the volume’s critical intentions. Occasional negligible misprints do not have an impact on what is an essential and groundbreaking tool that provides an insight into the hues and varieties of the sound of silence.

*Giovanna Tallone*

W.B. Yeats, *Drammi celtici*, introduzione e traduzione di Giorgio Manganelli, a cura di Viola Papetti, Milano, BUR, 2024, pp. 310. € 13. ISBN: 978-88-17-18687-2.

Quando W.B. Yeats vinse il Nobel per la letteratura, nel 1923, il poeta sentì di aver ricevuto questa onorificenza non solo, e non tanto, per la sua poesia, quanto e soprattutto, per il suo teatro e, ancora di più, per la sua capacità di aver messo insieme un gruppo di mestieranti dell’arte drammatica – dal talento forse irregolare ed in parte improvvisato, ma sicuramente unico ed originale – quali Lady Gregory, J.M. Synge, i fratelli Fay e molti altri che contribuirono alla nascita dell’*Irish Dramatic Movement* e al repertorio dell’Abbey Theatre di Dublino. Per questo, nel discorso di accettazione del premio Yeats scrisse:

I have chosen as my theme the Irish Dramatic Movement because when I remember the great honour that you have conferred upon me, I cannot forget many known and unknown persons. Perhaps the English committees would never have sent you my name if I had written no plays, no dramatic criticism, if my Lyric poetry had not a quality of speech practised upon the stage. perhaps even – though this could be no portion of their deliberate thought – if it were not in some degree the symbol of a movement. (Yeats 2010, 410)

Oggi, la produzione teatrale di Yeats non è ciò per cui il poeta viene ricordato. Per questo, ancora più apprezzabile che Rizzoli abbia deciso di riproporre una selezione di drammi yeatsiani nel nuovo volume dal titolo *Drammi celtici*. Le motivazioni che rendono questa raccolta particolarmente apprezzabile anche da un pubblico non specialista sono almeno due: la prima è l’argomento, sempre di interesse, di matrice folklorica delle antiche saghe irlandesi,



riproposto da Yeats in forma drammatica e poetica; la seconda motivazione è la firma illustre del traduttore, Giorgio Manganelli.

Tra i tanti drammi scritti da Yeats, viene dunque riproposto da Rizzoli (classici moderni) il ciclo riguardante gli eroi delle leggende irlandesi, *Deirdre*, *Al pozzo dello sparviero*, *L'elmo verde*, *Sulla spiaggia di Baile* e *L'unica gelosia di Emer* nella traduzione di Giorgio Manganelli, con una introduzione di Giorgio Manganelli e la curatela di Viola Papetti. Un'operazione non del tutto nuova, visto che nell'ormai lontano 1999, quattro di questi cinque drammi celtici, trovati da Lietta Manganelli tra le carte manganelliane, erano stati già pubblicati nella Bur Teatro, sempre a cura di Viola Papetti. Anche in quel caso, come nella nuova edizione, la scelta del testo introduttivo era caduta su un saggio di Manganelli intitolato "La rinascenza celtica: i riti drammatici", pensato per il Terzo Programma Rai del 1950. Nel saggio, Manganelli ripercorre quale fosse l'idea di dramma e di teatro nazionale irlandese secondo l'intenzione yeatsiana e, giustamente, menziona l'esperienza di Lady Augusta Gregory e di J.M. Synge, tratteggiando brevemente per un pubblico generalista quel trittico dai contorni quasi mitici che pose le basi del "Theatre of a Nation" (Levitas 2002).

Oggi, alle quattro traduzioni del volume del 1999, se ne aggiunge una quinta, *L'elmo verde*, una traduzione fino ad ora "non pervenuta". Da una corrispondenza tra Manganelli e Giuseppe Macrì, "amico ispanista [...] probabilmente collaboratore" di Guanda (5-6), casa editrice con cui Manganelli stava prendendo accordi per pubblicare queste traduzioni, si evince che Macrì avesse ricevuto in visione le traduzioni dei drammi poi proposti nel 1999, recuperate da Lietta Manganelli tra le carte del padre, stampate in seconde bozze e rilegate con spirale. Per quel che riguarda *L'elmo verde*, invece, all'epoca era stato dato per disperso. Solo recentemente, racconta Viola Papetti (44), Lietta Manganelli ha rintracciato il dattiloscritto di questa traduzione presso il Gabinetto Vieusseux di Firenze, dove era conservato fra le carte dell'Archivio Contemporaneo "A. Bonfanti". In questo modo, il nuovo volume aggiorna quello del 1999. Entrambe le edizioni riportano il testo originale a fronte e le note ai testi, che, però, in questa nuova veste sono aggiornate ed accorpate in un'unica sezione iniziale. Anche la bibliografia essenziale è stata rivista ed ha il pregio di comprendere una breve sezione dedicata agli scritti di Giorgio Manganelli sull'opera di Yeats. Tra la bibliografia, essendo il libro inteso per un pubblico italiano, sarebbe stato utile includere la monografia di Fiorenzo Fantaccini (2009) sulla ricezione dell'opera di Yeats in Italia che dedica spazio anche al rapporto tra Yeats e Manganelli.

La bella presentazione di Viola Papetti pone l'accento sia sul teatro yeatsiano – e sull'unicità del momento vissuto da quel piccolo gruppo di intellettuali della *Protestant Ascendancy* che misero in piedi un teatro nazionale che presto sarebbe loro sfuggito di mano – sia sulle affinità tra l'idea di teatro di Giorgio Manganelli e quella di W.B. Yeats. Proprio su *Studi irlandesi*, Viola Papetti, ripercorrendo i saggi di Manganelli sull'amato "mago astuto", e raccontando la vicenda / non vicenda editoriale di queste traduzioni pubblicate solo postume, parlava di come il teatro di Yeats fosse congeniale a Manganelli in quanto teatro di parola: proprio per questo motivo, uno dei paragrafi della presentazione titola significativamente, citando una conversazione con Manganelli, "il mio teatro è di parola" (10).

A questo proposito la raccolta testimonia una affinità di vedute su un tipo di teatro in cui la lingua ritrova una posizione centrale, così come nel "teatro di Shakespeare, [che è] letteratura non perché esibisca i personaggi, ma perché questi sono delle attive, violentissime costanti linguistiche, e dunque ambigue, instabili e contraddittorie" (Manganelli 2000, 36). Un teatro, dunque, che rappresenti un "linguaggio totale, che si nutre delle invenzioni di tutte le classi, impudico, lubrico, blasfemo, estroso, mai sentimentale; un impasto di sfatto barocco, di gerghi plebei e furbeschi, di autentica dottrina, di erudizione d'accatto, di arguzia stilistica e incon-

tenenza oratoria” (21). Yeats era dello stesso intendimento quando scriveva come Shakespeare fosse da considerare un modello per l’uso della lingua: “we have looked for the centre of our art where the players of the time of Shakespeare and Corneille found theirs – in speech, whether it be the perfect mimicry of the conversation of two country-men of the roads, or that idealised speech poets have imagined for what we think but do not say” (Yeats 2003, 101), e quando, allo stesso proposito, aggiungeva: “[...] if we are to restore words to their sovereignty we must make speech even more important than gesture upon stage” (27).

Viola Papetti chiude la sua presentazione citando H. Kenner, che identifica il luogo del teatro yeatsiano come una unicità – ma direi, anzi, singolarità, prendendo a prestito la definizione usata in fisica. Il teatro è un non luogo, il posto in cui avviene una cerimonia, come il pozzo sacro dello sparviero del dramma yeatsiano, un posto magico, e, appunto, una singolarità dove una situazione quasi statica viene trasformata in una molto dinamica a seguito di un cambiamento impercettibile, e dove quindi anche un minimo movimento come un gorgoglio d’acqua può assumere un significato straordinario (12). Scrive Manganelli:

Per quel che capisco di questo misterioso e mirabile mostro che è il teatro, non mi pare che i suoi intrichi polimorfi vogliano essere “capiti”; questo evento fatto di parole non lette ma pronunciate, e dunque foneticamente plastiche, e di non parole, di luoghi mentali, di inesistenti invenzioni, di epifanie e di magherie non aspira affatto ad essere “capito”, ma ad essere accettato. (2000, 41-42)

Per gli autori, il teatro è cerimonia ed artificio, una rappresentazione sacra. *Drammi celtici* testimonia ed è il prodotto di questa sintonia che meglio può essere descritta chiosando proprio con le parole di questi due funamboli (cf. Melchiori 1955) del teatro e della parola:

The theatre began in ritual, and it cannot come to its greatness again without recalling words to their ancient sovereignty; [...] as long as drama was full of poetical beauty, full of description, full of philosophy, as long as its words were the very vesture of sorrow and laughter, the players understood that their art was essentially conventional, artificial, ceremonious. (Yeats 2003, 150, 73)

Si parla spesso di “cerimonialità” del teatro. Questo significa: pubblico tenuto a bada con pacato terrorismo, attore sostituito dal celebrante, scenografia rituale, rigorosa delimitazione dello spazio deputato al prodigio, ed invenzione dell’opera teatrale come prodigio. Cerimonia e artificio. [...]. (Manganelli 2000, 37)

#### Riferimenti bibliografici

- Fantaccini Fiorenzo (2009), *W.B. Yeats e la cultura italiana*, Firenze, Firenze UP.  
 Levitas Ben (2002), *The Theatre of Nation: Irish Drama and Cultural Nationalism 1890-1916*, Oxford, Oxford UP.  
 Manganelli Giorgio (2000), *Cerimonie e artifici, scritti di teatro e di spettacolo*, a cura di Luca Scarlini, Salerno, Oedipus.  
 Melchiori Giorgio (1955), “Yeats, simbolismo e magia”, *Lo spettatore italiano* 8, 11 novembre, 453-465. Ristampato in Id., *Verso i funamboli. Le collaborazioni e Lo Spettatore Italiano 1951-1956*, EBook4Free.com, Roma, 2003.  
 Papetti Viola (2012), “All’ombra del mago astuto”, *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* 2, 143-154.  
 Yeats W.B. (2003), *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume VIII, The Irish Dramatic Movement*, ed. by Mary FitzGerald, R.J. Finneran, New York, Scribner.  
 — (2010), *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume III, Autobiographies*, ed. by W.H. O’Donnell, D.N. Archibald, New York, Simon and Schuster.

Fabio Luppi

Madalina Armie, Veronica Membrive (eds), *Trauma, Memory and Silence of the Irish Woman in Contemporary Literature. Wounds of the Body and the Soul*, New York-London, Routledge, 2023, pp. xviii+203. £ 100. HB. ISBN: 978-1-032-40964-1.

*Trauma, Memory and Silence of the Irish Woman in Contemporary Literature: Wounds of the Body and the Soul* is a welcome venture in the field of Trauma Studies, as it explores through a variety of critical essays the interconnection between trauma, memory and silence in contemporary Irish literature. The apt choice of title highlights the original meaning of the word “trauma”, physical injury, later to be extended to more profound injuries leaving indelible scars. The double perspective on wounds hard to heal embedded in the subtitle emphasises the mutual interaction of wounds in body and soul with particular attention to Irish women from the North and the Republic. This is an engaging collection investigating a wide range of topics and literary works written at the turn or in the first decades of the twenty-first century. The concern with trauma and memory creates a triad with the issue of silence as tightly connected with the unspeakability of trauma.

The Editors have collected eleven essays covering a diversity of issues dealt with in works of contemporary Irish fiction considering the manifestation of female trauma from a variety of critical perspectives. The volume is organised in three parts. An introductory section provides a “Foreword” by Evelyn Conlon and the “Introduction” by Madalina Armie and Veronica Membrive; Part I contains the single contributions organised according to thematic development; finally, in Part II three “Pieces of Creative Writing” by Catherine Dunne, Mia Gallagher and Lia Mills provide a significant conclusion to the book.

Evelyn Conlon defines her “Foreword” a “welcome mat” (xi) for a collection of essays she appreciates for the “dedication to the subject matter” (ix). Her voice highlights her personal engagement with female and feminist activism in Ireland, making reference to specific episodes over the years, such as the creation of Attic Press and of the Rape Crisis Centre, and provocatively wonders: “Is the trauma of Irish women different to British, Spanish, Romanian, North American?”, it is rather a common experience (x). Before quoting an excerpt from her short story “The Park” (xii) which concludes her contribution, Conlon’s congratulations to the editors in the Irish language pave the way to a triple reflection respectively on Catholicism, history and the Famine, each of them introduced by the caption “A brief word on” and taking the space of single paragraphs. This stylistic choice ideally unites the interweaving of such topics in the various essays in the volume.

The Editors’ “Introduction” can by all means be considered a twelfth essay in its complexity and thoroughness, highlighting the impact of trauma, memory and silence through the perspective of different recent approaches, from psychoanalytic theory to Gender Studies and Cultural Studies (1). Literary works investigate trauma to reflect on reality and “explore the very nature of trauma experienced by female characters” (2) as they can express what cannot be expressed or is unsaid or unspeakable. The Editors underline the intersections of trauma, memory and silence in the context of both the North and the Republic making it “essential” (3) to read female trauma in contemporary cultural and national discourse. An analysis of the conditions of women in history, culture and society points out factors that have had an impact on women’s lives leading to trauma and silence as a reaction (5), a situation that is common to both territories. Themes such as patriarchy, the female body, the impact of history on the present, the concept of legacy in families as well as sectarian conflict (15) are sites for the discussion of trauma and its consequences. The Editors provide a significant corpus of studies and reading material in an overview of Trauma Studies over the past few decades (17), as well as an outline of the various chapters. However, they also mark the specificity of the volume as it considers

literary works published between 1987 and the post-Celtic Tiger era, taking into account “male and female authors from both sides of the border” including diasporic and foreign voices like Irish-Canadian Emma Donoghue and British Rachel Seifert (*ibidem*). With a humorous touch of self-reproach, the Editors define their project an ambitious “pastiche” (*ibidem*), which in the richness of its variety and construction is everything but a pastiche.

In the first essay, “Trauma, Reproduction and Breeding in Catherine Brophy’s *Dark Paradise*”, Jessica Aliaga-Lavrijsen considers Brophy’s feminist dystopia *Dark Paradise* (1991) as trauma narrative and a paradigm of hegemony, patriarchy and oppression conducive to trauma. Pointing out the ambiguity of the title (33) in its oxymoronic overtone, Aliaga-Lavrijsen claims that the format of science fiction provides the opportunity to focus on “multiple ways of violence exerted against women” (32) and is thus an apt tool in the depiction and discussion of trauma. In the setting of the far from ideal planet of Zintilla, a society based on order has erased emotions and humanity, and new forms of reproduction and breeding, as well as forced sterilization and ectogenesis in the name of eugenics, have turned into further ways of female oppression. The state’s control on reproduction and breeding is a mask for the control of women, which for Aliaga-Lavrijsen speaks for the reality of Ireland.

In “*Different Kinds of Love: Silenced Women in Leland Bardwell’s Short Fiction*”, Burku Gülüm Tekin examines three short stories from Bardwell’s 1987 collection focussing on silence as a form of response to traumatic events (44). The stories taken into account, “The Dove of Peace”, “Euston” and “Out-patients”, are disturbing narratives of incest, mental illness, domestic violence, abuse, whose setting – the home – cannot provide safety. Making reference to the theoretical framework of Caruth and Luckhurst, the essay discusses the double perspective of silence, for the victim as a form of self-protection, for the community as deliberate neglect. The themes present in Bardwell’s collection in the late 1980s are still part of the Irish context when the volume was republished in 2011, so that “unspoken truths, painful taboos and neglected silences” (*ibidem*) seem to remain across time. The careful and deep analysis of the three stories points out the “recurrent presence of horrific everyday realities” (53), which is even more problematic considering the self-blaming (51) shared by all the protagonists, the feeling of wrong doing in an endemic sense of guilt.

The tragedy and secrecy of institutionalised violence and oppression is at the centre of the trauma of survivors in the Magdalene Laundries. In their compelling contribution “Trauma after a Life of Torture in Irish Magdalene Laundries: Magdalene Survivors’ Testimonies and Patricia Burke-Brogan’s *Stained Glass at Samhain*”, Elena Cantueso Urbano and María Isabel Romero Ruíz’s exploit real oral and written testimonies of women who experienced the abuse perpetrated in the laundries (54). Their discussion of the trauma of confinement and oppression kept under silence for decades is carried out vis-à-vis the analysis of the play by Patricia Burke-Brogan’s *Stained Glass at Samhain* (2003). The essay has thus a double focus in disclosing the traumatised and silenced voices of the victims, and in the reality of authentic accounts and the imaginative creation of drama women who suffered abuse in the Laundries are retrieved and kept alive. The analysis of Burke-Brogan’s play acts as a counterpart to real voices staging the complexity of moral response to clerical abuse. “Theatre”, the authors say, “allows the representation of silenced topics” (55) and in the play “the victims are not present” while the audience act as witnesses in the interaction with the past (60). The theory of Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder underlies the presentation of real testimonies and its artistic transformation in a play which revolves around the cruelty marginalised women considered immoral had to undergo.

A look from outside is represented by Paula Romo-Mayor’s work, which considers the novel *The Walk Home* (2014) by British novelist Rachel Seiffert. The essay, entitled “Shattering

the Moulds of Tradition: The Role of Women in the Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma in Rachel Seiffert's *The Walk Home*", discusses what the Author describes a "thought-provoking novel" (66) in terms of transgenerational trauma. Romo-Mayor claims that the consequences of trauma have "a crucial role in the construction of Irish identities" (65), which is evident in *The Walk Home*, a novel centered on a working class Protestant family living in Glasgow, unable to come to terms with the trauma of dispossession and forced emigration after the Irish Free State. Such trauma is embodied in the figure of Robert, whose obsession with the past and with past injustice makes him impose his ethics to the family, transmitting his acrimony to younger generations. In the atmosphere of "toxic Protestant masculinity" (69) Brenda and Lindsay are figures of resisting women, struggling against the oppressive traditions that mark their lives in a dysfunctional family.

In an ideal link to the previous essays, Melania Terrazas's contribution, "Representations of Trauma, Memory and the Silencing of Irish Women: Storytelling in Emer Martin's *The Cruelty Men*", relies on Will Storr's theory and research on storytelling to highlight the way in which people are connected "to each other, but also to their cultural identity and roots" (76). The first novel in a trilogy of dislocation and dispersion, *The Cruelty Men* (2018) intertwines the stories of two different families in the background of post-independence Ireland, in which the "cruelty men" of the title have to find poor children and put them in industrial schools, where sexual and emotional abuse is the rule. Likewise, the presence of Magdalene Laundries and Mother-and-Baby Homes and the abuse perpetrated in such institutions loom largely in a novel in which gender and class are prominent. The "silencing of Irish women" (78) in a continuous line of trauma is at the heart of the novel and Terrazas's feminist perspective addresses the role of storytelling in female identity. In fact, the main character, Mary, is also the main storyteller, whose voice is capable to break silence and reassert identity.

F.B. Schürmann analyses Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing* (2013) highlighting the protagonist's desire for resistance and self-determination. "Exposition of a Half-formed System: Trauma and Other Matters in Eimear McBride's *A Girl Is a Half-formed Thing*" discusses the novel through the lens of the Lacanian psychoanalytic status of lack and the Lacanian concept that "there are no *a priori* traumatic events" (92), so the protagonist's capacity to make choices and take steps against abuse and oppression creates a dynamic with her self-annihilation. The essay exploits the theory of the split subject which lies at the basis of the half-formedness embedded in the novel.

Alicia Muro discusses in depth Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends* (2017) and *Normal People* (2018) in an essay that considers the intricacies of trauma, shame and silence and the presence of what she calls "damaged" characters in both novels. "Damaged Women. Trauma, Shame and Silence in Sally Rooney's *Conversations with Friends* and *Normal People*" opens contextualising post-Celtic Tiger Ireland and the changes the country has gone through as a consequence of economic imbalance. After taking into account the traditional role of women in Irish society, attention is given to the theoretical framework of trauma and shame to counterpoint the historical trauma of the country, from the Great Famine to the Troubles, to the specificity of individual traumas in contemporary fiction. This is what Sally Rooney deals with in novels in which the female protagonists, Frances and Marianne, are quite similar to one another, since they suffer from the consequences of traumatic events in the past, they are wounded in body and soul. The dysfunctional families each of them has grown up in mark interpersonal relationships, their limited self-esteem leads to feelings of inadequacy conducive to sense of shame, while the inability to speak and express trauma and shame verbally is continuously embedded in the narrative. Muro highlights "the new kind of traumas contemporary

Irish women are facing” (111), and concludes her analysis of Rooney’s *bildungsromans* comparing the different generations of mothers and daughters.

In “Conditions of Homecoming: Self-Care and Anticipation in Louise O’Neill’s *Only Ever Yours* and *The Surface Breaks*” Kayla Fanning discusses the need to “re-politicise an ethic of self-care” (115) considering two dystopian novels by Louise O’Neill, and opposes Georg Lukács concept of “rounded action” and homecoming (116). Casting a glance at Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), *Only Ever Yours* (2014) displays the traumatic experiences of female characters in an oppressive society in which self-care is imposed with the consequence that it is never achieved and antagonism with the body develops (117). Andersen’s Little Mermaid is at the roots of *The Surface Breaks* (2018), a reimagining of the story from a feminist perspective. Like Freida in *Only Ever Yours*, Gaïa as the new mermaid experiences dissociation from her own body and self and, Fanning concludes, the protagonists “struggle to seize slivers of genuine self-care through modes of escaping” (125).

The two following essays are centered on lesbianism in an interconnected way. Asier Altuna-García de Salazar examines Donal Ryan’s novel *Strange Flowers* (2020) in his contribution “Confronting Female Unspeakable Truths in Ireland. Donal Ryan’s *Strange Flowers*” discussing the trauma experienced by lesbians in oppressive rural Ireland. Opening in the 1970s, this transgenerational or multigenerational (126) novel highlights the pain and trauma enacted by the necessity to keep same sex relationship hidden. Altuna-García works on the issue of the “unspeakable/unsayable” (127) and the secrecy of unspoken truths to develop his analysis of trauma generated by invisibility (128) as well as by “the social, cultural and religious conditioning of generations modelled upon by patriarchy” (130). Thus, Altuna-García remarks, the protagonist’s identity is a prototype of “traumatic subordination encapsulated in silence” (133), which makes Ryan’s novel an agent to recover a forgotten past.

In a similar way, lesbianism and silence are at the heart of Mayron Estefan Cantillo-Lucara’s “Emma Donoghue’s *Hood* and the Aesthetics of Existential Claustrophobia: From Traumatic Self-Retreat To Uncloseted Grief”. The 1995 novel, republished in 2010, is here examined through the perspective of Heideggerian hermeneutics and read as a trauma narrative. Based on “an intricate aesthetics of existential seclusion and self-closeted grief” (139), *Hood* follows Penelope’s grieving for the sudden loss of her partner in the notion of *Geworfenheit*, or thrownness, conditioned by the necessary silence to be kept on the relationship (140). The protagonist is thus unable to elaborate the trauma repressing her feelings and sense of bereavement and retrating into herself. The same silence she imposes on herself prevents her from dealing with loss, until “her *Mitsein* is rebuilt and repaired” (145) and the healing process can begin breaking silence and sharing her bereavement.

“Don’t Tell Them: The Strategy of Silence in Anna Burns’ *Milkman*” is the final chapter by María Gaviña-Costero, who focuses on a novel that, she says, “has produced a revolution in recent Irish literary studies” (150). Recalling Burns’ experiences of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, Gaviña-Costero points out the recurring themes in the writer’s literary output as a sign of the “personal and collective trauma” (*ibidem*) the Troubles have imposed on individuals and communities and highlights the risk that past episodes may be forgotten. Set in the late 1970s, a time when sectarian turmoil did not leave space to women’s voices, *Milkman* (2018) exploits experimentation in language to shed light on the consequences of a “falsely closed conflict” (151), on the legacy of individual, collective and cultural trauma (*ibidem*), and the different facets of silence around the Troubles. Only through the distance in time, thirty years after the events, can the first-person narrator and protagonist break the silence about that time, but also the silence imposed at the time on individuals and community. On the other hand, silence is

also a response to trauma; in her attentive and thorough analysis, Gaviña-Costero underlines the protagonist's reaction to multiple harassment: "on every occasion she freezes into silence" (154), later to claim the relevance of silence also at a linguistic level: "Expressions signifying silence and effacement are the most frequent type of lexicon in this narrative" not only for the protagonist but also for the community (156). The theoretical framework on memory, history and trauma is at the basis of this chapter, which with its keen eye on silence ideally and circularly closes the pattern of the volume.

Part II, "Pieces of Creative Writing", collects three contributions by writers Catherine Dunne, Mia Gallagher and Lia Mills, each preceded by an "Explanatory note", which provides a fascinating insight into the writers' writing and working methods as well as their personal perception and manifestation of trauma, memory and silence. Catherine Dunne offers five extracts from her novel *A Good Enough Mother* (2024) that was forthcoming at the time of the volume's organization. Here Dunne explores motherhood through the voices of different characters in different historical moments between the 1970s and the new century, each of them subject to the traumas of the past. Mia Gallagher's piece comes from a work in progress, a novel entitled *Kindergirl* set in Germany in the mid-1980s, revolving around two Irish girls and various facets of traumatic events, including disability, emigration, discrimination and violence. The last contribution is a full story by Lia Mills, "Flight", previously published in *The Stinging Fly* in 2011. The text "revisits, revises and plays" with the Irish legend *Tóiríocht Dhiarmada agus Ghráinne / The Pursuit of Diarmaid and Grainne* from the Fenian Cycle (189). In line with the contents and analysis of the volume, the story breaks female silence, giving voice and possibility of choice to silenced women in a patriarchal society.

This final section of creative writing dealing with the themes discussed in the various essays is the perfect way of closing an engaging volume that interlaces trauma, memory, gender, identity and silence. The volume is thus a significant accomplishment in the area of Trauma and Memory Studies, and it offers a precious tool to academics and specialists involved in the field, at the same time providing a valuable and captivating introduction for students developing initial interest in the subject.

Giovanna Tallone

John Greaney, *The Distance of Irish Modernism: Memory, Narrative, Representation*, London, Bloomsbury, 2022, pp. 248. £ 91.99. HB. ISBN: 978-1-35012-52-8.

In *The Distance of Irish Modernism: Memory, Narrative, Representation*, John Greaney riflette sulla complessità del concetto di "Modernismo irlandese", sia da un punto di vista prettamente etimologico, che storico-letterario. Partendo dall'assunto che esso possa essere considerato "a commonplace descriptor [...] for twentieth-century production in, and in relation to, Ireland [and its historical context]" (2), Greaney mette in discussione le nozioni relative al Modernismo irlandese – come per esempio quella dell'esistenza di una salda connessione tra il testo letterario e il contesto nazionale – e nella "Preface" rende immediatamente chiaro al lettore lo scopo del suo studio: dimostrare che sebbene le "Irish modernist fictions maintain a certain proximity to historical and material realities, they also manifest an irreducible distance to the national and transnational histories of their period and places" (vii). Di fatto, Greaney si propone di (ri)orientare il modo in cui si pensa al Modernismo irlandese, e stimolare una riflessione sul

canone letterario a esso connesso. Dopo aver gettato le basi teoriche per la sua argomentazione nell'Introduzione al testo ("The Vicinities of Irish Modernism"), Greaney esamina alcune opere di due scrittrici e tre scrittori modernisti, quali Samuel Beckett, Brian O'Nolan (conosciuto con gli pseudonimi di Flann O'Brien e Myles na gCopaleen), Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien e John McGahern, analizzandoli da vari punti di vista, e dedicando loro un capitolo. Ne risulta un'opera estremamente innovativa che rivisita le interpretazioni convenzionali del Modernismo irlandese e propone una nuova lettura delle memorie culturali a esso (apparentemente) connesse (29).

Greaney apre la sua argomentazione con un capitolo dedicato a Samuel Beckett ("Samuel Beckett and the Context of Modernism"), esplorando i contesti che hanno plasmato la sua espressione artistica attraverso l'analisi di alcune delle sue opere: *Malone Dies* (1951), *Molloy* (1951) e *The Unnameable* (1953). La particolarità dello studio condotto dall'autore su Beckett è quella di combinare abilmente l'analisi testuale di queste opere con un'attenta esplorazione dei contributi più specifici di Beckett al movimento modernista, come il saggio "Recent Irish Poetry" (1934). Sebbene riconosca nelle tre opere la presenza di riferimenti storici al contesto irlandese contemporaneo a Beckett, Greaney sottolinea come queste spesso superino i confini tradizionali della narrazione e del contesto geografico irlandese per acquisire una dimensione più universale. Ciò è reso possibile, spiega l'autore, dal linguaggio innovativo adottato da Beckett, caratterizzato da quello che gli definisce " 'styleless' style" (28); un linguaggio fatto di semplicità e minimalismo, in cui tuttavia sono sempre presenti riflessioni filosofiche che mettono in discussione la realtà esplorando i temi dell'esistenza, dell'identità e del tempo.

Le due parti successive all'analisi del contributo beckettiano al Modernismo irlandese, ovvero "Brian, Flann, Myles and the origins of Irish modernism" e "Elizabeth Bowen's modernist history", affrontano, seppure da due punti di vista differenti, la stessa tematica: "[Ireland's] absent presence" (29). Nel caso di Brian O'Nolan, Greaney si concentra infatti sul carattere frammentario e pseudonimo della sua scrittura. Nel condurre l'analisi di Bowen, invece, pone attenzione al romanzo *The Last September* (1929) per dimostrare come le strategie "moderniste" adottate dall'autrice nel suo testo, interagiscano con la metanarrativa dell'indipendenza irlandese.

Nelle ultime due parti dello studio di Greaney, "the focus turns to moderately symbolic literatures which the new modernist canon encompasses" (*ibidem*).

Nello specifico, nel capitolo 4, intitolato "Kate O'Brien's 'flawed' modernism", Greaney tenta di riposizionare la figura della scrittrice irlandese nel contesto modernista a lei contemporaneo, analizzando tre delle sue opere: *Mary Lavelle* (1936), *Pray for the Wanderer* (1938) e *The Land of Spices* (1941). Fin dai suoi esordi, fa notare Greaney, la scrittura di O'Brien è sempre stata considerata "imperfetta", a causa della costante co-presenza, nelle sue opere, di due tematiche tra loro non direttamente connesse, ovvero quelle che Anne Fogarty ha descritto come "women's romance [and] social critique" (116). Tuttavia, secondo Greaney, è propria questa duplicità che rende degno di nota il lavoro letterario di O'Brien. Adottando la strategia del narratore onnisciente, l'autrice riesce a mescolare "social critique with narratives of individual development to create surreptitious queer perspectives, and otherwise difficult to voice cultural, social and political commentaries that are implanted on, rather than imitatively represented in or dictated by, the space of Irish and European convent" (137).

Greaney dedica, infine, l'ultima parte del suo lavoro ("John McGahern and the limits of Irish Modernism") a John McGahern considerato in realtà, come Greaney stesso afferma, "very rarely a modernist or [an Irish modernist]" (141). La decisione di includerlo nella sua "lista" dei modernisti degni di nota, sembra derivare dalla necessità di indagare i limiti del Modernismo irlandese al fine di comprendere dove e quando questo "finisce". L'analisi si concentra sulle strategie narrative utilizzate da McGahern in opere come *The Barracks* (1963), *The Dark*



(1965), *Amongst Women* (1990) e *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2002), come per esempio l'insistente uso della figura retorica dell'analepsi.

La discussione di Greaney si conclude con un epilogo che riassume efficacemente i concetti esplicitati nei vari capitoli del libro. Esso offre una riflessione sulle tematiche che permeano l'intero studio e sostiene l'idea che la l'analisi del concetto generale di "Modernismo" e, in particolare, di "Modernismo irlandese" richieda un approccio molto più "aperto" e poliedrico. In conclusione, si potrebbe affermare che in *The Distance of Irish Modernism*, John Greaney conduce un'analisi metacritica che sfida la convinzione che la memoria culturale e la storiografia postcoloniale abbiano influenzato la lettura, e dunque la ricezione, delle opere letterarie. Esso si configura quindi come uno studio che mira a rinnovare il dialogo critico attorno alla definizione e all'interpretazione del Modernismo irlandese, incoraggiando un'indagine più approfondita e dunque una comprensione più completa di questa importante fase letteraria.

*Alessia Gentile*

Katherine O'Donnell, Maeve O'Rourke, J.M. Smith (eds), *Redress: Ireland's Institutions and Transitional Justice*, Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2022, pp. 520. € 25. ISBN: 9781910820896.

Nel 2013, davanti ai membri del Parlamento, l'allora primo ministro Enda Kenny chiese scusa per il coinvolgimento dello Stato irlandese in ciò che definì "national shame", ossia le Magdalene Laundries. In queste strutture, le lavanderie dei conventi, venivano rinchiusi giovani ragazze madri per evitare che infangassero il buon nome delle loro famiglie per aver avuto un figlio fuori dal sacro vincolo del matrimonio. Si calcola che dal 1922 al 1996, anno di chiusura dell'ultima Magdalene Laundry, siano state circa 10.000 le donne internate in queste strutture. Alcune di loro sono sopravvissute, altre non ce l'hanno fatta.

Ma le Magdalenes non erano l'unica istituzione repressiva del Paese: intorno alla metà del '900 l'Irlanda era lo stato europeo con la più alta percentuale di cittadini che vivevano fuori dai contesti familiari. Le donne nubili rimaste incinte venivano confinate nelle Mother and Baby Homes: dopo il parto i loro bambini venivano dati in adozione – molti di loro negli Stati Uniti – e, i meno fortunati, raggiunta l'età scolare, erano costretti a frequentare gli istituti di avviamento al lavoro presenti in tutto il Paese. L'Irlanda aveva uno più alti tassi di mortalità infantile d'Europa che nelle case per ragazze madri arrivava ad essere 4-5 volte superiore a rispetto a quello della popolazione generale. Nella casa per ragazze madri di Tuam, nei pressi di Galway, gestita dalle suore del Buon Soccorso, dal 1925 al 1961 si sono verificati numerosi episodi di violenza e deprivazione di madri e bambini, con percentuali di mortalità infantile estremamente elevate. Molti anni dopo la sua chiusura, durante dei lavori di scavo in un terreno nelle vicinanze della struttura, è stata scoperta una fossa biologica in disuso, coperta con una lastra di cemento, che conteneva resti umani. Un'inchiesta del 2021 ha accertato che, nell'arco degli anni di apertura delle Mother and Baby Homes e di altre istituzioni simili, sono morti circa 9.000 bambini.

*Redress: Ireland's Institutions and Transitional Justice*, curato da Katherine O'Donnell, Maeve O'Rourke e James Smith, esplora il tema complesso e doloroso della giustizia di transizione in Irlanda, investigando in particolare gli episodi di abusi fisici e psicologici perpetrati nelle istituzioni religiose e statali. I curatori offrono un'ampia panoramica dei diversi casi, combinando l'analisi rigorosa dei fatti con il rispetto e la sensibilità per le vittime: non solo si descrivono gli

eventi ma viene fornita anche un'analisi critica delle politiche e delle pratiche di riparazione messe in atto dallo Stato e dalle istituzioni religiose coinvolte, attraverso una combinazione di interviste, *case studies* e analisi storiche.

Il libro è strutturato in sezioni che coprono un'ampia gamma di argomenti, tutti collegati alla *giustizia di transizione* – “Truth-Telling”; “Irish State (In)justice”; “Transitional Justice: Opportunities, Limits”; “Motherhood and Adoption”; “Children in State Care”; “Knowledge, Memory and the Magdalene Laundries”; “Truth-Telling and the Archive” – locuzione con cui si definiscono tutti i processi e le pratiche che affrontano le violenze perpetrate all'interno di una comunità in un preciso periodo storico. Questa prassi giuridica, che si è sviluppata a partire dalla fine degli anni Novanta, ha lo scopo di portare alla luce le violenze e, anche attraverso un dibattito pubblico, di rivelare fatti ancora sconosciuti alla maggior parte della popolazione, non solo per evitare che vengano dimenticati ma anche per accertarne le responsabilità e dare riconoscimento e voce alle vittime.

Il volume mostra come spesso le istituzioni coinvolte fossero riluttanti ad ammettere apertamente il proprio coinvolgimento negli abusi commessi, a causa di preoccupazioni di carattere politico, religioso, economico e di credibilità: le istituzioni tendono, infatti, a voler chiudere i conti con il passato piuttosto velocemente invece che affrontarlo in modo approfondito, minimizzando l'impatto che la scoperta della verità potrebbe avere sulla società. La stessa diocesi di Galway, dalla quale dipendeva la casa del Buon Soccorso di Tuam, afferma di non essere stata a conoscenza di ciò che accadeva nella struttura. Padre Monaghan, il segretario della diocesi interpellato sui fatti, rispose: “I suppose we can't really judge the past from our point of view, from our lens. All we can do is mark it appropriately and make sure there is a suitable place here where people can come and remember the babies that died” (O'Toole 2014).

Il volume offre principalmente la prospettiva delle vittime e delle loro famiglie dalla quale emerge con forza la richiesta di giustizia, verità e autentico riconoscimento del dolore e delle sofferenze subite. Le testimonianze riportate nel testo mostrano come le persone coinvolte in questa “vergogna nazionale” si sentano ignorate, deluse e tradite dalle risposte inadeguate e tardive delle istituzioni. Ciò che emerge è il bisogno di vedere riparati i torti subiti, attraverso risarcimenti economici, iniziative di ‘memoria storica’ e riforme istituzionali che affrontino il tema con decisione. Per onorare le vittime e fare giustizia non basta un memoriale “to remind [Ireland] all of this dark part of [its] history” (“Magdalene laundries: Enda Kenny delivers state apology”, 2013).

*Redress* offre un approccio multidimensionale al tema della “giustizia di transizione”, combinando il rigore dell'indagine storica con le testimonianze dirette delle vittime e dei loro familiari. Gli autori evidenziano come il coinvolgimento attivo e la mobilitazione delle organizzazioni della società civile e delle associazioni delle vittime possano creare una forte spinta dal basso verso la verità e la giustizia, contrastando la lentezza, l'inerzia e la resistenza delle istituzioni.

#### *Riferimenti bibliografici*

- “Magdalene Laundries: Enda Kenny delivers State Apology” (2013), *BBC News*, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-21510497>> (05/2024).  
 O'Toole Emer (2014), “Tell us the Truth About the Children in Galway's Mass Graves”, *The Guardian*, 4 June, <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jun/04/children-galway-mass-graves-ireland-catholic-church#:~:text=Father%20Fintan%20Monaghan%2C%20secretary%20of,remember%20the%20babies%20that%20died.%22>> (05/2024).

*Francesca Salvadori*