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Recensioni / Reviews

Maud Ellmann, Siân White, Vicki Mahaffey (eds), *The Edinburgh Companion to Irish Modernism*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP, 2021, pp. 504. £180.00. ISBN-13: 978-1474456692.

Irish Modernism has long been a subject of scholarly interest, often centered on canonical figures such as James Joyce and W.B. Yeats. The Edinburgh Companion to Irish Modernism seeks to broaden this focus by exploring the multifaceted nature of Irish Modernism, emphasizing its resistance to various orthodoxies religious, sociopolitical and aesthetic. As the editors' note in their introduction, the volume aims to "reframe and diversify the research" (2) on Irish Modernism, presenting it as a movement characterized by "critical heresies" that challenge established norms. This volume offers an expansive interdisciplinary approach, incorporating contributions from established and emerging scholars, with a particular emphasis on Irish Modernism as an ongoing and evolving discourse rather than a fixed historical moment.

The collection is organized into five thematic sections: "Heresies of Time and Space", "Heresies of Nationalism", "Aesthetic Heresies", "Heresies of Gender and Sexuality", and "Critical Heresies". This structure allows for a comprehensive examination of Irish Modernism from various angles, highlighting its temporal, spatial, and ideological complexities. In "Heresies of Time and Space", Paul Saint-Amour's essay on "Joycean Anachronism" delves into James Joyce's manipulation of temporal structures, illustrating how anachronism serves as a narrative strategy to disrupt linear time and challenge historical narratives. Saint-Amour expertly traces the ways in which Joyce's experiments with time function as a critique of nationalist and imperialist historiographies. Luke Gibbons' contribution, "Temporal Powers: Second Sight, the Future, and Celtic Modernity", examines the concept of second sight in Irish culture, linking it to broader themes of temporality and modernity. Gibbons' work is particularly compelling in its discussion of how Irish folklore intersects with modernist concerns over historical continuity and rupture, suggesting that Irish Modernism operates in a state of perpetual temporal negotiation.

The section on "Heresies of Nationalism" includes Margot Backus's essay, which explores representations of precarious and lost children in Anglophone Irish Modernism, shedding light on themes of identity and national belonging. Backus offers an

incisive reading of texts in which the figure of the lost child operates as an allegory for Irish cultural anxieties about national formation and historical memory. Julieann Veronica Ulin's piece on "Ireland's Philatelic Modernism" offers a unique perspective by analyzing postage stamps as cultural texts that reflect and construct national identity. Ulin's analysis situates philately as a material site where modernist and nationalist narratives converge, demonstrating how small and seemingly mundane objects carry significant ideological weight. The essays in this section effectively challenge monolithic understandings of Irish nationalism, revealing Modernism as a space of ambivalence and contestation rather than outright affirmation or rejection of nationalist ideals.

In "Aesthetic Heresies", Kelly Sullivan discusses the intersection of Irish visual culture and the Arts and Crafts movement, highlighting how Irish artists engaged with and diverged from mainstream aesthetic movements. Sullivan's work convincingly argues that Irish Modernism must be considered beyond the textual, acknowledging the role of visuality and material culture in shaping its development. Catherine Flynn's essay on "Cruiskeen Lawn, Dada and the Blitz" examines the influence of Dadaist aesthetics on Irish literature, particularly in the works of Flann O'Brien. Flynn's essay is particularly illuminating in its exploration of O'Brien's subversive engagement with avant-garde aesthetics, arguing that his playful and irreverent prose reflects an Irish adaptation of European modernist experimentation. The section as a whole complicates the perception of Irish Modernism as predominantly literary, instead of emphasizing its participation in a broader network of transnational aesthetic movements.

The "Heresies of Gender and Sexuality" section features Ed Madden's analysis of the figure of the Irish bachelor, exploring how bachelorhood is portrayed and its implications for understanding masculinity in Irish culture. Madden offers a richly contextualized reading of bachelorhood as both a social construct and a literary trope, revealing how it mediates anxieties about gender, national identity and reproduction. Lauren Rich's essay on the late novels of Molly Keane discusses themes of subversive consumption and the pleasures derived from challenging societal norms. Rich's work is particularly compelling in its examination of how Keane's fiction satirizes and destabilizes traditional gender roles, offering a complex portrait of female agency and resistance within modernist literary forms. This section effectively expands the scope of Irish modernist studies beyond its historically male-dominated canon, foregrounding issues of gender and sexuality as central to the evolution of Irish modernist aesthetics.

Finally, in "Critical Heresies", Seán Kennedy and Joseph Valente's essay on "Degeneration and/as Disability in Beckett's Happy Days" offers a critical examination of how themes of degeneration and disability are interwoven in Samuel Beckett's work, providing insights into his critique of societal and literary conventions. Kennedy and Valente's work aligns Beckett's aesthetics with broader discourses on disability, arguing that his representation of physical and cognitive decline challenges normative conceptions of modernist progress and innovation. The section also includes an essay on censorship and modernist literature, which investigates how Irish writers navigated the repressive legal and cultural mechanisms of twentieth-century Ireland. These contributions illuminate Modernism's fraught relationship with institutional authority, demonstrating how Irish modernists continually redefined their work in response to external constraints.

While the volume is comprehensive in its scope, it could benefit from a more extensive engagement with Irish language-Modernism. The absence of sustained discussion on figures such as Máirtín Ó Cadhain is particularly notable, given his significant contributions to the field. Additionally, while the collection is successful in expanding the scope of Irish Modernism, a more explicit engagement with postcolonial theory would have further deepened its analysis

of modernist nationalism and identity formation. Overall, The Edinburgh Companion to Irish Modernism is a significant contribution to the field, offering fresh perspectives and challenging existing narratives. Its interdisciplinary approach and inclusion of lesser-known works and figures make it a valuable resource for scholars and students interested in Irish literature and modernist studies. This volume not only broadens the critical landscape of Irish modernism but also invites further inquiry into its contested and evolving nature.

Rob Finnigan

David Lloyd, *Counterpoetics of Modernity. On the Irish Poetry and Modernism*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh UP 2022, pp. 222. Ebook (PDF). £19.99. ISBN: 9781474489829.

"Modernism in Irish poetry […] cannot be understood apart from that history"
(David Lloyd, *Counterpoetics of Modenity*, 2022)

In *Counterpoetics of Modernity: On the Irish Poetry and Modernism* (2022), David Lloyd propone una (ri)lettura della poesia irlandese contemporanea, con particolare riferimento alla produzione modernista e postcoloniale. Riprendendo il concetto di *forced poetics* introdotto nel 2007 da Édouard Glissant, che descrive la tensione tra la necessità di espressione e l'incapacità di realizzarla, Lloyd introduce l'idea secondo cui la poesia modernista in Irlanda non possa essere compresa appieno al di fuori del suo contesto storico. In questa prospettiva, l'autore sottolinea come gli effetti del colonialismo e dell'esperienza "of the violent and disruptive impact of modernization" (1) abbiano imposto condizioni che hanno reso difficile l'espressione poetica autentica nel Paese. Ciò è ulteriormente accentuato dalla mancanza di attenzione da parte della critica nei confronti delle cosiddette *alternative poetries*, ovvero quesi testi poetici che sfidano le convenzioni e le narrazioni dominanti, quali "the divisions between traditionalism and modernism, mainstream and margins, formalism and experiment, that have tended to organize critical approaches to date, usually at the expense of the most vital and innovative work being written in Ireland" (2). Solo di recente, infatti, si è assistito a un più ampio riconoscimento di un corpus poetico "alternativo" caratterizzato da notevoli sperimentazioni formali e linguistiche.

L'obiettivo di Lloyd non è quello di tentare di stabilire "the persistence of a continuous modernist tradition in Irish poetry, to bridge the 'broken line' – in Alex Davis's apt phrase – that leads from the Irish poets of the 1930s who affiliated themselves, if only temporarily, with the radical and iconoclastic energies of European modernism to the contemporary Irish 'neo-avant-garde' (again, in Davis's phrase)" (3), ma piuttosto quello di dare voce all'opera di alcuni poeti irlandesi meno noti con l'intento di considerare le loro produzioni come espressione di una "contropoetica della modernità".

Il volume si articola in due parti intitolate rispettivamente "Specters of Modernity" e "New Things that Have Happened". Insieme, le due sezioni delineano quella che l'autore definisce "counterpoetics of modernity" che attraversa la poesia irlandese, ovvero una modalità poetica che, confrontandosi con le eredità storiche e le condizioni materiali della modernizzazione coloniale, si reinventa per interrogare e contrastare le sue dinamiche oppressive. I due titoli lungo cui si sviluppa la riflessione dell'autore costituiscono una sorta di coppia dialettica che riproduce la tensione costante tra passato e presente.

La prima parte, infatti, pone l'attenzione sugli "spettri" della modernità coloniale che, secondo Lloyd, permea costantemente la poesia irlandese. I quattro capitoli che compongono questa parte (rispettivamente "Overture. The Burden of Discontinuity: Criticism"; "Colonialism, and Anti-Modernism"; "Crossing Over: On James Clarence Mangan's 'Spirits Everywhere' "; "1913-1916-1919: Yeats's Dates"; " 'To Live Surrounded by a White Song', or, The Sublimation of Race in Experiment: On the Margins of Susan Howe"), infatti, propongono l'analisi di alcune delle opere di autori celebri, quali James Clarence Mangan, W.B. Yeats e Susan Howe, mettono in luce come il passato non scompaia mai del tutto, e come questo informi e interroghi le pratiche poetiche contemporanee. In particolare, qui Lloyd esplora i concetti di discontinuità, colonialismo e memoria, costruendo il fondamento dell'idea di "contropoetica della modernità" e proponendo una rilettura delle fratture storiche hanno segnato – e continuano a segnare – la poesia irlandese.

La seconda parte si allontana invece dalla tradizione per esplorare e dare spazio alle nuove forme di poesia contemporanea. Questa, costituita da tre capitoli (ovvero, "New Things That Have Happened: Forms of Irish Poetry"; "Intricate Walking: Scully's *Livelihood*"; "Rome's Wreck: Joyce's Baroque"), pone il focus su poeti contemporanei, quali Ciaran Carson, Medbh McGuckian, Maurice Scully e Trevor Joyce, il cui lavoro rappresenta una risposta formale alle condizioni materiali e storiche dell'Irlanda del tardo Novecento. A spiccare in questa sezione è l'analisi delle opere di Maurice Scully e Trevor Joyce, poeti che fanno della disarticolazione formale una risposta alla "necessità" culturale – e commerciale – della poesia "ben fatta". Questa parte del volume, infatti, sembra avere lo scopo di dimostrare come le forme poetiche siano non semplicemente mezzi espressivi, ma veri e propri strumenti critici, capaci di interrogare la soggettività, la memoria e il linguaggio in un contesto di continue trasformazioni sociali.

La riflessione di Lloyd si conclude con un capitolo dedicato a *Optic Verve* di Catherine Walsh intitolato "Conduits for the Humane: Walsh's *Optic Verve*". Qui l'opera dell'autrice viene proposta come esempio emblematico di "produzione contropoetica". Lloyd, infatti, si concentra sulle condizioni materiali e psicologiche in cui il testo nasce e si sviluppa, ovvero uno uno spazio domestico disordinato in cui la scrittura, in continuo confronto con la frammentazione del sé, si fa espressione di resistenza.

I nove capitoli, incluse introduzione e conclusione, che compongono il volume di Lloyd non si limitano a tracciare una storia della poesia irlandese, o a offrire semplici letture testuali. Al contrario, Lloyd colloca la poesia in un dialogo costante con il contesto storico-culturale dell'Irlanda postcoloniale, proponendo un paradigma interpretativo in cui la poesia stessa si configura come pratica critica della modernità. Attraverso una riflessione che si snoda tra "passato" e "presente", infatti, Lloyd mira a dimostrare come le *alternative poetries* non costituiscano un elemento marginale, bensì vere e proprie forme di "controrarrazione", di "contropoetica" che pongono il proprio focus su temi fondamentali, quali l'identità, la lingua e la storia.

Alessia Gentile

Edwina Keown, Carol Taaffe (eds), *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics*, Oxford-Bern-Berlin-Bruxelles-Frankfurt am Mein-New York-Wien, Peter Lang, 2010, pp. viii+252. £60.00. ISBN: 978-3-0353-0072-7.

Modernism in Ireland, while often dominated in discussions by figures such as James Joyce and Samuel Beckett, has been shaped by a complex interplay of national and international influences. *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics*, edited by Edwina Keown and Carol

Taaffe, seeks to expand and complicate traditional narratives by exploring a range of voices, movements and contexts. As the editors' state in their introduction, this volume "examines how Modernism was received and engaged with in Ireland, while also considering how Irish writers contributed to the broader European and Anglo-American modernist movements" (1). This interdisciplinary collection brings together established and emerging scholars to offer fresh perspectives on the emergence, reception, and legacy of Irish Modernism.

The book is divided into four thematic sections: "Origins and Contexts", "Border Crossings: Ireland and Europe", "Catholic Modernism in Ireland", and "Evolving Irish Modernism: Literature, Visual Arts, Architecture". This structure enables a wide-ranging exploration of Irish Modernism, from its early stirrings in the late nineteenth century to its intersections with religion, politics, and the arts.

The first section, "Origins and Contexts", provides historical and theoretical frameworks for understanding Irish Modernism. Jean-Michel Rabaté's opening chapter, "Dublin, 1913: Irish Modernism and International Modernism", deftly situates Irish Modernism within global literary currents, illustrating how Ireland was both a participant in and a site of resistance to modernist experimentation. Jim Shanahan's discussion of Frank Mathew's *The Wood of the Brambles* (1896) is a highlight, as it reassesses Mathew's work as an overlooked precursor to Irish modernist fiction, one that complicates conventional genealogies of the Irish novel.

In the second section, "Border Crossings: Ireland and Europe", the essays consider how Irish writers engaged with European Modernism. Michael McAteer's chapter on Expressionism in the works of W.B. Yeats, Sean O'Casey and Frank McGuinness traces the influence of German modernist aesthetics on Irish theatre. Karen E. Brown's essay on Thomas MacGreevy explores the interplay between modernist poetry and visual art, particularly the painterly qualities of MacGreevy's verse. This section convincingly demonstrates that Irish Modernism was far from insular; rather, it was shaped by and contributed to broader transnational exchanges.

The third section, "Catholic Modernism in Ireland", examines the intersection of religious thought and literary Modernism. Rhiannon Moss's chapter on Thomas MacGreevy and T.S. Eliot provides a fascinating account of how Catholicism informed their respective modernist aesthetics. Meanwhile, Jennika Baines's discussion of *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) reframes Flann O'Brien's work as deeply engaged with Catholic themes, challenging readings that emphasize its irreverence at the expense of its theological concerns. This section offers a fresh lens through which to reconsider the complex relationship between Irish Modernism and religious identity.

The final section, "Evolving Irish Modernism: Literature, Visual Arts, Architecture", brings the discussion into the mid-twentieth century. Róisín Kennedy's exploration of the White Stag Group and its impact on Irish art history is particularly noteworthy, as it highlights the experimentalism of a movement often overlooked in literary studies. Ellen Rowley's chapter on 1950s Irish church architecture illustrates the tensions between modernist design and Catholic conservatism, making a strong case for considering architecture as a crucial but understudied facet of Irish Modernism. Edwina Keown's closing essay on Elizabeth Bowen's *A World of Love* (1955) situates the novel within mid-century debates on Anglo-Irish modernity, demonstrating how Bowen's late fiction reflects Ireland's evolving cultural landscape.

Despite its many strengths, the collection does have some omissions. While the volume succeeds in expanding the canon of Irish Modernism, its focus remains largely on English-language texts. A more sustained engagement with Irish-language Modernism, particularly the work of Máirtín Ó Cadhain, would have further enriched the discussion. Additionally, while some essays address gender dynamics, a more explicit feminist analysis of Irish Modernism would have been welcome. Nevertheless, *Irish Modernism: Origins, Contexts, Publics* is a vital

contribution to modernist studies. Keown and Taaffe have curated a volume that not only deepens our understanding of Irish Modernism, but also challenges us to rethink its boundaries and influences. Scholars of Irish literature, Modernism, and transnational literary studies will find much to admire in this nuanced and engaging collection.

Rob Finnigan

Rosita Copioli, *William Butler Yeats: Omero in Irlanda,* Milano, Edizioni Ares, 2024, pp. 392. €25.00. ISBN: 978-88-9298-372-4.

Il volume si compone di due parti separate da un gruppo di fotografie di Yeats e della sua famiglia oltre che di alcuni personaggi incontrati da Rosita Copioli nel corso delle sue ricerche. La prima parte, di oltre 150 pagine, più che un saggio critico organizzato secondo criteri scientifici, è la storia di un rapporto personale con la figura e l'opera del poeta, che ne giustifica il titolo: "Viaggio in Yeats"; la seconda parte, della stessa lunghezza della prima, contiene sei saggi, già pubblicati in passato come introduzioni a opere di Yeats o in atti di convegno, in parte ritoccati, riadattati o ampliati.

"I saggi di Yeats", scrive Copioli nelle prime pagine del volume, "sono opere d'arte, non l'opera fredda di un letterato: sono attraversamenti di anima, la ricerca di sé stesso" (14). Non si tratta di una semplice osservazione generale strappata a un contesto in cui potrebbe trovare la sua collocazione naturale, ma di una vera e propria dichiarazione di metodo, o anche – se si considera il suo stile di scrittura – quasi di una dichiarazione di poetica. L'adesione all'opera e alla personalità di Yeats della studiosa infatti è totale, sostenuta da un entusiasmo genuino, che la induce talvolta, sul filo dell'analogia, a costruire come un gioco di scatole cinesi, in cui ciascuna delle scatole, per attenerci alla metafora, offre nuove sorprese, curiosità, riflessioni, spunti critici spesso di grande finezza. Inseguendo gli sconfinati interessi di Yeats, ne fa emergere la personalità complessa e profonda in polemica con quanti nel passato lo avevano bollato come approssimativo e superficiale, un cialtrone di "esoterismi infrequentabili" (63). Avendo avuto accesso alla biblioteca personale di Yeats, Copioli lo scopre, al contrario, lettore assiduo di opere e di autori fra i più vari e complessi, fra gli altri, Vico e Croce, Kant, Hegel, Bergson, Whitehead, Spengler, oltre naturalmente agli amati Platone e Plotino. Di costoro, come per opere note e meno note di Yeats, la studiosa offre puntuali sintesi e valutazioni relative alla forma e alla sostanza.

L'autrice adotta un approccio libero e personale che non segue un metodo sistematico di citazione, commento o valutazione di opere o teorie filosofiche. Le sue riflessioni, spesso ampie e articolate, emergono spontaneamente dal richiamo di un nome, un'idea, un'opera o uno scritto, da esperienze personali, come la visita a un luogo, l'incontro con una persona legata alla figura del poeta, oppure dalla lettura di un'opera o di una citazione che suggerisce ulteriori approfondimenti. Questo processo genera un ricco intreccio di riferimenti: un movimento dinamico e caleidoscopico, paragonabile a una collana di cui si sia spezzato il filo, facendo cadere i grani in un vortice affascinante.

L'effetto sul lettore è suggestivo e quasi ipnotico, sebbene possa talvolta rendere meno immediata la comprensione del rapporto tra la digressione e il contesto iniziale, che Copioli riprende sempre con coerenza, anche se può richiedere al lettore di tornare indietro di qualche pagina per orientarsi meglio. Per quanto riguarda Yeats, l'autrice affronta con grande profondità tutta la sua produzione, spaziando dalle raccolte poetiche ai drammi, dagli scritti sul folklore irlandese all'auto-

biografia, dai racconti fino agli intricati scritti esoterico-filosofici. In ogni caso, riesce a metterne in evidenza qualità e limiti con una chiarezza e un acume critico notevoli. Tuttavia, il ricorso frequente a connessioni con altre opere, interventi critici e ricordi personali, pur offrendo spunti di grande interesse, può talvolta disorientare il lettore, che rischia di perdere il filo principale del discorso.

La seconda parte del volume si distingue per stile e contenuti, risultando particolarmente adatta a lettori con una conoscenza approfondita dell'opera di Yeats. I frequenti e intensi riferimenti alle sue opere, non solo poetiche, e le citazioni da testi filosofici, esoterici o critici, presuppongono una familiarità che potrebbe rendere la lettura più impegnativa per chi non possiede tale background. Inoltre, i saggi presentano una struttura indipendente l'uno dall'altro, senza un evidente filo conduttore, il che si riflette nell'ordine in cui sono proposti. L'ultimo saggio, "William Butler Yeats: John O'Leary, The Young Ireland, Maud Gonne, la nascita dell'Eire", per esempio, avrebbe avuto migliore collocazione all'inizio della sezione; ripercorre, infatti, la storia d'Irlanda, quella dell'Ottocento e della prima metà del Novecento; difatti, essendo Yeats il punto costante di riferimento di Rosita Copioli, si sarebbe colto bene il senso dell'osservazionedi T.S. Eliot, secondo il quale: "fu uno dei pochi la cui storia è la storia del proprio tempo, e che fanno parte della coscienza di un'epoca che, senza di loro, non può essere capita" (316). È un capitolo scritto con estrema lucidità e chiarezza e, proprio per questo e per i temi che tratta, sarebbe stato di grande utilità a quanti di Yeats abbiano una conoscenza parziale e avrebbe facilitato la comprensione degli altri saggi, particolarmente "La magia della soglia" e "La soglia del crepuscolo", ripreso parzialmente in "La rosa dell'ombra".

Yeats vi compare come figura dagli smisurati interessi, lontanissimo dall'immagine del lirico o del visionario fuori controllo che persiste nell'immaginario di molti. Al contrario, Yeats è uomo profondamente inserito nel suo tempo, consapevole della funzione dell'intellettuale nella definizione dei meccanismi che orientano il cambiamento e dei percorsi da proporre per un armonico sviluppo della società.

"Acanti dall'Irlanda", originariamente introduzione a *L'artificio dell'eternità. Saggi sull'arte* (Yeats 2015), è particolarmente interessante per la solida argomentazione sul teatro di Yeats, mai arida e spesso sostenuta da un'intensa adesione ai testi, che coinvolge il lettore nell'emozione della studiosa; l'ultima parte del saggio, piuttosto corposa (più di dieci pagine), ci offre molte delle poesie di Yeats, fra le più complesse, nella traduzione della stessa Copioli. Un'impresa magnifica, una traduzione che non scende a compromessi con l'originale, eppure mai risultato di fredda tecnica quanto piuttosto tentativo di riprodurre la tensione psichica, intellettuale ed emozionale, che Yeats ha profuso in ogni verso, in ogni locuzione e perfino in singole parole; merito certamente di una sensibilità linguistica non comune – Copioli è lei stessa poetessa – che le permette di affermare di non aver mai tradotto "se non per passione" (9). Traduzioni si trovano un po' in tutti i saggi, ma particolarmente in "La magia della soglia" e "La rosa dell'ombra".

"Scrivere autobiografie", originariamente un intervento a un convegno organizzato dal Dipartimento di Scienze del Linguaggio e Letterature Moderne e Comparate dell'Università di Torino, poi confluito negli Atti del Convegno stesso dal titolo *Yeats e l'autobiografismo* a cura di Melita Cataldi (1996), molto più breve e partecipato (la stessa Copioli dichiara la sua vicinanza di poetessa all' "immaginazione simbolica e trasfigurante" (225) di Yeats), è di più agevole e gradevole lettura, particolarmente nella parte finale in cui lo stile si fa più lieve, il tono gentile, quasi affettuoso, poetico.

Il volume accoglie infine una bibliografia essenziale che, oltre alle opere di Yeats, presenta un elenco di studi sullo scrittore e un resoconto delle traduzioni italiane di opere critiche o mitopoietiche o narrative di Yeats con l'avvertenza che tali opere finora non sono state tutte tradotte in italiano. Molte delle opere citate in bibliografia sono ampiamente discusse e valutate soprattutto nel corso della prima parte.

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Giuseppe Serpillo

Joseph Bristow, *Oscar Wilde on Trial: The Criminal Proceedings, from Arrest to Imprisonment*, New Haven and London, Yale UP, 2022, pp. 670. $85.00. ISBN: 978-0-300-22272-2.

As various critical responses have so far underlined, Joseph Bristow's monumental volume soon catches the eye as a thorough and comprehensive study of the contextual background, documentary evidence and aftermath of the 1895 notorious court processes – the civil libel suit and the two criminal trials – that catalysed Oscar Wilde's downfall.

Published in 2022 in the Yale Law Library Series in Legal History and Reference, *Oscar Wilde on Trial: The Criminal Proceedings, from Arrest to Imprisonment* carries out a detailed and revealing analysis that devotes special attention to the socio-political backdrop and juridical frame of reference relating to Wilde's "gross indecency" case. In an admirable conjunction of meticulous research and incisiveness, this study succeeds in never losing sight of Wilde's personal ordeal while also throwing light on wider collective dynamics and the multiple forces that were then at work, including political manoeuvres. Drawing on an impressive range of sources, the book shores up the extant critical bibliography through archival material extrapolated from databases, folders and collections hosted by the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library (University of California), the British Library, and The National Archives. These findings, mainly consisting in legal transcripts and newspaper articles that resume the threads of the April/May 1895 courtroom exchanges, do prove instrumental in offering a fuller account of one of the bleakest chapters in the modern history of homosexuality. As a result, *Oscar Wilde on Trial* deservedly takes its place on the podium as a major, authoritative reference source compiled by an eminent Wilde scholar of our time.

Other commendable qualities are to be found in Bristow's lucid style, clarity of thought, consistency, and intellectual honesty, the latter being testified by the author's acknowledgment of a palimpsest of pioneering works that constitute significant departure points for a proper reconstruction of the Crown prosecution. Among these are Charles Carrington's *The Trial of Oscar Wilde: From the Shorthand Reports* (1906), Christopher Sclater Millard's *Oscar Wilde: Three Times Tried* (1912) along with H. Montgomery Hyde's *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1948, 1973) and *Oscar Wilde* (1962), largely borrowing from Millard's attentive survey. Due credit is also given to Merlin Holland's 2003 seminal contribution – *Irish Peacock & Scarlet Marquess: The Real Trial of Oscar Wilde* and *The Real Trial of Oscar Wilde: The First Uncensored Transcript of The Trial of Oscar Wilde vs. John Douglas (Marquess of Queensberry), 1895* – which has unravelled much uncharted territory:

> In many respects, *Oscar Wilde on Trial* serves as a complement to Merlin Holland's *Irish Peacock and Scarlet Marquess: The Real Trial of Oscar Wilde* (2003). Holland's expert volume reproduces the longhand transcription of the exhaustive shorthand reports that Queensberry commissioned during Wilde's libel case. Yet, unlike the document that Holland has edited, there are no comparable shorthand records of the Crown prosecution. As a consequence, my task has been to reconstruct the full complexity of the proceedings from diverse (often highly detailed) printed sources. Through the critical adaptation of these

materials, *Oscar Wilde on Trial* aims to give a much completer account of the trials than those that exist in the four extant editions. (xix)

As suggested by the passage quoted above (and by the whole "Preface" to the volume), Bristow goes to great lengths to both bring his study into dialogue with a worthy genealogy of hypotexts and keep his own trajectory in sharp focus. Indeed, *Oscar Wilde on Trial* can be shown to take us one stage further by focalizing on an as yet hidden reservoir of printed material connected with Wilde's prosecution, from the pretrial hearing to his conviction. Comments, annotations, synopses, and careful editing help the reader assess reports of lawyers' examinations and cross-examinations which newspaper editors occasionally found themselves attenuating or "purging" of explicit sexual references. Bristow makes the most of an extensive coverage by British dailies and weeklies comprising the radical evening paper *The Star*, the Sunday broadsheet *Reynold's Newspaper*, the venomous *News of the World*, the conservative *St. James's Gazette*, as well as scandal sheets like the *Illustrated Police Budget* and the *Illustrated Police News*, among others.

To avoid any confusion, Bristow also makes sure to map his exegetic terrain by tackling a question that is likely to come to mind:

> Readers may rightly question whether late-nineteenth-century newspapers can reliably provide accurate insights into the astonishing courtroom events that made Wilde's name into such a source of both national and international scandal. Under no circumstances can we view such journalism, regardless of how observational and neutral it often appears, as a transparent account of the truth. Each paper had its political predilections, editorial preferences, and reporting practices. Moreover, journalists sometimes made divergent assumptions about the events that unfolded in the courtroom, especially with respect to Wilde's demeanor and state of mind. In any case, all of the press accounts that have been assembled here involved editors and subeditors abbreviating and condensing shorthand records of the proceedings. […] there is a further noticeable aspect of the abundant reports of the trials. Many of them strove, in the face of considerable pressures to exercise discretion, to reveal the more unmentionable aspects of the homosexual acts that various leading witnesses had described. The comparative openness of the journalism of the time arguably came at a moment before the transition to a more moralistic tone that increasingly dominated the press in the later 1890s. (xxiii-xxiv)

The closing remarks are pivotal here, since they tend to debunk the widely held belief that the 1890s' editorials were necessarily punctuated by circumlocutions or glaring omissions about Wilde's intimacies and sexual life. What is more, the courtroom proceedings themselves seem to have been more direct on these matters than commonly thought, to the point that barristers at the Old Bailey did not refrain from using the word "sodomy", a potentially offensive term capable of shaking hearers out of their complacency.

By exploring these less trodden avenues, *Oscar Wilde on Trial* holds open a discursive space that intriguingly lifts the veil on the debatable grounds of Wilde's "mishandled trials" (xxxii). Bristow corroborates his assumption that Wilde suffered a wrongful treatment and a legal injury by raising the contentious issue of the witness statements' reliability and the coercive moral pressure exerted by the Crown on the vulnerable, uneducated young men appearing in the witness box. Of course, the wheels had been first set in motion by the Marquess of Queensberry's attorney at the time of his client's plea of justification. There is also little doubt that sums of money had been paid to at least some of these boys, i.e. Charles Parker, Alfred Wood, and Edward Shelley. Other flaws in the prosecution process concerned the disparity between the time allowed to cross-examinations and the strictures imposed on the defence's perorations.

On the structural level, *Oscar Wilde on Trial* presents the already mentioned "Preface" (xv-xxxii) and an "Introduction" (1-23) aiming to refresh our memory on various topics and circumstances,

from the eleventh section of the Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 to the notion of "gross indecency" at large and its connections with the history of the criminalization of sodomy, from the Radical MP Henry Labouchere's accountability to the sexologist Havelock Ellis's theories and the subcultural queer environment in nineteenth-century London. Here, Bristow begins to reconstruct the path leading to the accusations of "sexual criminality" against Wilde and his falling victim to male sex workers' blackmailing, in a grim foreshadowing of the courtroom events' crucible.

Part I, "Oscar Wilde on Trial: Social Background, Cultural Context, Legal Process" (25-151) covers the broad spectrum of Wilde's career, professional goals, and sexual relationships, with a whole section addressing the author's scandalous affair with Lord Alfred Douglas and, as might be expected, the noxious retaliation stirred up by Bosie's father. Functioning as a precious reminder, these pages endeavour to outline an accurate, unbiased historical framework pertaining to both Wilde's private sphere – his ambitions, marriage, ensuing flirtations and ties with young males – and the public arena, from the demimonde of homosexual prostitution and blackmail to the sensational liaison with Bosie, up until the belligerent Marquess of Queensberry's libel and Wilde's decision to sue the nobleman. Noticeably, among the attempts at redressing the balance is a softening of Bosie's stigmatized traits of narcissism, fickleness, and cupidity:

> It is therefore misleading to attribute to the temperamental Douglas the onus of blame for the events that triggered Wilde's decision to sue the volatile Queensberry for criminal libel. Their union, which endured periods of great devotion followed by ones tarnished with saddening betrayals, was more intricate and textured than it might at first appear. Theirs was a busy, adventurous, and luxurious life marked by a great measure of codependency. Together, Douglas and Wilde made rather poor decisions at the same time as they insisted that they could defy the social customs and punitive laws that sought to discipline their desires. As Nicholas Frankel has observed, the moment has come to even out the historical bias against Bosie. (86-87)

Although one hesitates to unconditionally agree with the statement that "[c]entral to Wilde's fascination with Douglas was the young lord's unquestionable talent as a poet" (86), it is admittedly true that "Wilde himself bears a degree of responsibility for the ways in which this deeply negative view of Douglas developed over the years" (87). Generally speaking, all the substantial portions of Part I going into the technicalities, leading figures, and underhand dealings of the libel trial (*Regina v. John Sholto Douglas*), up to the climactic twist of Wilde's arrest, are cogently articulated as well as aptly itemized.

At the core of the book is undoubtedly Part II, "*Regina v. Oscar Wilde and Alfred Taylor*: A Reconstruction of the Proceedings" (153-400), which systematically digs into the various phases of the three-day pretrial hearing and the subsequent proceedings (6 April-25 May 1895), fruitfully bringing into play the archival treasure that Bristow has been unearthing. While no simple summary or overview would be able to do justice to this multilayered forensic charting, one cannot help underscoring the vivid quality of the narration, which sometimes resembles the scene-shifting sequence in a play script. The interspersed quotations from newspapers further gear our perception towards such a "live streaming" effect, as showcased by the following excerpt:

> Once the court opened its doors at 10.30 a.m., there was a rush to find a seat in a very crowded chamber. The *Echo* calculated that 'there could have been little short of 200 persons who were vainly struggling for admission.' *Reynold's Newspaper* reported that the court 'was so crowded that the ushers had to take chairs in to accommodate the comers.' The journalist also remarked that the court 'was filled with men only,' apart from an unidentified woman 'quietly dressed in black, with close-fitting jacket and small bonnet, slightly relieved with a few violets,' who was 'shown in from the prisoners' entrance, and given a seat immediately behind the prisoners' dock.' Among the crowd was Sir Augustus Harris,

manager of the Drury Lane Theatre, who entered in a fur coat and silk hat. For its part, the *Illustrated Police Budget* took special note of Wilde's entrance: 'About twenty minutes to eleven o'clock the door by which the prisoners enter the Court was opened, and Oscar, hat in hand, and the suede gloves between his fingers, entered the Court. He was conducted by Mr. Bush [the jailer] to the dock at each end of which stood a policeman'. (163)

Needless to say, the effect is graphically intensified by virtue of an array of extracts from the testimony of witnesses and the attorneys' assertions and examinations (with Sir Edward Clarke famously undertaking Wilde's defence, besides Travers Humphreys and Charles Mathews). It is common knowledge that, after more than three hours of deliberation, the jury was to reach a verdict of guilty on all counts except those involving Edward Shelley. As for the judges, Bristow is conscious of how deeply Justice Alfred Wills's harsh attitude has remained engraved in collective memory, and pointedly claims that his lordship's "visible discomfiture […] while presiding over the case made it more than apparent that he harbored deep-seated prejudices against the accused" (305). In this sense, a newspaper's gloss movingly attunes us to the final pronouncement that set the seal on the gruelling trials, in which Wills labelled Wilde's plight as the worst he had ever coped with and passed the severest sentence allowed by the law:

> The *Star* commented on the way in which Justice Wills proceeded to pass sentence: 'Here came another dramatic surprise. The studied fairness of the summing-up had not prepared anybody for the burning, scathing words in which his lordship passed sentence. Seldom have such terms been heard at the Old Bailey, never perhaps addressed to a man of Wilde's antecedents'. (398)

The volume's Part III, "After the Trials" (401-460), closes the circle by dwelling on Wilde's post-trial life, from the disparate responses to his condemnation to the harrowing incarceration periods at Pentonville, Wandsworth, and Reading. Importantly, when getting to grips with the divisive issue of Wilde's merciless banishment, Bristow does not deny *a priori* that there might have been a puppet master behind Her Majesty's legal machinery (to say nothing of the contention that the Crown could have bribed some of the male criminals to testify against the defendant by promising them a pardon):

> Lockwood's headstrong determination to condemn Wilde struck one or two contemporaries as extreme. In 1932, Edward Marjoribanks claimed – without providing any source of authority – that even Carson was startled by Lockwood's tenacity. 'Cannot you let up on the fellow now?' Carson asked Lockwood. 'He has,' Carson added, 'suffered a great deal.' Lockwood's defensive response suggests that there was much more at stake in the Crown prosecution than Wilde's culpable sexual behavior: 'I would,' Lockwood said, 'but we cannot: we dare not: it would at once be said, both in England and abroad, that owing to the names mentioned in Queensberry's letters we were forced to abandon it.' To this day, we do know which 'names' were vulnerable to exposure. Douglas's, Adey's, and (courtesy of Marjoribanks) Lockwood's respective observations are polemical ones that raise the specter of a wholesale government conspiracy. (408)

Part III draws to a close with a section fittingly entitled "Coda: Release", which symbolically projects a ray of light by touching on Wilde's return to life – albeit as an exile and a man reduced to poverty. Travelling between France and Italy, two countries he had been fascinated with since the days of his youth, "Sebastian Melmoth" was to look for another chance in the short span of time left to him, before his passing away on 30 November 1900. Far from making a clean sweep of the hellish prison experience he had gone through, the author developed a sense of civic commitment that led him to write petitions and public letters purporting to bolster an awareness-raising campaign on the inhuman treatment of inmates by the British

penitentiary regime. Furthermore, in parallel with his composition of *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* and in spite of appearing "bleak about his professional career", Wilde "revealed that he was fully engaged with the literary currents of the day" (453).

To be sure, by way of its coda, *Oscar Wilde on Trial* continues to perform the valuable argumentative (and moral) function of rectifying a festering imbalance, in an effort to bring Wilde's all-round human profile markedly to the forefront.

Laura Giovannelli

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Michaela Schrage-Früh (eds), *Well, You Don't Look It! Women Writers in Ireland Reflect on Ageing*, Salmon Poetry, Cliffs of Moher, 2024, pp. 186. €15.00. ISBN: 978-1-915022-60-8.

There is a light touch of disturbing humour in the title of this engaging volume: *Well, You Don't Look It!*. These are the words women who are not that young any more may take as a compliment but also as a statement of their inevitably being "old". This highlights the "double standard" of ageing Susan Sontag identified in 1972 (9), considering how different the process of ageing is for men and women in terms of perception and stereotypes. The Editors emphasize the principle that underlies this issue making reference to Margaret M. Gullette's statement that women are "aged by culture" (2004).

The area of ageing studies has developed considerably from different perspectives in the past decades and in recent years, as a response to an increasingly ageing population worldwide, critical work starting with Kathleen Woodward's *Aging and its Discontents. Freud and other Fictions* (1991), a pioneer of literary gerontology. The field of Irish studies is characterized by the academic work of eminent scholars, such as Heather Ingman, Cathy McGlynn, Margaret O'Neill, and Michaela Schrage-Früh, who together with Éilís Ní Dhuibhne has edited the present anthology. The volume has thus two outstanding editors. Ní Dhuibhne's resonant and significant voice in contemporary Irish fiction was celebrated by a special issue of the *Irish University Review* last year in recognition of a writing career spanning over nearly five decades. The work of Schrage-Früh is groundbreaking in the area of ageing studies within Irish studies in a variety of publications, for example *Ageing Women in Literature and Visual Culture*, edited together with Cathy McGlynn and Margaret O'Neill, *Ageing Masculinities in Contemporary European and Anglophone Cinema* (2022), and *Ageing Masculinities in Irish Literature and Visual Culture* (2023), both edited with Tony Tracy.

Ní Dhuibhne and Schrage-Frűh have joint forces and effort to realize something different, as, unlike other texts, *Well, You Don't Look It! Women Writers in Ireland Reflect on Ageing* is the product of creativity rather than academic work. It is an anthology of 58 diverse pieces of writing, memoirs, poems, fiction, aiming at giving voice to ageing women and retrieve these voices from marginalization.

The "Introduction" by Michaela Schrage-Früh provides the theoretical framework as well as an account of the research project originating the volume, "Restorying Ageing: Older Women and Life Writing" (2012-2022), funded by the Irish Research Council in partnership with Age & Opportunity (10), the national organization aiming at enabling quality of life while ageing.

Schrage-Früh focuses on the "restorying" process, the pun implying the "restoration" culture somehow imposed on ageing women in order to fit into acceptable social standards, as well as on the storytelling process of exploration of ageing from within (12). The detailed account

of the phases of the project points out the age range of the participants, between 50 and 80, and the creative writing workshop led by Éilís Ní Dhuibhne they took part in (11). The 41 contributors to the anthology are established writers whose work is commissioned or reprinted here, but also women whose first attempts at creative writing took place during the workshop.

Interestingly, there is no particular "chronological, thematic or alphabetical order" (*ibidem*) in which the various pieces are assembled. The editors have chosen to place "the fictional stories at the centre, framed by alternating poems and reflective essays" (*ibidem*). Furthermore, the work of women contributing with more than one item is diluted or interspersed throughout the volume. This strategic organization is consistent with the statement underlying the anthology, "Ageing is a mixed bag" (*ibidem*).

All contributions are quite short, and essays alternate with poems and stories. However, given the high number of texts, it will be virtually impossible to take them all into account in this context, and the necessary selection and exclusion of some of them is not judgemental of relevance, value or significance. The variety of related texts is extensive, each of them giving voice to individual perspectives.

The opening piece by Ann Ingle, "Reflections of an Older Woman", provides an immediate link to the volume's subtitle, *Women Writers in Ireland Reflect on Ageing*. The reflections start with a sharp, brief statement: "I will be 84 in August", which introduces the reader to everyday devices such as a stick, a rollator and earphones, all "part of my ensemble" (13). Health issues related to age are described alongside a required mastectomy, which Ingle calls "another great adventure" (*ibidem*). Being left "cancer free" is also conducive to other forms of freedom, like "wearing earrings that didn't match" (14). This leads to consider the invisibility of elderly women mentioned in Schrage-Frűh's "Introduction", which is also the main concern of Catherine Dunne's piece, appropriately entitled "Invisibility: The New Super Power". She thus puts into words one of the main issues of the anthology, introducing among other things the responsibility and condition of carers within Irish society, wondering "at what age women begin to become invisible" (46). Invisibility is dealt with also in Mary O'Donnell's "The Growing Button", "there are times when I find invisibility a bonus" (20), which interlaces with philosophical issues mentioning Susan Sontag's "Double Standard of Ageing", medical issues, as well as the awareness that "my body is no longer what it was" (*ibidem*). O'Donnell's contribution closes rather polemically on "the ambiguous and weird attitude official Ireland radiates towards the truly vulnerable old" (21).

Fairly obviously, illnesses and ailments are at the centre of most of the essays. Anne Griffin's "Change" sheds light on the change of menopause as well as the onset of coeliac disease later in life, which leads the writer to reflect that "My biggest loss due to illness was my absolute faith in myself" (42).

The impact of the Covid pandemic features in a few essays, as a reminder of a problem that has probably not been explored seriously enough. It is touched briefly in Arja Kajerno's "Recovery Room", in which the 72-year-old protagonist realizes she has undergone major surgery for a mass in her abdomen. The sounds and movements of the oncological ward merge with her feelings, "She thought of the six stages people went through when given bad news. Despair, denial, anger, bargaining, depression and then acceptance" (72). Her admission to A&E and then immediately to the operating room has not let her any time to elaborate, "All the stages were coming at her like a tsunami" (71). It is while realising her condition that the recent past comes to her mind: "She was seventy-two, called 'vulnerable and elderly' during the pandemic" (*ibidem*). On the other hand, Ailbhe Smyth gives priority to the pandemic in her piece, whose title, "Unseen, Unheard, Untouched. *A View from the Interior*", highlights the experience of isolation and fear that particularly marked the elderly, especially through the absence of touch and of "physical tenderness"

(118). The replacement of real contact with distance meetings can hardly give comfort: "Virtual touch is the ultimate oxymoron, leaving me with an ineffable longing, an ache, a need" (117). Her essay mixes an emotional perspective with statistical data, in particular in relation to the "excess deaths" (118) in nursing and care homes, due to the lack of motivation and stimuli as a consequence of forced isolation. Maria McManus follows these steps not from inside like Smyth but from outside in "What Odds" as a daughter whose mother cannot understand restrictions in usual and everyday actions: "I try to tell her it is not sustainable. That we cannot go in to assist her and do the things that the carers cannot do. Clean. The laundry. Re-stock the fridge and make sure she has food. The pharmacy run. There is no-one to do these things" (172).

Writer and former minister Liz McManus retraces her life's experiences as a student, a mother, a feminist and a politician. In a parallel way, also Ivy Bannister retraces various steps in her life, first at the age of 16, then 36 and 72, this being also the title of her essay, "16, 36, 72". With the passing of time the perspective of age changes and at 72 she wonders "[j]ust how did I get old so fast?" (33). On a similar line, Tricia Cronin writes a "Letter to my 20-year old self ", whose advice follows the steps of her life; notably, half-way through the text she writes "value those who are old" (36) in a sort of reflection on her own ageing.

Advice to a younger self features also in Moyra Donaldson's poem "On Being Asked What Advice I'd Give My Younger Self", whose opening defies all expectations: "Dear younger self – sorry / but I've no advice to offer" (133). The older self is "still muddling through", and the effort is suggested by the irregular pattern of the poem, in which stanzas of different length alternate.

Poetry features conspicuously in the anthology, occasionally writers are present with more than one piece. This is the case of Paula Meehan, for example, whose three poems are here reprinted from previous collections. In the impressive short poem "The Hands" the speaking voice puts away her "young woman's hands" (16) as she has put in a drawer her "young woman's hair", thus accepting ageing and her "old woman's hands". Helena Nolan focuses on the inset of ageing asking "Why are there not one hundred poems about the menopause?" in "One Hundred Poems About The Menopause". The six five-line stanzas and the nearly total absence of punctuation imply the lack of an answer. Bodily features, from "The down-turned mouth, the lips" to "flustered faces", "the knuckles strung / With ropes of shrivelled veins" (23) are accompanied by regular references to poetry, "the mirrored halls of poetry, stanza'd rooms", or "symbols / Metaphor", as a reflection on the ageing body and the need to speak, to put the ageing body into words.

Mary Rafferty presents companion pieces which in a way form a single poem. "What I don't Need" is followed in the subsequent page by "What I Need", in an interplay of texts the writer points out what is superfluous in life, "scarves", "Hand cream / Candles or scented room diffusers" among other things in a long list making the poem (68). The second part – if this is the appropriate expression – is shorter, some lines are just one word, to emphasise what is essential, opening with "Smiles", "Laughter", "Good jokes", "Time". Once again, the limited use of punctuation provides both stream of consciousness and an ethical reflection. The poem is made of a list, closing with "Unfinished business", which leaves the way open to further items in the list of what may be a need in an elderly person's life.

The central section of the volume is made of fiction, with items already published elsewhere which are relevant to the present anthology. A case in point is Evelyn Conlon's "Reasons I Know of What We Are Not Allowed to Speak to Our Grandmother", half-way between a memoir and a short story, disrupting all possible preconceptions about old age and ageing, "Mr. McGrane was particularly interested in how those of us who had grannies living on their own fared on such a busy evening" (75). The grandmother expected to spend a solitary Saturday evening is instead revealed to have fun at the local pub, and she also turns out to be more modern than younger generations as regarding the institution of marriage. The perspective of a young grandchild

having to write a school assignment about the loneliness of elderly people on a Saturday night provides a framework of naivety and spontaneity, with an outward look on the adult world the child in the text is closer to her grandmother than she would ever have expected.

Lia Mills' extract "How long has it been?" is set at a hairdresser's where the visit recalls the past as well as the present of an unpleasant body.

Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's short story "Little Red" from her latest collection of the same title intertwines the isolation of divorce and old age with the use of dating agencies as a possible remedy to invisibility and loneliness. The result is an unexpected visit on a Sunday afternoon from a man who introduces himself as Declan, "Is that Declan the plumber or Declan the electrician or Declan the serial killer?" (102). The reader follows the protagonist's careful steps in trying to cope with the unforeseen as well as with the possible perspectives of her future, aware that she is either doomed to be alone or to run risks to survive.

Old age is an inevitable key stage of life, but this is the first anthology of creative writing on the topic gathering the work of contemporary women writers in Ireland. Dealing provocatively with the invisible, the unspeakable, the untouchable in a society that values youth and beauty, these essays, stories and poems are in a way a celebration of ageing, respectful of its disquieting shades. With insight, humour and a realistic stance Éilís Ní Dhuibhne and Michaela Schrage-Frűh lead the readers' steps along the inevitable path of narrative decline, which might be some sort of rebirth.

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Giovanna Tallone

M. Teresa Caneda-Cabrera (ed.), *Telling Truths: Evelyn Conlon and the Task of Writing*, Peter Lang, Oxford-Bern-Berlin-Bruxelles-Frankfurt am Mein-New York-Wien, 2023, pp. vii-ix + 202. € 52.95. ISBN: 978-1-180079-481-8.

"Tell the truth, but tell it slant" writes Emily Dickinson, "The Truth must dazzle gradually / Or every man be blind". The poet reflects on how to tell the truth, which should be conveyed slowly and indirectly, approaching it from different angles in order to be grasped. Evelyn Conlon does tell the truth both openly and indirectly, combining realistic outlook, social and political activism and humour to reveal what is hidden.

The volume edited by M. Teresa Caneda-Cabrera is a long-awaited contribution that fills a gap in the field of Irish critical studies, it pays homage to the resonant voice of a writer who has been working for over four decades and certainly deserves more exhaustive critical attention. It recognizes and celebrates her novels and short stories in individual studies that offer a variety of broad cultural and scientific approaches covering her *oeuvre* as a whole and creating a stimulating ensemble focussing on the complexity of her fiction. The title of the collection of essays underlines Evelyn Conlon's engagement with truth as well as her concern with the "task of writing" and the "endless potentiality of storytelling" (viii), which sheds light on the volume's programmatic stance.

Prefaced by a "Foreword" and an "Introduction", *Telling Truths* is divided into four parts devoted to specific themes, each comprising two or three essays. The compactness and

coherence of the volume is marked by thematic interconnections and critical intersections, which highlight the careful planning and organization on the part of the Editor. The "Coda" provides an interview with the Author held in 2021, which acts as a reflection and a *résumé* of the contents of the volume, and is followed by a detailed bibliography.

In his "Foreword" Michael Cronin points out Conlon's engagement with the unknown and with the "past as a site of possibilities" (vii), as she has retrieved voices and stories that had remained silent or ignored. Making reference to some titles of novels and short story collections, Cronin highlights some of the themes of her fiction, such as justice, discrimination and exclusion, as well as the role of memory. Notably, her formal engagement with different genres, long and short fiction, is revealing of her serious creative perspective in narrative, and making reference to German writer Judith Schlansky Cronin sheds light on the nature of truth telling, thus paving the way to the major concern of the volume.

The Editor's "Introduction" follows this thread in its subtitle, "Nothing but the Truth". After a brief account of Conlon's writing career and publications, Caneda quotes Clair Wills in *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* who considers Conlon in connection with "subversive writing" and refers to her as a "radical inheritor of Edna O'Brien" (1). She emphasises Conlon's political consciousness and her awareness of being a writer who is a feminist, capable of disclosing silenced stories with humour (2). With a round-up of significant texts and referring in particular to the novels *Stars in the Daytime* (1989) and *Not the Same Sky* (2013), Caneda observes Conlon's reversal of Joyce's "silence, exile and cunning", in that her voice gives voice to other marginalised and silenced voices. She then introduces the variety of perspectives of the different essays, from feminism to memory and trauma, to narratology or famine studies (3), pointing out the overlaps and cross-talks of the four parts (3), and briefly sums up the volume's contents.

"Writing against the Norm: Representations of Women's Lives" is the title of Part I which comprises three essays that in different ways speak to one another. In " 'Women Behaving Badly' in Evelyn Conlon's Short Fiction", Rebecca Pelan examines Conlon's short stories within the context of the development of feminism in Ireland and the writer's "awareness of the connection between writing and real women's lives" (12), in particular non-conformist women who break the rules (13). Pelan takes into account the changes in Ireland in terms of identity over the past few decades and considers how women's fiction has changed since the 1970s, a transformation of which Evelyn Conlon is a protagonist. Stepping away from traditional female figures that conform to national ideology, in Conlon's predominantly realist mode of writing women challenge "male dominated narratives" (14). In particular Pelan considers Conlon's response to short stories that are part of the canon, "Two Gallants Getting Caught", a rewriting of Joyce's "Two Gallants" from a female perspective in academic surroundings, and "The Last Confession", which recalls Frank O'Connor's "First Confession". If in the former Conlon retrieves women's untold and unwritten stories, in the latter she displays the provocative attitude of a woman breaking the rules to defy the hypocrisy of some members of the Catholic church. Pelan analyses a group of stories, among which "The Park", "My Head is Opening", "Take Scarlet as a Real Colour", "I Deserve a Brandy and Port" to focus on the lives of ordinary women capable of pushing boundaries (28).

Also Éilís Ní Dhuibhne's contribution, "Moving about the Irish Short Story: An Exploration of Evolving Style and Themes in Evelyn Conlon's Fiction", sheds light on the short story form, taking an early and a later story by Conlon as examples, "The Park" and "How Things are with Hanna These Days" respectively in order to analyse thematic and stylistic evolution. Ní Dhuibhne highlights the "political critique and wry and comical voice" (31) that characterise Conlon's fiction, her concern with inequality and injustice and her departure from the general focus on individuals that is typical of short stories. Rather, in "The Park", Conlon deals with

a group, which, according to Ní Dhuibhne, is "rare in the short story" (32). The reaction of a group of activists to the Pope's visit to Ireland is commented upon within the context of the story's inception and choice of tone, thus highlighting Conlon's "departure from the 'national grid' as far as form and theme is concerned" (34). Though different from "The Park" in terms of length (it "is more a novella than a short story", 36), "How Things are with Hanna These Days" focuses again on the individual and on the protagonist's "lonely voice" (37); however, it shares attention to the issue of emigration which marks the subtext of "The Park". While it does not have a political perspective like "The Park", "How Things are with Hanna These Days" has references to racism (40), which is consistent with Conlon's approach to public concerns.

Mobility in terms of transgression, resistance and displacement is at the heart of M. Teresa Caneda-Cabrera's essay, "Women's Mobility in Evelyn Conlon's Fiction". In an ideal link to Rebecca Pelan's contribution, also Caneda turns her attention to women who behave badly and who make mobility an act of subversion. Starting from Stephen Greenblatt's dialectic of persistence and change (44), Caneda takes into account the historical and social condition of institutionalised "at-homeness" that characterised women in De Valera's Ireland and its development in narrative across the twentieth century. Movement and mobility are thus considered in the framework of women's reaction to the *status quo* as a *fil rouge* in Conlon's fiction, who "has continued to revise the tensions between traditional values and women's demand for individual freedom" (48). Considering Rose's disruption of rules in *Stars in the Daytime*, Caneda considers the prominence of the theme of travelling in Conlon's later work (50), pointing out how mobility can be both "distressing and liberating" (52). The analysis of "Two Good Times", *Skin of Dreams* (2003), and of the collection *Moving about the Place* (2021) with its emblematic title highlights the "disruptive and constructive aspects of travelling" (53), with a particular attention to the movement of letters, not only in the novel *A Glassful of Letters* (1998), but also in the short stories "Imagine Them", and "Dear You", on Violet Gibson, the woman who attempted on Mussolini's life in 1926. Caneda points out that letters are "containers of buried stories" (57) retrieved from the past, which is a recurring motif in Conlon's fiction.

In Part II, "Writing and Power Relations: The Politics of Language", the issue of language is considered from different perspectives. Seán O'Reilly's essay, "Hurtful Intimacy: Kinds of Knowing in a Pair of Evelyn Conlon's Short Stories", examines Conlon's use of metafictional devices in her short stories "Telling" and "The Reading of It". O'Reilly analyses the setting of both stories in creative writing workshops to consider the politics of language and how the role of point of view disrupts the relationship between writer and reader. O'Reilly's analysis of the stories represents a twist in the critical perception of Conlon's fiction, since by using metafiction she questions "not only the authority of the narrator but the social value of the reader's emotional response" (67).

Marilyn Reizbaum analyses "Two Gallants Getting Caught" *vis-à-vis* Joyce's short story "Two Gallants", pointing out how the story is a "riff" (79) or refrain of Joyce. Exploiting musical metaphors throughout the essay, Reizbaum compares intertextually extracts from the Joycean original and from Conlon's text, commenting textual relationships and palimpsestic layers, especially in the use of puns. The essay is detailed and carefully constructed in its complexity, and intersects linguistic analysis with thematic reflections particularly considering the academic context in which it develops. For example, the theft in "Two Gallants" takes the form of plagiarism (83), and while the story maintains the sexual innuendo (84), the issue of literary authority is also at stake.

Following Reizbaum's essay, Ira Torresi discusses her process of translation into Italian of "Dear You" and "Two Gallants" in her contribution "Translating Evelyn Conlon". An appropriate way to close this section of language, the essay introduces the reader to the challenges

for the translator in her rendering of the original text into Italian. Torresi first describes her first encounter with Conlon, namely with the short story about Violet Gibson "Dear You", claiming that "it is impossible to disentangle objective analysis from subjective experience" (93). She then describes the first obstacle in the translation of the story, that is the title, in which gender is not clear. The characteristics of the Italian language and grammar compared to the "indeterminacy" (95) of "Dear You" require precision in terms of gender, a problem for which she provides several examples, from the formal expression of address (96) to the choice of colloquial expressions (97). Torresi sheds light on the writer's gendered perspective as something the translator is bound to bear in mind, and this adds to the understanding of Conlon's use of language. The second part of the essay is concerned with the translation of "Two Gallants" and the two different perspectives implicit in the texts by Joyce and Conlon respectively (100). Examples of the Italian renditions of the original text gives rise to stimulating reflections. Interestingly, Torresi emphasises the female perspective making reference to the badly-behaved women in Pelan's essay, thus providing a cross-reference within the volume.

History is at the centre of the two essays in Part III, "Writing the Past: History, Memory and Trauma", shedding light on two historical events far from each other in time and space, the journey to Australia of 4,000 Irish girls after the Great Famine and the Monaghan bombing respectively. Margaret Kelleher takes into account *Not the Same Sky* in "Rites of Return: Evelyn Conlon's *Not the Same Sky*", considering the representation of history in the novel alongside the role of memorials. In fact, Conlon's novel intertwines the present of the building of a memorial of the Great Famine with the account of the forced voyage of emigration to Australia of orphan Irish girls sent to the other side of the world to be employed as servants or labourers after surviving the Famine. The novel, and Conlon, cast doubts on what is known and what cannot be known making use of the "particular combination of narrative conventions" (120) defined as historiographic metafiction (118), in which the organisation of data and historical facts are problematized as a form of knowledge (120). The imaginative reconstruction of the girls' forgotten past is for Kelleher a "rite of return", in which Conlon's voice rescues other silenced and ignored voices. Kelleher closes her essay quoting Eavan Boland's famine poem "Quarantine", which aptly concludes her analysis with words Conlon herself might appropriate: "[W]hat they suffered. / How they lived".

The second essay in this section is "*Later On*, Later on, and in Another Country" by Patrick Leech. It follows Kelleher's issue of memorializing considering the collection of writings Conlon was commissioned to write on the Monaghan bombing of 1974, which is by all means a form of memorial. Leech opens his contribution reconstructing the events of May 1974 in Dublin and Monaghan town, when bombs exploded causing a number of victims. His apparently objective and detached tone shifts to a more emotionally charged one when turning to the events that brought to Conlon's involvement in the project of editing a book as a memorial of the events: *Later on: The Monaghan Bombing Memorial Anthology* (2004). Though reluctant at first (130), Conlon, a native of Monaghan, then accepted, spending time listening to the accounts of people who had been present at the time or somehow involved. The essay describes the way in which Conlon worked with local people and refers to Conlon's introduction highlighting the role of "solid sculpture as memorials" and memorials of words – it was "indeed unusual to attempt to have a book play a similar role" (131). The essay highlights the "dialogic and collaborative endeavour" of the book (*ibidem*), whose effort of putting the suffering of the experience into words has a healing power.

The two essays in the final section, Part IV, entitled "Writing and Ethics: Explorations of In/Justice" approach Conlon's fiction from the perspective of social consciousness and justice/injustice. The title of Joseph Bathanti's contribution, "Prisons, Prisoners, the Death Penalty and

Resurrection in *Skin of Dreams* and *A Glassful of Letters*, by Evelyn Conlon" carefully paves the way for his critical intentions. In fact, his analysis of both novels focuses on the sense of justice and injustice that involves law-abiding characters who find themselves at the centre of crucially complex legal situations. Bathanti implicitly evokes the motif of telling truth underlying the volume when he sees the revelation of a "long-buried family secret" (142) at the heart of the novel, whose knowledge shatters the life of Maud, the protagonist. Conlon approaches the truth related to what is generally considered taboo, a "demonized world of pariah" (141). Bathanti then examines the epistolary novel *A Glassful of Letters* which is "in the vein of *Skin of Dreams*" (148), since everyday life and balance are troubled by the intertwining of multiple letters revolving around Portaloise prison. The complexity of the plot and of the letter exchange for Bathanti is a way to "explore escape" (150), which in the end become a form of redemption and/or resurrection (153).

Izabela Curyłło-Klag investigates hauntology in "Ethical Encounters with the Spectral in Evelyn Conlon's Fictions". The critic states that Conlon's novels and stories are full of ghosts, not threatening or malevolent but a source of hope and help. This is highlighted in the provocative opening of her essay, "Ghosts haunt us for a good reason" (155). Following the complex Derridean notion of spectrality, the essay sheds light on various forms of haunting and family secrets in "The Undeathing of Gertrude", "Two Gallants Getting Caught" and *Skin of Dreams*, in which spectres are both "disruptive" and "figures of possibility" (155). In "The Undeathing of Gertrude" the refusal to acknowledge and accept the death of a spouse paves the way for contact and "communion with another world" (156), while the ghost of Joyce haunts "Two Gallants Getting Caught". From this point of view, Curyłło-Klag takes into account both the spectre of a literary predecessor (156) and the figure of the servant girl from *Dubliners* acting as a protection for the protagonist of Conlon's story. In *Skin of Dreams* Maud is haunted by the spectre of the uncle accused and executed of a murder he did not commit (162). This casts a cross-reference to the previous essay from a different perspective.

Telling Truths: Evelyn Conlon and the Task of Writing closes with a "Coda", an interview Paige Reynolds had in 2021 during the Covid-19 pandemic, shortly after the publication of the short story collection *Moving about the Place*. The captivating title, "The Lookout: A Conversation with Evelyn Conlon", emphasises both Conlon's capacity of sharp observation to tell the truth, as well as the rhythm and pace of what is by all means real conversation. It opens with the issue of mobility that characterises the collection in order to focus on issues of Irish identity, as Conlon recounts experiences of being and/or feeling Irish outside Ireland, the contradictions of emigration as experienced in her own family and the experience of emigration as portrayed in *Stars in the Daytime*. The consciousness of the border while growing up is intertwined with the account of how she came to *Later On: The Monaghan Bombing Memorial Anthology*, discussed in Leech's contribution. Here the perspective is from inside, as Conlon recalls moving episodes of people she met while working on the book, the conversations, the need to express repressed feelings, but also the need of privacy in a devastating experience as witnesses or relations to victims. From this the conversation moves to the background of her historical fiction and the awareness that "fiction can tell us (what) history, fact, can't" (176). The detailed account of her visit to the US to gather the information about capital punishment that represents the basis of *Skin of Dreams* closes a full circle with the discussion in the essays. Space is given to her first steps in writing, as she mentions that David Marcus rejected her stories, as well as her development as a feminist and activist. The conversation provides clear insight into her writing technique and her approach to writing and fiction, as she says fiction is "what's happening in the unseen corridors" (176), which reflects her intention of retrieving from silence unspoken stories and unseen paths.

The full bibliography that closes the volume is a precious tool for whoever approaches the work of Evelyn Conlon for the first time and for the scholar interested in having a closer look at the work of an accomplished writer.

The various essays in Caneda's *Telling Truths* are marked by a variety of critical approaches that display the sensitivity and careful critical investigation of the different contributors, who provide an insight into the hues and varieties of Evelyn Conlon's work. The volume is therefore a significant step in the field of studies of Irish women's writing and a welcome contribution that gives voice to a writer capable of giving voice to silent and unheard voices.

Giovanna Tallone

Claire Keegan, *So Late in the Day: Stories of Women and Men*, New York, Grove Press, 2023, pp. 128. $ 20.00. ISBN: 978-0-8021-6085-0.

Already established as an author renowned for her essential prose, rich in detail and tension, Claire Keegan further consolidates her mastery of the short story form with the 2023 collection *So Late in the Day: Stories of Women and Men*. This work exemplifies her ability to condense complex themes into brief narratives, skilfully addressing topics ranging from the imbalances and power dynamics inherent in gender relations to male resentment, societal expectations placed upon women, and the difficulties of communication and conscious introspection. The collection comprises three stories, with the first, which lends its title to the volume, being previously unpublished. The other two, arranged in reverse chronological order, are *The Long and Painful Death*, which had previously appeared in *Walk the Blue Fields* (2007), and *Antarctica*, which was part of the eponymous collection from 1999.

The title of the collection is programmatic and appears to aim at examining the misunderstandings and emotional conflicts between women and men. However, the perspective adopted throughout the stories is far from neutral or equitable, consistently privileging a female point of view, even when the narrator is male. The reference to the late afternoon, to a time that is almost expired and imbued with a sense of urgency, alludes to the protagonist of the first story – an unremarkable man who reflects on his past choices only when it is already *too late* to alter them. Yet, one might also question whether this is, in fact, a reflection on the state of gender relations in the contemporary world: is it *too late* to create a society free from patriarchal dominance? Or has it become *too late* to begin addressing and correcting the inequalities between women and men? In this regard, the reverse chronological arrangement of the stories could be interpreted not only as a retrospective reflection on the author's stylistic and literary development but also as a commentary on society, which appears to have yet to eradicate the misogyny that continues to corrupt it.

"That was part of the trouble: the fact that she would not listen, and wanted to do a good half of things her own way" (29, italics added). The first story in the collection, *So Late in the Day*, opens with a depiction of Dublin in the height of summer, a scene almost idyllic in its portrayal of freshly cut grass, a clear sky, and a gentle breeze. In stark contrast to this pastoral setting is Cathal, an Irishman confined to an office, staring at the screen of a computer. Keegan's concise prose does not immediately reveal what is amiss, but it begins to offer subtle clues from the outset, starting with Cathal's inadvertent closure of the file he is working on without saving it. The almost clinical repetition of time references draws attention to the temporal emphasis

implied by the title, while simultaneously highlighting a sense of anxiety within the protagonist, for whom the passage of time appears to be a sentence. The reader's first assumption may well be that the man has experienced some form of grief; however, Keegan subverts this expectation, revealing the true nature of Cathal's predicament when, after work, he boards a bus and catches the scent of a pregnant woman. This is the expedient employed by Keegan to introduce the character of Sabine, setting the stage for a flashback that gradually uncovers the gradual and destructive decline of Cathal and Sabine's relationship.

The narrative could be briefly summarised as the story of a man and a woman who meet, decide to marry, but, just before the wedding, the woman makes the sudden and cruel decision to leave her partner. Cathal is left bewildered and disoriented by the abrupt end to their relationship. This, undoubtedly, reflects Cathal's perception of the events, which are characterised throughout by a consistent lack of self-criticism, initiative, and an inability to recognise his own responsibilities. Sabine is introduced as a woman who "seemed at ease in herself but alert to what was around her" (15). However, everything we learn about her is filtered through Cathal's perspective, in which he, perhaps unconsciously, constantly criticises and judges her in ways that show underlying patriarchal assumptions. Two particularly noteworthy issues can be highlighted, on which Cathal seems particularly resentful: money and cooking.

The protagonist exhibits a symptomatic obsession with money, using it as a measure of the love he offers and receives. He complains about her spending more than they can afford, particularly on food, despite his stated appreciation of her cooking. Notably, he never explicitly claims that she asked him for money; instead, it is he who voluntarily offers financial support – though there is little spontaneity in a man who then makes a point of emphasising the six euros spent on cherries. A particularly enlightening episode occurs at the jeweller's, which underscores the awareness of the female character in contrast to the male character's blindness. Cathal almost refuses to pay for the cost of altering the engagement ring, despite, as Sabine points out, having been clearly informed of the additional charge in advance. In retrospect, Cathal appears to feel far more regret for the loss of money than for the loss of Sabine herself. His belief that greater expenditure directly correlates with a bigger expression of love – whether it be the love he gives or the love he expects to receive – betrays a simplistic and outdated perspective on the economic dynamics of relationships. In this view, the man is the provider, and as such, he expects that everything is owed to him in return.

The issue of money emerges even when Sabine, who is unpacking her belongings alone after the move, does not cook, leading them to order takeaway food instead. The prominent focus on the four euros for home delivery further reinforces the stereotypical connection between woman, money, and food in Cathal's mind. While he does not seem particularly bothered by general untidiness, Cathal repeatedly comments on the dirty dishes left by Sabine after cooking, yet he never considers the possibility of washing them himself. Consistently, he expresses satisfaction in not having to wash dishes after ordering food. It is evident that the underlying assumption driving these thoughts is that the woman alone is responsible for cooking and managing food, especially when the man is the one providing the financial support.

The only instance where Cathal exhibits a glimmer of self-reflection manifests when he recalls that it was his mother who consistently prepared meals for the family. In one particular episode, as she approaches the table to eat after serving the others, his brother pulls the chair out from under her, causing her to fall to the floor. The three men of the family – Cathal, his brother, and their father – laugh derisively while the mother silently gathers the broken fragments of her plate. Although Cathal briefly questions who he might have become had his father been a different kind of man, the scene is so deeply unsettling for the reader that this

fleeting moment of hesitation – devoid of any apology or meaningful consequences – fails to elicit even the slightest sense of empathy for a character who has, until this point, given no indication of having critically reflected on gender roles in society. The narrative's exploration of the asymmetry in expectations between women and men in relationships is as evident to the reader as it remains unconscious to Cathal.

In this respect, Cathal embodies a particular archetype of masculinity characterised by an inability to form meaningful social connections, let alone deep emotional bonds. This dynamic is aptly explained by bell hooks in *The Will to Change: Men, Masculinity, and Love*: "The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not violence toward women. Instead, patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves" (2004, 68). As a result, Cathal develops a profound sense of dissatisfaction and isolation, which becomes obvious whenever he passively observes the way others communicate. First, he notices the Polish cleaner absorbed in sending a message on her phone; later, on the bus, he finds himself seated next to a woman eager for conversation, an interaction that visibly irritates him. And yet, even recognising his own loneliness proves too difficult for him – to the extent that he derives an almost juvenile sense of satisfaction upon realising that he no longer has to concern himself with lifting the toilet seat.

An intriguing aspect to consider is that the author refines the narrative with a series of details that may initially go unnoticed but ultimately underscore Keegan's keen interest in the condition of women in contemporary society. One such detail is the book that the woman on the bus retrieves from her bag, *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*, a 1996 novel by Roddy Doyle, narrated by a woman who has survived a series of harrowing experiences of domestic violence. Another subtle yet significant reference that Keegan incorporates is the documentary on Lady Diana, which Cathal stumbles upon while aimlessly switching channels. Despite coming across it by chance, he becomes so engrossed that he unconsciously presses the rewind button on the remote control. If this action were to be interpreted as an unintentional expression of regret, it would nonetheless be important to acknowledge the fundamental nature of rewinding: to return to the past is merely to witness the same images once more. Cathal undergoes no transformation, nor does he experience any moment of self-awareness. The life he envisions for Sabine is strikingly reminiscent of that endured by Diana, an almost archetypal figure of a woman constrained by the societal roles imposed upon her, trapped in an affectionless relationship in which her only recognised contribution is that of "getting pregnant and *producing* a son, and then another" (40, italics added).

It is no coincidence that Cathal aspires to a wife who resembles little more than an ornament – someone who agrees with him unreservedly, lacks a distinct personality, and occupies neither physical nor social space. This notion is confirmed at two pivotal moments in the narrative. The first occurs when Cathal's idealised vision of marriage is shattered by the presence of Sabine's boxes, filled with her personal belongings, which he perceives as "too much reality" (31). He does not even attempt to anticipate that cohabitation entails a process of sharing – both in terms of physical space and emotional intimacy – since his own obtuseness renders such an understanding entirely inconceivable to him. Notably absent from his reflections are any references to shared aspirations, values, or desires; even the decision to marry appears fundamentally one-sided, with Sabine merely *persuaded* into agreement. This suggests that she may have harboured doubts – doubts that Cathal never once acknowledges or considers, leaving the reader to infer them from their omission.

The second, and arguably the most crucial moment in the narrative, is Sabine's account of her conversation with Cynthia, which further illuminates Keegan's perspective. Cathal's inability to refute the perception of men as self-indulgent and wishful only of silent, servile

women serves as an overt confirmation of his deeply internalised misogyny. Sabine attempts to confront him with his own failings: like many men, he never thanks women, never considers himself at fault, and is incapable of genuine generosity. Yet, throughout this entire exchange, the only remark that truly registers with Cathal is a linguistic mistake Sabine makes – an error he is quick to point out, seemingly out of petty and childish spite. This reaction is particularly revealing given that, earlier in the narrative, he had expressed irritation at Sabine's linguistic precision and command of language, further illustrating his lack of introspective insight.

Cathal, embedded in a patriarchal system, fails to develop a critical awareness of gender and, consequently, is unable to perceive women as distinct and complex individuals. Instead, he often reduces them to predefined roles, devoid of subjectivity, as evidenced by his portrayal of Sabine, which lacks substance, as though he has never truly engaged with her as a person. He blames her for the end of their relationship, incapable of understanding her perspective. As bell hooks explains, "Since sexist norms have taught us that loving is our task whether in our role as mothers or lovers or friends, if men say they are not loved, then we are at fault; we are to blame" (2004, 21). Similarly, Cathal cannot confront change and retreats into a self-pitying narrative, overwhelmed by his own victimhood, which leads him to hurl derogatory and sexist insults at the woman he was about to marry. These insults reflect male fear of losing social dominance and a deep resentment towards women's autonomy.

Throughout the reading of this story, the aware reader, *alert* to the stereotypical mechanisms influencing gendered perceptions, cannot help but respond in the same manner as Sabine – laughing in a way that is both brazen and revealing. These are the kinds of laughs that arise when something is taken so for granted that it seems absurd that it is not equally obvious to the rest of the world. Rather than an expression of mockery, Sabine's laughter is a bitter acknowledgment of the pervasive misogyny within society and Cathal's passive ineptitude, characterised by an unwillingness to change. The underlying assumption is that extending rights and spaces to others necessitates a readiness to share and recognise their humanity. For Cathal, however, love appears not as a reciprocal exchange but as an obligation or service. Thus, when Sabine presents her perspective, he interprets it as a sign that she has been "falling out of love" (Keegan 2023, 34), confirming his inability to grasp emotional dynamics.

Sabine's decision, which underpins the story but is only explicitly revealed in the final line, marks Cathal's belated awareness. Far from being a simplistic choice, it stands as an assertion of a woman's right to decide for herself, rejecting the conventions that define women's value in relation to men. The unspoken elements within the narrative, likely referring to the oppression of women who are silenced and their perception as autonomous individuals, further contribute to the psychological complexity of the characters. The reader is assigned an active role, tasked with interpreting the situation through the lens of contemporary social processes, ultimately leading to a deconstruction of the myth of traditional masculinity. The same applies to the two stories that follow, the aforementioned *The Long and Painful Death* and *Antarctica*, which, unlike *So Late in the Day*, feature a third-person narrator. The anonymity of this narrator does not depersonalise the character but instead facilitates a closer, more intimate connection between the reader and the protagonist. Although these stories have already been the subject of numerous reviews, they nevertheless deserve brief mention here.

"There, without invitation, the professor sat down in what she considered to be her place and turned the cup upright on its saucer" (75, italics added). The protagonist of the story from *Walk in the Blue Fields* is an Irish writer who arrives on Achill Island to stay in the residence where Heinrich Böll, Nobel laureate for literature in 1972, retreated to write some of his works. The narrative begins with a description of the landscape, gradually introducing the protagonist as she calmly organises the house and prepares for a day that "would be hers" (55). This peaceful

atmosphere, however, is quickly interrupted by the ringing of the phone. A man, who identifies himself as a professor of German literature, claims to be standing right outside and states that he has obtained permission to visit the house. While the most appropriate response in such a situation might range from employing swear words to a firm refusal, the writer negotiates with the man to return at eight in the evening. This unplanned encounter, a metaphor for how men often attempt to interfere with women's desires, disrupts her plans and sets the stage for a conversation in which male egocentrism and the devaluation of the protagonist's talents take centre stage.

In the course of the story, the reader learns that it is the writer's thirty-ninth birthday, prompting her to bake a cake, which she plans to offer to the uninvited guest. She proceeds to purchase the necessary ingredients for the cake and then visits the coast, where she first observes a hen before deciding to take a swim in the ocean. Upon returning home, she prepares dinner and then settles down to read. The choice of reading material is of particular significance, as it is *The Fiancé*, the final short story written by Anton Chekhov. It centres on a woman, on the verge of her marriage, who, in a desperate act, flees prior to the wedding to travel to St. Petersburg and pursue university studies. This dramatic last-minute flight resonates with Sabine's departure from Cathal and evokes in Keegan's protagonist a series of memories focused on her past lovers.

The central point of the narrative revolves around the visit of the elderly academic, rude and his envy poorly concealed, who accepts the cake with evident greed and condescendingly begins to inquire about the woman's artistic endeavours. The professor shows no genuine interest in establishing a meaningful dialogue, and the exchanges that follow are characterised by a lack of mutual engagement or any effort to truly understand the other. Despite the woman's evident discomfort and frustration, the man seems reluctant to leave and he directs a tirade at her, judging her without any grounds, blaming her for her personal choices, her ignorance of Heinrich Böll, and the way she chooses to spend her leisure time, as though he possesses some entitlement over it.

This vehement patriarchal aggression compels the protagonist to reflect on the men she has encountered, all of whom she has left, much like the protagonist in Chekhov's story, before marriage. The German professor's attitude, steeped in a paternalism that undermines the protagonist's autonomy – probably also in matters of relationships – serves as a reflection of the hostility and sense of inadequacy that women often experience within the academic and literary spheres. Indeed, the male interference that conceals a desire to diminish women's autonomy is evident in the tension between the solitude required for writing and the impossibility of achieving it within a world that fails to respect women's spaces. Figuratively, this conflict reflects the systemic challenges women encounter in the artistic realm, where they remain perpetually subordinated to men and are compelled to justify their legitimacy as artists.

It is therefore important that the professor occupies the woman's designated seat: this act of symbolic appropriation asserts both spatial and conceptual supremacy. The seat, far from being a mere physical space, embodies a role – a right to expression and work – historically denied to women by men. As Linda Nochlin argues in *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?*, for centuries "it was indeed *institutionally* made impossible for women to achieve artistic excellence, or success, on the same footing as men, *no matter what* the potency of their so-called talent, or genius" (2021, 80). In light of this, it is highly significant that the protagonist's response to the intellectual violence she faces is a feeling of indignation, which becomes the driving force behind her art and artistic rebellion, sublimating in the literary vengeance of the depiction of her antagonist's slow and painful death.

"Every time the happily married woman went away, she wondered how it would feel to sleep with another man" (Keegan 2023, 89, italics added). *Antarctica*, the eponymous story from Keegan's

debut work, follows a married woman who, seeking an escape from the monotony of marriage and domestic life, decides to embark on an extramarital affair. The protagonist travels to what can be inferred as the English town of Wells, where she first fulfils her duties as a wife and mother by purchasing Christmas gifts for her family. Only once this is accomplished, perhaps alleviating her conscience, does she dress and venture out in search of a lover. A metatextual detail acts as the catalyst for the story: the woman is drawn into a pub, significantly a former prison, by *The Ballad of Lucy Jordan* (1974). This song, by the American poet and songwriter Shel Silverstein, intertwines with her own narrative, as it tells the story of a woman in her late thirties, married with children, who realises she will never experience the romantic adventure she once dreamed of in her youth. Lucy Jordan is trapped by the daily obligations of the stereotypically feminine role, which increasingly fuel her frustration and isolation, eventually driving her either to madness or to a form of delusion. Should the latter interpretation be correct, *Antarctica* might be read as a minor hallucinatory nightmare, but it is far more likely that the story reflects a grim reality.

In this pub, the woman is approached by a man wearing a gold chain and a Hawaiian shirt, who strikes up a conversation with her and speaks of his life, self-identifying as "the loneliest man in the world" (92). While this may immediately seem dangerous to an enlightened reader, the solitude of the man might, from the perspective of a woman seeking infidelity, provide a form of comfort or protection. Motivated by her desire for transgression, and perhaps clouded by alcohol, she follows the stranger to his apartment building. While the environment she enters does not initially seem oppressive, its starkness and filth foreshadow something far more sinister. It becomes clear that the man's ability to seduce her appears not so much based on physical attraction but rather on his calculated manipulation and abuse of her insecurities and vulnerabilities. He himself refers to her as "one of these wild, middle-class women" (94), a remark that functions as a mirror, reflecting her internalised roles as wife and mother, but not as a fully realised woman in her own right.

As he himself states, it is undoubtedly the protagonist who attends to the needs of other members of her family, yet no one reciprocates this care for her. Therefore, he lures her by subtly exploiting the cracks that societal stereotypes create: he cooks for her, washes her, combs her hair, and kisses her. The protagonist clearly expresses her desire, which persists in her as a woman despite the oppressive forces and moral judgments she faces; however, this act of rebellion against the gender norms imposed upon her forces her to confront the brutal realities of a world that denies women the right to experience pleasure without consequences. In this context, Keegan may be subtly alluding to the prevailing double standard, where male sexuality – embodied in the man who engages in numerous relationships – is celebrated as a symbol of prestige and virility, while female sexuality is subject to stigmatisation and shame, as it threatens the established social order.

Up until the sexual encounter, there are only vague – and perhaps justifiable – indications that, to some extent, disarm the reader, creating the illusion that all is progressing smoothly. However, the mention of a gun serves to amplify the sense of discomfort and unease, further heightened by a conversation concerning hell. Yet, no one is adequately prepared for what follows: on Sunday, the woman returns to the hotel, but the unknown man seeks her out and drags her back to his home. They engage in intercourse, despite her clear lack of desire – again, a clear reference to the societal expectation that women should prioritise the desires of others. He handcuffs her to the bed, forces her to eat while feeding her, and ultimately makes her drink something that induces sleep. The reader is thus presented with a stark contrast to the earlier notion of care: the forced care, which presages further assaults and violence. When the woman

awakens, naked, in front of an open window, gagged, and incapable of freeing herself, she appears to slowly descend into dissociation, adopting this as a psychological survival mechanism.

As Susan Brownmiller coherently explains in *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape*, "rape became not only a male prerogative, but man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear" (1993 [1975], 14). The protagonist, fully conscious of the violence she is almost certain to endure, enters into a psychological state characterised by absolute terror, processing her fate in a complex tension between panic and detachment. As the cold permeates the room – evoking the previously discussed image of a frozen hell – Keegan's minimalist prose intensifies the sense of detachment and surrealism. The open-ended conclusion, devoid of hope, suggests that the woman will inevitably be subjected to both literal and metaphorical submission and silence, having been reduced to the property of the stranger who embodies patriarchal authority in its most cruel manifestation. The author describes, with chilling precision, a man who has not overtly assaulted a woman but has instead lowered her defences and gradually rendered her powerless after gaining her trust. In this almost documentary-like approach, there is no space for the sensationalism of violence, which is only prefigured, but rather a stark portrayal of female sensitivity.

In conclusion, Keegan constructs a narrative triptych that highlights her distinctive expertise in addressing the dynamics of power, control, and dominance in the everyday interactions between women and men, often interjecting thoughts and actions so subtly that they become difficult to recognise. When placed in comparison, the stories illustrate Keegan's remarkable stylistic versatility: while *Antarctica* impresses with its rawness, *So Late in the Day* dissects male resentment with surgical precision, and *The Long and Painful Death* delves into a more corrosive suffering, demonstrating how culture can become a battleground for intellectual dominance. Thus, the collection presents a complex depiction of the female condition and the pervasive dangers of patriarchal society, discussing various forms of gender oppression – psychological, social, intellectual, and ultimately physical – while demonstrating Keegan's extraordinary ability to explore the misogyny that permeates contemporary society.

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Alice Giovanelli

Nicholas Frankel, *The Invention of Oscar Wilde*, London, Reaktion Books, 2021, pp. 288. £20.00. ISBN: 978-1-178914-414-7.
Nicholas Frankel (ed.), *The Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde: An Annotated Selection*, Cambridge-London, Harvard UP, 2022, pp. 400. £24.95. ISBN: 9780674271821.

Despite being largely neglected or outright dismissed as a scandalous writer for the first half of the twentieth century, Oscar Wilde has enjoyed a revival of interest in our own times, especially as scholars and ordinary readers alike have built on the pioneering work of those

who, from the 1960s onwards and under the impulse provided by Robert Ross and Merlin Holland, managed to wrest Wilde's name from the machinations of powerful social hierarchies. As is natural, life-writing has been at the forefront of this turn in Wildean criticism, as Vyvyan Holland's moving 1954 memoir, Richard Ellman's magisterial 1987 biography, and Neil McKenna's 2005 *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde* (among others) have positively re-invented Wilde as an intellectual and public persona who was very much in conversation, and at times at odds, with his times. Nicholas Frankel's recent biography of Wilde, aptly titled *The Invention of Oscar Wilde* (2021), continues this important legacy in our own century, insisting precisely on Wilde as an active creator not only of beautifully written texts, but first and foremost of brilliantly and somewhat strategically crafted personae.

Nicholas Frankel's *The Invention of Oscar Wilde* is a nuanced, critical biography that reframes Wilde as both the orchestrator and the performance of his own myth. This study foregrounds Wilde's adept manipulation of his image and underscores how his artistry extended beyond his literary output to his self-construction as a cultural icon. Frankel rightly emphasises Wilde's embodiment of paradox – Irish yet cosmopolitan, socialist yet aristocratic, Christian yet pagan, politically committed to the betterment of society yet propounding a highly wrought aestheticism – and echoes many modern-day critics in his suggestion that the Irish author's provocative blending of art, life, and sexuality prefigured aspects of modern celebrity culture and the "society of the spectacle," as theorised by Guy Debord (10). This paradox was of course part and parcel of his own family, where Irish nationalist sentiments and socialist ambitions seamlessly fed into the high-society circles of his parents, and came to manifest itself more strongly in his studies at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he started signing his poems with a shortened English name – no longer the Irish serials "Oscar F. O'F. Wills Wilde" but simply "Oscar Wilde", as we know him now – while at the same time "purifying" his Irish accent so as to produce a more "standard", and aristocratic English pronunciation. This tendency to conformity is also highlighted by Frankel in Wilde's "Poetry of Englishness", as the title of Chapter Two reads, in that his poems from this early period in his life combined an English national sentiment and a more subversive critique of imperial Britain which is discernible between the lines of such poems as "Ave Imperatrix" (1880). His interest in the visual and performing arts, doubtless prompted by the influence of Walter Pater and John Ruskin (amongst others), veers at this time towards courting the attention of such important actresses as Sarah Bernhardt and Ellen Terry while attempting to produce a public embodiment of the aesthete in his dialogues (and later, repartees) over art with James McNeill Whistler and his appearances with Lillie Langtry. It ought to be noted here that the confrontation with Whistler may now be easily followed in Frankel's annotated selection of critical writings, which, much as the other critical editions of Wilde's writings overseen by Frankel for Harvard University Press, act as useful expansions on this earlier biography, providing readers with a guided access to Wilde's writings while keeping an eye on a more manageable length than *The Complete Works* alongside *The Critical Writings* (2022) under review, present and future scholars will undoubtedly benefit from Frankel's editions of *The Uncensored Picture of Dorian Gray* (2011) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (2015) as well as his careful selections of Wilde's prison writings (2018) and short fiction (2020).

Chapter Three of *The Invention of Oscar Wilde* shows how Aestheticism continues to be a useful artistic and public category for Wilde when he embarks on his 1882 lecture tour in the United States. One of those parts of Wilde's life that have been widely discussed in several monographs over the last two decades or so, this American lecture tour is shown by Frankel to be a pivotal act of self-promotion in which the Irish author managed to establish his brand in the face of sometimes outright malicious publicity. It may strike some as slightly strange that Michèle

Mendelssohn's 2018 monograph on this momentous period in Wilde's life is not even referenced in passing, as it stimulated a broader debate around Wilde, Irishness, and race which extended beyond the groves of Academe – a debate which seems all the more important to highlight, it may be argued, in the wake of Black Lives Matter and the "Decolonising the curriculum" mobilisations in most English-speaking countries in the last decade or so. (Mendelssohn's monograph only appears in the "Select Bibliography" at the end of the volume.) Considering how adept Frankel is at making Wilde more "present" to the reader, a feat definitely supported by the numerous photographs and illustrations included in this biography, this omission seems particularly evident to a modern-day scholar of Wilde.

Another aspect which has of necessity been commented and expanded on in the last century or so is of course the issue of Wilde's sexuality. It is evident that Frankel can and does provide a grounded overview of this fundamental aspect of his private and public persona in his subtle navigating between the social obligations expected by Constance in her marriage to Wilde (covered in Chapter Four) and the Irish author's sometimes reckless behaviour in London's queer subcultures (which underpins much of the rest of the volume), and readers will be grateful for Frankel's emphasis on the inherent tensions and ambiguities that Wilde's position created both in himself and in those closest to him. If in other parts of the biography Frankel was quick to notice Wilde's (re-)invention of himself, however, his posing – if we may be forgiven for borrowing this term from the Marquess of Queensberry's notorious note – as a lover of youthful "boys" (aptly and somewhat strategically re-interpreted by Frankel as "young men" in Chapter Eight) seems to come out of this critical inquiry unscathed if not untouched. "Wilde was attracted to young men who were in their late teens," Frankel comments, "or older men such as [Alfred] Douglas and [John] Gray who appeared to be so, and he was not a paedophile" (203). Surely, the somewhat problematic aspect in Wilde's love of younger men lay not so much in how young these "boys" were (even though some of the "rent boys" were in fact *very* young) as in the kind of power dynamics involved in this relationship, which depended on specific class and age differences that are sometimes hard to stomach nowadays.

The oft-cited speech on "the Love that dare not speak its name" that Wilde gave during one of his trials is described by Frankel in these terms: "Appealing to an ancient Platonic idea of love, Wilde here counteracts an older notion of male homosexuality as 'sodomy', grounded in proscribed sex acts, with a powerful new conception of male same-sex love based on personal identity, mind, sensibility and emotion, as well as intellectual and social relationships" (217). While this is indeed what Wilde does, in his speech there is also, an emphasis on the relationship existing "between an elder and a younger man" (217), an aspect which goes unrecorded in Frankel's otherwise subtle account. Although this element still characterises part of today's queer culture, especially when it comes to men attracted to men, this emphasis on age difference and on the intellectual dimension of the relationship is certainly curious for most people invested in LGBTQ+ scholarship and queer theory. That "Wilde's answer constitutes one of the most indelible, impassioned defences of such love in all of history" (215) may be true, but perhaps it may have been useful to draw attention to the sanitisation that Wilde is somewhat shrewdly operating here: from being an erotic (and as such scandalous) act between bodies, love between men is astutely transformed by Wilde into an intellectual exchange of experiences between a younger man full of vitality and an elder, wiser man who thus cultivates the former's mind. Countless critics have of course drawn attention to how Hellenism or "Greek love" became a by-word for what we would now term homosexuality (the early monographs of Stefano Evangelista and Linda Dowling spring to mind, and Frankel does reference Dowling after his comments on this speech), but Richard Kaye (among others) also rightly stressed the

importance of not reproducing the same kind of sanitised rhetoric of queer love at the beginning of our new century (cf. Kaye 2004): although Wilde's speech from the dock of the Old Bailey may have marked "an epochal moment in the history of modern homosexuality" (256), he was at the same time inflecting the category in original, and perhaps not all too impeccable ways, precisely in the same vein as when he was reinventing himself as an English poet or an embodiment of aestheticism.

To emphasise this aspect is of course not to detract any value from the biography; on the contrary, this observation in fact reinforces the driving argument of the volume, namely that Wilde deftly invented and re-invented himself in order to appeal to the audience, performing different parts on the public stage with a view to getting the kind of reputation and praise he longed for. Chapters Five, Six and Seven draw attention to the editorial adjustments and the sometimes astute narrative practices Wilde deployed in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, his short fiction, and his plays in order to soften the more overt references to "Greek love", thereby showing how one of the clearest continuities in his mature work resides in the conflict between his own artistic (and sometimes political) ambitions and Victorian societal constraints. That classic Wildean rhetorical strategy, paradox, underpins much of his oeuvre, and Frankel invariably provides concise yet enlightening readings of many passages from his works. His biography is thus to be praised for striking the perfect balance between recreating, or *re-inventing*, Wilde for today's readers, while showing how productive an activity close reading can be when we are confronted with such a rich oeuvre as that of the Irish author. Combining well-known episodes in Wilde's life and more curious, less frequently cited anecdotes, the major texts and a number of those that are still marginal in the Wildean canon, *The Invention of Oscar Wilde* promises to inform and inspire new generations of readers, critics and thinkers. That Frankel's biography is accompanied by such numerous and generously annotated writings of Wilde, then, is all the more important for those readers who want to get a better sense of the varied, and sometimes positively ambiguous texts the Irish author produced in his short, but ultimately eventful and prolific life. In its combination of early reviews, extracts from essays and dialogues, letters to the press, and epigrams and paradoxes, Frankel's volume *The Critical Writings of Oscar Wilde* shows how Wilde, far from simply "mimicking" intellectual discourse or aiming to be provocative for provocation's sake, was in fact a serious late-nineteenth-century thinker in his own right who created a philosophy of life combining aestheticism, Decadence, socialism, anarchism, feminism, and neo-Platonism, transforming society in the process.

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Luca Pinelli

Cónal Creedon, *Spaghetti Bowl*, Cork, Irishtown Press, 2024, pp. 168. € 20.00. ISBN: 978-1068732201.

Cónal Creedon's *Spaghetti Bowl* (SB) features a captivating title which, nevertheless, was not Creedon's invention. It has a semantic, economic nature. The World Bank defines the "Spaghetti Bowl Phenomenon"[1] as the confusing and overlapping network of multiple Free Trade Agreements (FTA), which end up complicating trade instead of facilitating it[2]. This term was coined by the Indian economist Jagdish Bhagwati[3] in 1995 when he criticised the FTAs for being counterproductive, complicating global trade rather than promoting openness.

Cónal Creedon's impactful title, through the spaghetti metaphor, compares the nest of converging streets to Devonshire St., where he lives and his family has traded, to a messy, tangled, and lively scenario. And the writer, himself, declares: "[…] and home for me is a spaghetti bowl of streets centring on the one called Devonshire" (3).

Spaghetti Bowl is an anthology of previously published essays (2) mostly commissioned to comment on what was going on during different moments of his story and history, as it happened during the covid pandemic in 2019 or the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Starting from the very beginning, he delves into the texture of his family's venture into Cork from the "breathtaking beauty" (8) of Beara and Inchigeelah. What strikes most is the author's highly nostalgic dimension when he deals with what was entangled in the Spaghetti Bowl, be it family, relatives, or relations spanning through Cork or the lands of his ancestors. Cónal's uncle Jack, "instilled in [him] the importance of a sense of place and a love of parish" (12).

The "Genius Loci"[4] which indicates the atmosphere, the unique and distinctive character of a place that makes it special and different from others, influencing its perception and the experience of its inhabitants, strongly works through this collection of essays.

From Devonshire Street where kids used to play soccer until one of them was killed, to Rossmuc which ties in as a historic immersion into Patrick Pearse's cottage thanks to the North Mon's trip led by the Christian Brother Hennessy; to Ballybunion[5], his father's summer route as a CIE bus driver, who sometimes took the inner city centre dirty-faced kids (Cónal and his friends) to enjoy a day at the beach. And the litany of sacred places, like beads on a rosary, unravel and dot on Iveleary and Inchigeelah. (Beara, Rossmuc, Ballybunion, The scenic Route Home, and Inchegeelah).

But from "Genius Loci", he plunges into sections that I have regrouped as objects, gods, people, history, sports, culture, and current affairs.

Significant objects like a *pull-along-suitcase* in "Mother of Invention-Mistress of Innovation" to his "Most Expensive Item of Clothing" board on people, important people of his neighbourhood, and school life. The first object stems out of an infinite list of objects he's given away and finally got back when people living in the spaghetti bowl left it, "a catalogue of wonderful artefacts" (46). According to his father, on the 17th June 1973, Ned Ring was the first who attached "a child's roller

[1] <https://www.drishtiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/spaghetti-bowl-phenomenon> (05/2025).

[2] Quote from <https://www.drishtiias.com/daily-updates/daily-news-analysis/spaghetti-bowl-phenomenon> (05/2025).

[3] Jagdish Bhagwati first used the "Spaghetti Bowl" metaphor in a 1995 paper titled "US Trade Policy: The Infatuation with Free Trade Agreements". He used it to criticize the proliferation of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and their potential to create a complex and inefficient web of trade rules.

[4] For a definition and historical meaning of "Genius Loci" see <https://www.unistrapg.it/it/genius-loci> (05/2025).

[5] Ballybunion is a magical seaside town, but it also boasts the first spoken-word radio transmission at the Marconi Station on the 30th March 1919.

skate to the base of [a] suitcase", and also "[attached] an extended *collapsible* handle to the side. He didn't patent it to further the cause of equality". (52). But the object which has constantly yearly reproduced is "a pair of size-10 oxblood Doc Marten shoes" (80) he has bought at McCarthy's every single Christmas. Through the years he's collected "[his] Painting Docs, Hill-Walking Docs, Work Boot Docs, Lounge-Around-the-House Docs, Dancing Docs, Turner's Cross Docs, Going Out Docs, Staying Down Docs and Good Wear Docs for special occasions" (81). What makes it special is meeting his school mate James. "New shoes or old news-it's just the excuse for this annual get-together of two boys who sat in the same classroom […] forty or fifty years ago" (82).

Strangely enough, "The Year Ireland Was Discovered by the Irish" falls into several categories: Stories, History, Genius Loci, Culture, People and strikingly underlines what it means to be Irish and follows the Irish people's reactions when visiting Ireland after the ban of Covid lockdown. Summer 2020 presents a fascinating case study on what it means to be Irish' and tells about Cónal Creedon's and his partner Fiona O'Toole's exploration of the West Coast of Ireland after the Covid-19 pandemic heading to the island of Inishturk to find the roots of her family. Very few people live there, about 70, and she luckily met her cousins keeping to social-distance rules.

The red thread of Covid also runs through "My Dog Dogeen" and the final "And I Am Thinking", where philosophical statements tangle in the love of dogs, which permeated his family for generations. Starting from the epic story of Fionn mac Cumhaill with Bran and Sceólang, he tells and retells his dog-story.

Covid restrictions have marked societal links and, according to Cónal Creedon, "Bubble", "Staycation", "dog-friendly" have characterised the Irish getting into "small, tribal family groups" (53).

"Bubble" was the term used to rearrange this social organisation. And within them, Ireland went mad about dogs. "It was as if channelled our ancient hunter-gatherer instincts" (53). "Staycation" and "dog-friendly" became paramount throughout Covid, but lost their power and meaning once it reduced its fear. But, as he said, his love for dogs was not temporary. He's always had a little mongrel dog throughout his life. So from Jude, backwards to Finbarr, who also had the privilege of being taken to RTE by car, to T-shirt who was excommunicated[6] as his relative Red Mick Riordan for being a Communist, Cónal's dogs have always been popular, epic figures within the spaghetti bowl of Cork. While in "And I'm Thinking" he speculates that an ecological war struck the planet during the covid pandemic. Through self-quarantine, social isolation, and vaccines, the war was finally won, even though dystopian failures hit us.

But the essay I think is most hopeful and successful is "Eurovision the Zeitgeist Barometer", which analyses the political, ideological importance of this festival for Europe. Europe was never united since Julius Caesar's Pax Romana, which lasted 500 years, but after the Second World War we have had the Council of Europe, the EEC, and the EU, which also led to the birth of Eurovision: from Dana, a young Catholic girl from Derry representing the Republic of Ireland in 1970, to the support for Ukraine invaded by the Russians, "Eurovision has been and is the soundtrack of Pax Europa" (132).

I've known Cónal Creedon since he published *Passion Play*, and all his literary work as a novelist, playwright, and film maker has revealed his hometown, as does Joyce's Dublin. Cork and its spaghetti bowl have never ceased to inspire him and us.

Moreover the essay "The Scenic Route" by ascending and descending through steps and under steeples has taken me back to the meandering the writer led me through while tracing

[6] He was "excommunicated" because she barged into St Mary's church 12 o' clock mass "doing helicopter's spins […] in front of the tabernacle" (41).

fundamental stages of *Passion Play*. I still clearly remember me, anticipating his niece Asha, going to see Mrs O'Driscoll and her historical toy shop and Mr Tony Leehan's sweet factory.

I felt mesmerised and again and again felt the legacy of being a blessed guest of Cónal Creedon's spaghetti bowl.

Conci Mazzullo

Síobhra Aiken, *Spiritual Wounds: Trauma, Testimony and the Irish Civil War*, Newbridge, Irish Academic Press, 2022, pp. 344. €29.95 HB. ISBN: 9781788551663.

Il volume *Spiritual Wounds: Trauma, Testimony and the Irish Civil War* di Síobhra Aiken, si configura come un'opera di notevole importanza nonché un contributo essenziale per una comprensione più sfaccettata e culturalmente ricca della Guerra Civile Irlandese. L'autrice si propone di sfidare e superare quella che definisce "overemphasis on the reticence surrounding the Irish Civil War [that] has occluded the many voices that broke the silence" (2022, 1) e che, per lungo tempo, ha caratterizzato il dibattito pubblico e la ricerca storica su questo conflitto complesso e doloroso.

L'obiettivo principale del libro è proprio quello di portare alla luce, nel dibattito pubblico, le voci di tutti colori che hanno scelto di non rimanere in silenzio ma di parlare e scrivere, costruendo così un vero "archivio alternativo" di testimonianze di guerra. La genesi di questo studio risiede nella vasta ricerca documentale condotta dall'autrice, iniziata con la compilazione di un elenco di scritti prodotti da veterani della Guerra Civile nei decenni immediatamente successivi alla fine del conflitto. Questo elenco preliminare è cresciuto nel tempo, trasformandosi in un ampio catalogo che include una molteplicità di resoconti e libri. È importante sottolineare che molte di queste opere sono state pubblicate prima dell'istituzione del Bureau of Military History[1], dimostrando così l'esistenza di una produzione significativa al di fuori dei canali ufficiali. Le testimonianze prese in esame da Síobhra Aiken provengono da un campione estremamente variegato e rappresentativo dei partecipanti al conflitto. Vengono considerate le voci di uomini e donne, sia a favore del Trattato Anglo-Irlandese che contrari, ed espresse sia in inglese che in irlandese. Queste narrazioni assumono forme diverse, che si manifestano in generi letterari diversi.

Un elemento centrale del libro è la presentazione di opere che rientrano con difficoltà nella rigida categorizzazione: molte, infatti, sfidano le definizioni convenzionali di genere, presentando

[1] Istituito in Irlanda nel gennaio 1947 da Oscar Traynor, Ministro della Difesa ed ex Capitano dei Volontari Irlandesi, aveva come obiettivo dichiarato "to assemble and co-ordinate material to form the basis for the compilation of the history of the movement for Independence from the formation of the Irish Volunteers on 25 November 1913, to 11 July 1921" (The Military Archives, "Report of the Director, 1957", <https://bmh.militaryarchives.ie/about/guide-to-the-collection/> [05/2025]). La motivazione alla base dell'istituzione del Bureau era dunque quella di dare a coloro che avevano preso parte attiva agli eventi che portarono all'indipendenza irlandese la possibilità di documentare le proprie esperienze. Tra i partecipanti figuravano membri di gruppi come i Volontari Irlandesi e, successivamente, l'Irish Republican Army (Esercito Repubblicano Irlandese), la Cumann na mBan (Lega delle Donne), l'Irish Republican Brotherhood (Fratellanza Repubblicana Irlandese), lo Sinn Féin, l'Irish Citizen Army (Esercito Cittadino Irlandese) ma anche i parenti dei defunti non associati ad alcuna organizzazione. I materiali sono rimasti secretati fino al 2003, quando sono stati resi pubblici. Nei dieci anni successivi alla sua istituzione, il Bureau ha raccolto 1.773 testimonianze per un totale di 35.000 pagine, 334 serie di documenti dell'epoca, 42 fotografie, 12 registrazioni vocali, e una raccolta di ritagli di stampa.

una combinazione di elementi autobiografici e finzionali. Si evidenzia inoltre la difficoltà di dare un nome preciso al genere, notando che tali scritti possono essere considerati o descritti in vari modi:

> The critical neglect of these autobiographically based fictional writings has resulted in a lack of consistent terminology to describe them; they might be considered as autobiographical fiction, semifictional autobiography, autofiction (a 'text that purports to be both fictional and autobiographical'), autobiografiction ('fiction which draws on biography and/or autobiography'), testimonial fiction ('a fictional narrative with a large testimonial component') or *romans à clef* (real-life behind a façade of fiction). (2022, 13)

L'autrice sceglie consapevolmente di non offrire una soluzione definitiva di categorizzazione, concentrando piuttosto l'attenzione su come, indipendentemente dalla loro forma esatta, queste diverse narrazioni possano essere lette e comprese come testimonianza. La testimonianza viene qui intesa in senso ampio: non si limita a essere un semplice resoconto, in qualsiasi forma, di eventi vissuti in prima persona, ma è guidata da una motivazione morale o etica. Chi testimonia è spinto dal desiderio o dalla necessità di esporsi pubblicamente, di contestare un silenzio imposto o autoimposto, o di catalizzare un cambiamento nella percezione o nella comprensione. I veterani della Guerra Civile hanno sfruttato le potenzialità di testimonianza offerte da diversi generi di scrittura: forme autobiografiche come diari, memorie, biografie, ma anche generi fittizi come romanzi, racconti, opere teatrali e poesia. Le storie personali acquisiscono lo status di testimonianza solo nel momento in cui vengono rese pubbliche, presentate a un pubblico. Questo porta l'autrice a esplorare un altro aspetto di vitale importanza per la comprensione di questo 'archivio alternativo': il ruolo attivo e cruciale dei lettori. I lettori hanno acquistato, letto, condiviso e spesso esaminato queste testimonianze e hanno giocato un ruolo fondamentale per il loro riconoscimento pubblico e per la loro circolazione. È attraverso l'interazione tra i testi e i lettori che è nata, si è sviluppata ed è stata sostenuta una vera e propria "contro-memoria" della Guerra Civile. La testimonianza traumatica richiede un destinatario attivo: l'imperativo a raccontare è legato al bisogno di essere ascoltati. Il lettore può diventare un testimone secondario, "the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time" (2022, 237) Questa posizione comporta tuttavia la responsabilità di immergersi nelle storie traumatiche di qualcun altro: attraverso una risposta 'consapevole', il lettore può dare valore pubblico alla testimonianza, contribuendo a trasformare le esperienze represse in un racconto condivisibile. Le opere considerate nel volume dimostrano come la lettura possa offrire uno sguardo sulle esperienze di persone comuni coinvolte nella guerra, ma anche "great solid mass of quiet people who went on living and eating and laughing and sleeping or trying to sleep, during those years" (234) colpita dal conflitto, costruendo un "archivio alternativo" di voci spesso escluse dalla storia ufficiale. Questa "contro-memoria" si è affermata e ha resistito al silenzio ufficiale dello Stato appena costituito e di ampi settori della società irlandese. Per alcuni autori, "writing would stir the sluggish backwaters of [the reader] crowded mind" (64), dimostrando una consapevolezza dell'impatto che il loro racconto poteva avere sul destinatario. Il libro cita esempi concreti di lettori impegnati, come il veterano dell'IRA Mike Quill, per il quale leggere i resoconti degli altri veterani rappresentava un modo per rivivere le proprie esperienze rivoluzionarie passate (236). Questo rivela come la lettura di queste testimonianze non fosse un atto passivo, ma un'esperienza immersiva e spesso personale.

Il libro reintroduce testimonianze ampiamente trascurate di veterani, uomini e donne, sia pro- che anti-trattato, scritte in varie forme, tra cui romanzi e memorie. Una dinamica centrale esplorata è l'uso di narrative fittizie come mezzo per elaborare l'esperienza traumatica della guerra. Il linguaggio delle ferite psicologiche risuona negli scritti di molti veterani alle prese con questa difficile eredità: secondo Desmond Ryan "the deepest wounds of the Civil War were

spiritual wounds" (4), un'affermazione che suggerisce come la narrazione possa servire sia alla "liberazione" personale di chi scrive sia a promuovere la consapevolezza pubblica. Questa idea di testimonianza terapeutica, attraverso la scrittura e la lettura, è un concetto chiave. Molti veterani, come Peadar O'Donnell, Francis Carty, Patrick Mulloy hanno sperimentato diverse forme narrative, spesso misurandosi con le categorizzazioni di genere e mostrando un impulso creativo/generativo derivante dall'esperienza traumatica:

> [They] have written from first-hand experience of the physical and spiritual ordeal through which a riven army and a sundered movement then passed, and few readers of their poignant pages, even if Ireland is to them only a name on a map, can escape the feeling that the deepest wounds of the Civil War were spiritual wounds. (21)

Il volume pone inoltre grande enfasi sulla figura e l'esperienza delle donne nel contesto della Guerra Civile Irlandese e nella sua rappresentazione letteraria, spesso evidenziando come le loro voci siano state storicamente trascurate o relegate al silenzio. Viene riaffermata l'importanza delle testimonianze di donne veterane, pro- e anti-trattato, che hanno rotto il silenzio attraverso varie forme di scrittura, come testi narrativi e romanzi e diari. Il libro esplora come le donne rivoluzionarie, limitate nello scrivere apertamente di sé, abbiano impiegato strategie narrative ibride per esprimere le proprie esperienze, come mostrano le opere di Alice Cashel che rassicura le ragazze sul loro ruolo cruciale per la causa nazionale, o Lily O'Brennan che usa la figura del cane narratore per evidenziare il ruolo delle donne repubblicane nel conflitto. Autrici come Garrett O'Driscoll e Máiréad Ní Ghráda sono analizzate per la loro capacità di intrecciare le esperienze femminili con la lotta nazionale, spesso mettendo in discussione il rapporto problematico tra la causa nazionale e quella delle donne. Il volume esamina anche autrici che hanno raccontato tabù sociali, come la violenza domestica e la depressione post-parto, o la violenza sessuale, tema particolarmente rilevante e doloroso.

Spiritual Wounds: Trauma, Testimony and the Irish Civil War non propone una semplice rilettura della storia, ma un'indagine accurata e umana che confuta l'idea semplicistica di un silenzio post-bellico uniforme e impenetrabile. Attraverso un'ampia raccolta, un'analisi dettagliata e una presentazione di testimonianze di veterane e veterani spesso trascurate dalla storiografia tradizionale, il libro rivela la ricchezza, la diversità e la complessità delle narrazioni che hanno sfidato la reticenza ufficiale. Mettendo in risalto l'ambiguità di genere nelle opere, e soprattutto il ruolo attivo dei lettori nella formazione di una "contro-memoria", il volume offre una prospettiva nuova sulla Guerra Civile Irlandese e sul suo impatto psicologico e sociale. Il suo tratto distintivo è proprio portare alla luce questa moltitudine di voci precedentemente in ombra e dimostrare in modo convincente come la scrittura, in tutte le sue forme, sia stata un mezzo cruciale e potente per elaborare il trauma, rendere testimonianza, e contestare le narrazioni dominanti su un conflitto che ha segnato profondamente l'identità e la memoria dell'Irlanda.

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