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Tiziano Rimoldi, *Stato e Chiesa in Irlanda. 1914-2014*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2023, pp. 776. €55,00. ISBN: 978-88-15-38385-3.

Stato e Chiesa in Irlanda. 1914-2014 fornisce un'esaustiva, dettagliata e oltremodo puntuale disamina storico-giuridica delle relazioni tra Stato e Chiesa in Irlanda, che si spinge vieppiù a scandagliare i complessi termini d'influenza che dette relazioni hanno cagionato rispetto all'assetto costituzionale del Paese, al relativo sistema legale, e all'azione dell'Esecutivo. Non manca, peraltro, un'analisi "inversa", densa di contenuti e riferimenti dottrinali e storici, rispetto all'ambito di influenza che queste tre ultime componenti hanno determinato nell'evolversi dei rapporti tra la Chiesa cattolica e la Repubblica. Il lavoro mette a fuoco, segnatamente, la complessa strutturazione di questi ultimi, non agevolmente o semplicisticamente identificabile in un modello di separazione, atteso il fattore legato all'influenza della religione cattolica sulle istituzioni statali, la cui portata trascende sotto molti aspetti il dato letterale delle disposizioni della Costituzione. Il profondo vaglio effettuato dall'Autore, conseguentemente, scruta con verso minuzioso e consapevole tutte le fonti primarie, e i più salienti riferimenti giurisprudenziali, senza lesinare ricorso, al contempo, all'analisi dei lavori parlamentari, e alla pubblicistica di settore. La ricerca, assai articolata e approfondita, assume connotati di pregio indiscutibile, riprendendo filoni d'indagine che esibiscono spunti interessanti e di certo arricchimento per il settore del diritto ecclesiastico comparato.

Mario Ferrante

Eavan Boland, *Citizen Poet: New and Selected Essays*, edited by Jody Allen Randolph, with a foreword by Heather Clark, New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 2024, pp. 448. \$24.99. Paperback. ISBN: 9781324074281.

Few poets in contemporary Ireland have left as indelible a mark as Eavan Boland (1944-2020). Both in her poetry and prose, she redefined the possibilities of Irish writing by placing

women's experience, domestic space, and ordinary lives at the heart of national and literary narratives that had long excluded them. *Citizen Poet: New and Selected Essays*, edited by Jody Allen Randolph, offers a timely consolidation of Boland's prose writings. It gathers some of her most influential essays together with more recent reflections, underscoring her dual role as poet and public intellectual. The volume not only reinforces Boland's standing as a leading Irish poet-critic but also allows us to appreciate the coherence of her critical vision across several decades.

The collection brings together a wide selection of Boland's key essays, many originally published in her volumes of essays, *Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time* (1995) and *A Journey with Two Maps* (2011), as well as in journals, edited volumes, and introductions to anthologies. They are organised chronologically, giving the reader a sense of the continuity in Boland's thinking.

Citizen Poet opens with a foreword written by Heather Clark and a preface by Jody Allen Randolph, and it is divided into three parts devoted to Boland's earlier volumes of essays. Recurring themes and concerns of Boland's selected essays are the silencing of women in Irish literary tradition; the importance of lived experience as legitimate poetic subject matter; the uneasy relation between national identity and private life; and the responsibilities of the poet as both artist and citizen. In these essays, Boland insists that poetry is not only an aesthetic act but also a civic one: a way of negotiating the individual's position within a collective memory.

The foreword by Heather Clark pays tribute to Boland and her resistance to the male-oriented Irish poetic tradition that is liable to the simplified versions of Irish womanhood. Highlighting the significance of Boland for Irish literature, Clark puts into words that "Ireland has expanded its figurative borders because of writers like Boland, whose works confronted and challenged the nation's endemic sexism" (xiii). She makes references to Boland's earlier poems and essays with an emphasis on how Boland's poems redefine and portray the multiplicity and complexity of Irish women's experiences and challenge patriarchal literary tradition.

Jody Allen Randolph, in the "Preface", underlines the significance of *Citizen Poet* for Boland's oeuvre by claiming that "it forms the most complete single volume of Boland's essays available in any format" (xv). Randolph's preface offers a rich introduction to Eavan Boland's literary evolution, tracing her journey from a displaced teenager to a pioneering voice in Irish poetry and criticism. It highlights her early essays, such as "The Weasel's Tooth" (1974), published in the aftermath of the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, which reflect her nascent engagement with nationalistic politics and communal responsibility – themes that matured over decades. Notably, her use of womanhood as a lens on nationhood emerges as a defining strength, evident from her first prose pieces for the *Dublin Review* in 1965, written as a Trinity undergraduate, to her influential works like *Object Lessons* (1995) and *A Journey with Two Maps* (2011). This preface sets the stage for understanding Boland's enduring impact on how women's poetry shapes cultural narratives.

The first section consists of the selected pieces from Boland's first volume of essays, *Object Lessons*. These essays articulate her early and forceful challenge to the Irish literary canon, insisting on the visibility of women's lives and voices. Pieces such as "Lava Cameo", "In Search of a Nation", and "Outside History" are now regarded as foundational texts in Irish feminist criticism, where Boland redefines the relationship between private experience and national history. Together, the essays trace Boland's struggle to locate a language for women's subjectivity in an Irish poetic tradition that had systematically excluded it. They also illustrate her belief that the personal and domestic are not marginal but central to the work of poetry.

The second part of the collection revisits Boland's later essays from *A Journey with Two Maps*, where her reflections expand beyond the Irish context to engage with international women poets such as Adrienne Rich, Elizabeth Bishop, and Sylvia Plath. Essays like "The Rooms of Other Women Poets" and "Becoming an Irish Poet" map out a transatlantic dialogue that situates Irish women's writing within a broader feminist literary framework. Here, Boland reflects more explicitly on the responsibilities of the poet as both artist and citizen, refining her vision of the "citizen poet". These essays demonstrate the maturity of her critical thought, combining personal narrative with broader cultural analysis and underscoring her position as both a national and international voice.

The final section of the volume, titled "Uncollected Prose: A Selection", stands as the true locus of the book, crystallising her enduring legacy as a feminist essayist and citizen-poet through a treasure trove of previously unpublished or lesser-known works spanning decades. This anthology's capstone draws from her early reflections in "The Weasel's Tooth" (1974), a sharp critique likely probing the predatory undercurrents of literary and societal expectations, to her later, more intimate explorations, culminating in the powerful, unfinished draft "From Daughter" (circa 2007) – a raw mosaic of letters, journal entries, and poetic fragments that poignantly captures the "incoherence" of balancing motherhood with the demands of poetic creation. Interwoven with this are incisive pieces like "Virtual Syntax, Actual Dreams" (2003), which delves into the digital age's impact on creative consciousness; "Islands Apart" (2008), reflecting on geographical and cultural isolation; and timely interventions such as "A Woman Without a Country: A Detail" (2014), "The Conscripted Poet" (2017), "Collaborate" (2017), "Diversity in Poetry" (2018), "What Does the Poet Look Like?" (2019), and "The Poet and Community" (2019), which interrogate the intersections of gender, nationhood, exile, and communal responsibility in poetry. By foregrounding these uncollected pieces alongside her latest essays, this section not only honours Boland's evolution from a young Irish poet navigating patriarchal barriers to a mature voice advocating for inclusive, woman-centred literary discourse but also underscores the book's overarching theme: the poet's vital role in reshaping cultural narratives through personal and political testimony.

Of particular note is the inclusion of "Daughter", an essay previously unpublished, which makes this volume especially valuable. More than a simple addition, "Daughter" deepens our understanding of Boland's lifelong preoccupations with lineage, identity, and generational memory. In this essay, Boland turns her attention to the intimate relationship between mother and daughter, exploring how personal bonds are shaped by cultural silence and historical absence. The essay resonates strongly with the themes of inheritance and erasure that permeate her earlier writings, yet it also feels distinctive in its emphasis on intergenerational dialogue.

This volume of essays consolidates Boland's reputation as one of the foremost theorists of Irish poetry in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It demonstrates how her essays complement her poems, offering a theoretical backbone to her creative practice. For students of Irish Studies, women's writing, and cultural memory, the volume will become an indispensable resource. More broadly, *Citizen Poet* invites us to reconsider the role of the poet in society. At a time when questions of identity, inclusion, and belonging are at the forefront of cultural debates, Boland's insistence that poetry must account for silenced voices is more relevant than ever. She challenges us to view literature not as a retreat from reality but as an intervention in it.

Citizen Poet, New and Selected Essays is both a tribute and a challenge. It reminds us of Boland's extraordinary contributions as poet, critic, and citizen, while also urging us to continue the work she began: to expand the canon, to question inherited narratives, and to acknowledge

the civic dimensions of art. As we read these essays, we encounter not only Boland's acute intelligence but also her moral imagination – her belief that poetry can and must engage with the lived realities of its time. For Irish Studies, and for the wider field of literary scholarship, this volume is a landmark.

Okaycan Dürükoğlu

Stephen Rowley, *Kindling Ashes*, London, Austin Macauley Publishers, 2024, pp. 205. Paperback. £9.99. ISBN: 978-1-0358-5224-6.

Stephen Rowley's *Kindling Ashes* concludes his trilogy on the Northern Ireland Troubles with a lyrical and deeply reflective novel. On the surface, it narrates the story of Daniel and Deirdre, lovers divided by sectarian circumstance. Beneath this narrative, however, lies a layered meditation on political violence, religious identity, personal guilt, and the elusive nature of peace within the Northern Ireland context. The prose is consistently poetic and evocative, lending the novel both emotional tact and symbolic richness. It is a text that bears witness not only to the historical trauma of the region but also to the moral imperative to remember – and to do so cautiously.

The novel's structure reflects its central preoccupation with fire and its aftermath. Divided into four parts – “Torched”, “Scorched”, “Charred”, and “Ashen” – each section corresponds to key historical events and emotional stages in the characters' lives. “Torched” evokes the beginning of the Troubles with the burning of houses on Bombay Street in August 1969, an event widely regarded as the catalyst of the conflict, and it is here that Daniel and Deirdre's tentative early romance takes shape amid the violence that displaces them. In “Scorched”, the horror of the Dunmurry train bombing is recounted in an understated register, marked by the narrator's haunting reflection on the mingling of ashes: “Do you think they mixed, eventually?” (91). Rowley's presentation of such events is notably restrained. His intention appears to be to present the facts as simply and clearly as possible, resisting sensationalism in order to show empathy with the victims. This stylistic economy, far from neutral, creates a narrative space where grief and trauma can be confronted without emotional excess.

In “Charred”, the Omagh bombing becomes both literal and metaphorical. As Daniel reflects on the end of his relationship: “as if a fire has gone through me and burnt my inside” (147) – Rowley intensifies the emotional terrain without rhetorical excess. The final section, “Ashen”, places the reader in a world where personal and political energies are spent. The ashes of past violence are not framed as closure, but as unstable ground upon which an imperfect peace attempts to stand. The use of fire as both a destructive and regenerative agent underscores the emotional logic of the novel: things are not reborn from ash, but they may still be understood.

Religion, in this text, is neither dogmatically condemned nor sentimentally reclaimed. Rather, it is rendered as a kind of emotional ecology, a system of interdependent beliefs, emotions, and responses that shape how individuals relate to themselves and to others in a sectarian world. Within this ecology, faith and disbelief are shifting forces that sustain, constrain, and reshape human relationships. Daniel becomes increasingly anti-theist, reacting to the violence “justified” by religious difference, while Deirdre's robust Catholicism stands as a counterpoint, embodying a wounded but persistent spiritual identity. Eddie, Daniel's cousin, functions as a figure of comic relief and moral evolution. He begins the novel as a caricatured bigot but grad-

ually becomes an advocate for pluralism. His humor may be read as a mechanism of defense – a quality he has developed to cope with the violence. Through these intersecting journeys, Rowley examines religion as a force that can both sanctify love and justify hate, capable of wounding and sustaining in equal measure. The spiritual toll of sectarianism is deeply felt in these pages, not only through plot but through tone.

The “Epilogue” marks a tonal and generic shift toward the mythopoetic. Recalling Heaney’s line that “the end of art is peace” (1979, 58), the narrator relates a dream of burial grounds where Catholic and Protestant dead rise, play, and mix without concern for their origins. In this vision, the dead are reconciled through shared games, symbolic gestures – such as drawing crescents on children’s foreheads – and mutual laughter. “Crematoriums are more a place of reconciliation than confrontation” (Rowley 2024, 204), the narrator muses, gently reconfiguring death as a space for understanding. The entire scene is rendered in euphemistic and poetic language, blurring dream with ritual and softening historical antagonism into symbolic healing. The phoenix motif on the cover – a green-eyed bird surrounded by sectarian colors, rising yet stained by blood – finds its analogue here. The dead appeased to their graves with a sense of belonging which suggests a vision of difference that is shared rather than opposed.

Rowley’s prose is marked by intertextual resonance, from the Heaney epigraph to the father’s cryptic aphorism: “Writers, son, live under the volcano, at the foot of the hills, just where the land touches the sea... amidst heaps of ashes... and they celebrate the Day of the Dead” (203). This line recalls Malcolm Lowry’s *Under the Volcano* (1947), evoking the notion of the writer as one who remains close to destruction in order to give voice to it. The dreamlike burial scenes of the epilogue offer a gentle echo of All Souls’ Day, suggesting that the dead are understandably better disposed at reconciliation than the living and represent a point of departure rather than arrival. Rowley, like Lowry and Heaney, turns to literature not as escape but as reckoning.

At the core of *Kindling Ashes* lies a feeling of unrelieved guilt: for having left Northern Ireland, for not having done more, for not having spoken sooner. That moral pressure animates the novel’s narrative ethics. In giving voice to the muted aftermaths of violence, and in portraying characters who yearn for but do not achieve spiritual peace, Rowley avoids the seductions of closure. His novel remains an open-ended act of testimony – graceful, painful, and deeply humane. While the fire may not reignite, the warmth of the potential of respectful remembrance flickers, tentative but enduring.

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Zhuo Li

Salomé Paul, *Marina Carr and Greek Tragedy: Feminist Myths of Monstrosity*, New York-London, Routledge, 2024, pp. 214. Paperback. €55.99. ISBN: 9781032288888.

As Marina Carr herself stated in “Dealing with the Dead” (1998), writing is being in “conversation with [...] the ghost of the dead writers [...] writing’s about the courage to sit down and face the ghosts [...]”. It’s about going over the other side and coming back with something new, hopefully; gold, possibly” (191). It is new and gold indeed that we bring back after the reading of the very well-researched monograph by Salomé Paul, *Marina Carr and Greek Tragedy: Feminist Myths of Monstrosity* (2024).

In “Introduction: The Gender Politics of Tragedy”, the author carefully plots the development of Carr’s plays. She shows how Carr’s characters are not born monsters, as often believes the common view of the legacy of the classical drama, but they become so, because of the restrictive roles of the patriarchal order in contemporary Ireland and in Western world at large. She compares Greek tragedies and her contemporary transpositions captures the moment in which women’s identities and experiences transform them into the terrifying monsters of patriarchal oppression.

Other researchers have described the influence in her work of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, but the author maintains that there is not yet “any study tracing Carr’s journey into transposing Greek tragedy on the contemporary stage and analysing the devices and strategies that she has been implementing throughout her career to overturn the patriarchal purpose of classical drama in order to create feminist theatre out of it” (12). The novelty of her exploration of Carr’s transpositions lies in a variety of interconnected perspectives, but she privileges the feminist perspective to overcome the traditional binary opposition of female characters into “good” and “bad” women.

Paul uses the term “transposition” as an umbrella term which falls into the broader category of “transtextuality”, as used by Gérard Genette, which helps Carr’s inclusion of Greek tragedy in her theatre.

Carr’s first play was *Low in the Dark* (1989), followed five years later by *The Mai*, both of which posited her as a central figure on Irish stage. Critics soon understood that she was disrupting the traditional conventions of patriarchy both in terms of canonical authorship but also in terms of dramaturgical form and dramatic content. She privileged the use of Greek mythology and tragedy to discuss the canon of women’s agency and subjectivity in her plays.

By the Bog of Cats... (1998) is Carr’s first play that derives explicitly from a Greek tragedy, Euripides’ *Medea*. Hester Swaine, the protagonist, is in love with Carthege Kilbride, her lover for fourteen years and father of the little girl Josie. The grief arises when Carthege leaves Hester to marry Caroline, a rich young woman. Carthege’s mother has never accepted Josie as a granddaughter because she was born out of the wedlock with a “tinker”. Moreover, the couple Carthege and Caroline are meant to settle in place of Hester on the bog. This action demonstrates not only a sexist a racist attitude, which emarginates and makes invisible those who are “Other” on basis of gender and ethnicity, but also illustrate social expectation in Ireland. The play ends with Hester’s burning her house and finally killing herself and Josie. These two events can be interpreted as a further explanation of how the three pillars of traditional Ireland, Nation, Church and Family were put into question.

Carr uses a similar approach in *Ariel* (2002), in which she employs plot elements from *Iphigenia at Aulis* and Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*. Ariel is the story of an Irish family, The Fitzgeralds, over a ten-year period during the Celtic Tiger era. The action is set in Fitzgeralds’ house and deals with the disappearance of Ariel after her sixteenth birthday, just when Fermoy, the patriarch, is running for election to the Dáil. Only late, will it be discovered that he sacrificed his

daughter for political success. What is interesting in *Ariel* is that Carr starts her transposition drawing a parallel between Fermoy and Agamemnon in *Iphigenia at Aulis* who must sacrifice his daughter to enable the Greeks to sail to Troy.

Carr's *The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan* (1996) and *On Raftery's Hill* (2000), which form the Midlands cycle, are pervaded by a sense of doom. These plays are not directly based on Greek tragedy but Carr interweaves many classical intertextual similarities.

The Mai is a memory play, recounted by Millie, The May's daughter, who, like a modern *seanchí*, remembers some of the events occurring during her childhood and leading to her mother's suicide. It is a story of loss and despair that haunted her grandmother Fraochláan and her great-grandmother before her.

Portia Coughlan tells the story of the titular character and her profound dissatisfaction with her family life. Her incapacity to be happy is gradually connected to the loss of her twin brother, who makes some ghostly appearances. The second act deals with Portia's suicide. As in *The May*, the chronological order is disrupted in the final act. Portia is still alive and there is the revelation of her incestuous relation with Gabriel, which recalls that of Portia's parents, thus reinforcing a tragic perpetuation of fatal actions that doom the family.

Incestuous relationships are also the theme of *On Raftery's Hill*, perpetrated by the patriarch Red, a farmer and land owner, on his two daughters Dinah and Sorrel.

Ten years later after the production of *Ariel*, Carr started to write new works based on Greek tragedy. These plays acknowledge more explicitly their connection to classical drama as they retain the classical diegesis of the ancient tragedies.

The first play of this new cycle transposing Greek tragedy is *Phaedra Backwards* (2011), which premiered in the U.S. The author states that *Phaedra Backwards* "relies roughly on Euripides' *Hippolytus*" and Carr offers a "complete reversal of the structure of the classical myth and tragedy in that play" (6). *Phaedra Backwards* opens with Theseus informing Phaedra of Hippolytus' death before moving back to relate not only the actions leading directly to that tragic event, but also to the history of Phaedra's family. The play also presents the humanisation of the Minotaur, who is not a ferocious monster as in classical literature and drama which corresponds to the de-humanisation of Theseus. When Theseus kills him, his heroic nature is reframed through the lens of toxic masculinity.

Hecuba (2015), which premiered at the Royal Shakespeare Company Swan Theatre in Stratford upon Avon in the U.K., is based on Euripides' *Hecuba*. Carr experiments a new form of dramatic speech mingling dialogue and soliloquies as well as narration and enactment, which helps Carr's to cast a new light on Hecuba, who is not portrayed as a monstrous character anymore.

In *Girl on an Altar* (2022), produced by the Kiln Theatre in London and based on Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* and Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, Carr significantly changes the order of actions as the play starts with the sacrifice of Iphigenia and ends with the murder of Agamemnon. Thus, Clytemnestra does not kill Agamemnon immediately after his return but months or years later.

In 2021, *iGirl* was performed on the main stage of the Abbey Theatre. *iGirl* is not even a transposition of other tragedies but "a postmodern epic poem dealing with death, loss, and extinction. *iGirl* involves a variety of characters from a wide range of sources (ancient mythology, history and autobiography) and from different historical periods (prehistory, antiquity, medieval and contemporary time)" (8). However, the recurrent apparition of characters such as Antigone, Oedipus and Jocasta bear witness of the centrality of classical drama in Carr's theatre.

The author is adamantly clear that Carr's feminist transpositions of Greek tragedy have not emerged in a void. She traces the origins of the Greek tragedy and she maintains that Carr understands that tragedy in 5th century B.C.E. was used to define how men and women should live in the new-city state and what was the culture of the Athenian democracy. The genre thus

became a “distinctive Athenian cultural product”. Greek tragedy was as “a form of socio-political institution [...] [and] a form of propaganda” (14) and accomplished even more than one aim. It controlled, stereotyped and marginalised women, foreigner and slaves and reassured audience and citizens that the societal order, which persists in western consciousness, would have been maintained. Carr is aware of all this and, for this reason, she is strongly committed to challenge and subverts gender expectations.

In the first chapter, “From ‘Woman’ to Women on Stage”, Paul shows how Carr sets out to dismantle the binary opposition between “bad” and “good” women. In classical Greek tragedy the “Woman” was conceived as having a “normative function” and her representation showed ideologically what she was and was not allowed to do to comply with the gender expectation of patriarchy. Woman was “other” from men and Western mythology was built on the patriarchal order of woman as Virgin Mother or Eve since she simultaneously stands as the “source of life” and the “the downfall” of man. Womanhood dramatised by figures like Clytemnestra, Medea, Phedra and Hecuba underlines the definition of what woman is, or can be, or can go within a political model that is controlled by men. Carr deconstructs this vision and approaches the characteristic features of tragic women from a different angle. She defines a new conception of the categories of the “monstrous” and “sacrificial” women embedded in classical drama.

In Greek tragedy, women monsters include Clytemnestra, Medea, Phaedra and Hecuba as they embody the model of the vindictive women that must be feared. Clytemnestra and Hecuba have lost several children, Medea has been dismissed by her husband, and Phaedra has been killed by the goddess Aphrodite to punish Hippolytus’ impiety. Nonetheless, their reactions are “excessive” because they alienate the audience’s initial sympathy for their causes, turn them into monsters and, finally, confirm Greek men’s worst fears about women. Fear is a powerful emotion and Clytemnestra, Medea, Phaedra and Hecuba embody a vision of “woman” that is a threat to the male supremacy structuring Athenian democracy.

Hecuba appears to be the monster-woman *par excellence*. Unlike in Euripides’ version, in Carr’s transposition, Hecuba does not kill Polymestor’s sons nor blind him. It was the Greeks who performed these deeds and Carr’s reversal of these tragic actions illustrates a “radical” inversion of the “moral hierarchy” of the classic dichotomy, which oppose the barbarians to the Greeks.

The title of the play *Phaedra Backwards* provides information concerning Carr’s approach to this other classical figure of a woman monster. The play is famous for the outraged reaction of Phaedra’s shamelessness as she openly declares her guilty passion to her stepson. In Carr’s play Hippolytus is already dead when the play starts, and Phaedra offers a different insight into the events. She claims that Theseus, as he was an ageing patriarch that women are not looking at him anymore, was almost “favouring” Phaedra’s deed to rip through his son, thus making Hippolytus’s tragic death a consequence of the toxicity of hegemonic masculinity. Carr therefore introduces Theseus’s responsibility in Hippolytus’s condemnation to death and his desire not only to get justice for Phaedra but also for asserting dominance over his son.

Carr’s approach to *Medea* is similar for showing the grip of patriarchy on the conception of that figure as a monster, but the deconstruction of Medea’s monstrosity is embedded in the myth through intertextuality for two of her Midland plays: *Portia Coghlan* and *By the Bog of Cats*.... Portia embodies the representative of the “unwomanly woman”, but Portia does not grow monstrous because she has been forced into the realm of womanhood.

Carr’s examination and deconstruction of Medea are more significant in *By the Bog of Cats*.... She changes the circumstances leading the Medea-like figure to perform the murderous act. In Euripides’ tragedy the infanticide is an act of revenge against Jason’s betrayal and the wish not to leave her children in the enemies’ hands. Medea’s considerations are those that have more

influenced Carr's transposition of the myth. Scholars have given various contrasting interpretations of the infanticide as "an act of love", "an irrational deed on the impulse of a moment", "psychological or mythological", but I agree with the author's conclusion that "the connection between Hester and Josie emerging from the gender switch of Medea's sons implies that the child is subjected to the same marginalisation and discrimination as her mother" (54).

Clytemnestra is another "unwomanly woman" like Medea, and the author shows how she

appears in *Girl on an Altar*, which is based on Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, the first play of *The Oresteia* trilogy. The figure of Clytemnestra also inspires the course of action undertaken in *Ariel*, which transposes the same classical tragedies as *Girl on an Altar* with the addition of Aeschylus' *The Libation Bearers*, the second play of *The Oresteia*, to a modern Irish setting. (55)

Clytemnestra, however, does not kill her children, but her husband Agamemnon, to usurp his male power. However, this action relates to the situation as a mother whose husband has killed their daughter, a specific feature that Carr uses in both of her transpositions to redeem Clytemnestra from her classical monstrosity.

Carr's decision to start both *Ariel* and *Girl on an Altar* with Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* helps to redeem Clytemnestra from her murderous violence and this alters and modifies the impact of her characterisation in *Agamemnon*. Aeschylus plays with the primordial myth of the chaotic matriarchy, as compared with the order that follows from the implementation of patriarchy. Carr exposes the falseness of that patriarchal tale as the first acts of both *Ariel* and *Girl on an Altar* are based on the submission of women to patriarchy. Women holding power is intended to be ephemeral. In *Ariel*, Frances acts as the head of the house for a short period and in *Girl on an Altar*, Clytemnestra's time in power for ten years seems of no importance. Carr's use of Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* overturns the depiction of matriarchy's destructiveness in Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. The tragedy sustaining the whole trilogy is indeed triggered by a woman killing a man, which establishes a strong dichotomy between male and female, and female self-assertion comes only at the cost of annihilating the Other. In *Ariel* and *Girl on an Altar* however the trigger of the tragedy is the killing of an innocent and young girl by her father seems greatly ironical as it shows the destructiveness of patriarchy rather than matriarchy.

The tragic end of Carr's many female characters emerges even more clearly in the classical model of sacrificial woman, which relies completely on women's acceptance of the destiny created for them by men, even at the cost of their life. Two types of women are specific in Greek tragedy: Polyxena and Iphigenia.

In Carr's *Hecuba*, Polyxena is not innocent for her secret love affair with Achilles. This demonstrates the agency she had before the fall of Troy and thus increases her alienation at the time of the play. Carr still leans on the lack of women's agency, but she overturns its reception. In Euripides' *Hecuba*, Polyxena willingly accepts her sacrifice as there is no choice offered to the character. This illustrates the patriarchal vision that woman is free if she submits to the destiny decided for her by man. Carr erases this dimension as Polyxena does not understand what they are doing to her and focuses on the obliteration of Polyxena's agency.

In Euripides' *Hecuba*, the willing submission to men is pleasurable and gives way to a powerful sexualisation associated with the murder of a young woman: Polyxena is stabbed and her body is half naked. Carr retains the requirement of half nudity but prevents the eroticisation of the action. Therefore, the physicality of the action is central to the re-conception of that action that is more a slaughter than a ritual. Unlike the characters in Euripides' tragedy, Hecuba attends the action, thus heightening the emotional implication of mother and daughter's helplessness. Carr's shows the extreme implication of women's reification required by patriarchy.

Carr's goes further in the reification in *Girl on an Altar*. Iphigenia does not even appear on stage; she stands as a mere prop to the story but Carr highlights the symmetry between these two sacrifices in classical tragedy mentioned in her transposition of *Hecuba* as a justification for Polyxena's death. Like Polyxena, Iphigenia has been murdered half naked, her throat has been slit with a knife by Agamemnon. Thus, the sacrifice is not fully dramatised but only its outcome. Clytemnestra, like Hecuba, relates the events to the audience and arrives after her daughter has been killed. It is through her reaction that Carr underlines how a young girl has been butchered like an animal in a field. This expresses the position of women in patriarchal society, which does not consider them humans equal to men and "are disposable cattle available to be slaughtered in order to strengthen male domination and patriarchy" (63). Furthermore, at the end of the chapter the author expands the category of "women" into pluralised, heterogeneous identities – characters like the Minotaur – who resist easy categorisation.

In the second chapter, "Feminist Resistance to Patriarchal Myths", Carr's transpositions rely on the feminist concept of the "resisting reader", which draws attention to patriarchal control of the characters' voices, and the author makes a distinction between adaptation (a new retelling), to which the Carr's plays of the Midlands cycle belong, and appropriation (a complete transformative re-writing that changes the meaning), to which belongs Carr's plays from *Phaedra Backwards* onward. The author also maintains that myth is universal and therefore is continuously re-written according to different times and places. This shows Greek tragedies can acquire diverse meanings, but Carr's transpositions draw a connection between the cultural and sexual politics of fifth-century Athenian society and twentieth-century Irish society and the Western World in general. Her plays show attention to the ancient male authors' patriarchal control on the characters' voices. In Carr's *Hecuba*, for example, the events of the fall of Troy are not a war but, in her words, a "genocide". This is the backbone of Carr's dramatic strategy. As the Greeks were the winners, Trojan history has been obliterated and substituted by the Greek "version" of that history. The civilisation conflict is at the basis of Carr's *Hecuba*, who is redeemed in her adaptation because in Euripides' tragedy was easy, according to Carr, to discharge Hecuba as a Trojan, an enemy and especially a woman. In this respect, monstrosity associated with this classical figure does not only highlight the sexist conception of women, but also the racist vision of non-Greek peoples. Carr thus unifies the classical dichotomy opposing the Greek to the barbarians and this dichotomy invites caution on judging who is the civilised and who is the uncivilised, especially in post-colonial contexts. Similarly, in the rest of the chapter every female character – from Phaedra in *Phaedra Backwards* to Clytemnestra in *Girl on an Altar*, to Antigone in *iGirl*, to The Mai in *The Mai*, to Hester in *By the Bog of Cats...* and to Portia in *Portia Coughlan* – to mention only a few, try to adopt strategies of feminist resistance to recover their agency, but their attempts and their subjective experiences remain within the domain of patriarchal control over their lives.

In the third chapter, "Writing Like a Woman", the author draws on practices such as Hélène Cixous' "écriture féminine" and Adrienne Rich's "revision", who approached classical writing from a feminist perspective to change the androcentric "horizon of expectations" and reconceptualises, for example, the figures offered from classical mythology. Carr's adaptations and appropriations therefore manifest a process of reassessing dominant narratives of history and cultural memory to (re)-inscribe unrepresented female experiences in which women are not only the subjects but also the authorial narrators. Carr thus gives voice to women characters who have been silenced and submitted to men's words and actions by the classical tragedians. In *The Mai*, *iGirl* and *Hecuba*, Carr places the characters of Millie, the Mai's daughter, Jocasta and Hecuba in an authorial narrator position in the attempt to gain subjectivity and agency. The authorial narration is also present in Carr's other Greek tragedies because the female protagonists' ability

to tell their stories sheds light on the distortion of “reality” emerging from the objectification of women in men’s narrative. According to the author, Carr thus shows her feminist intentions not only through the topic and characterisation but also by the form of her play.

In the fourth chapter, “Feminist Tragedy”, the author shows how the gender imbalance in Greek tragedy emerges from Aristotle’s notion of Mimesis, which provides both the tragic story and the tragic form. The patriarchal project of classical theatre is thus constructed both narratively and structurally. The hero, who performs the tragic action, is the central character in the Aristotelian conceptualisation of tragedy and the central character of the genre pertains to men only. In the fourth century however, women violate Aristotle’s assumptions about what they should be like. Nonetheless, women never stand as the tragic heroes and they never occupy centre stage. Even if they function as catalysts, agents and instruments of the play they “are never an end in themselves” (142).

Mimesis has been questioned by Bertold Brecht’s *Verfremdungseffekt* – the “alienation effect”, a theatrical device to distance the audience from emotional involvement in the play and make the spectators acquire a critical position. As epic theatre aims to uncover the ideology structuring and ruling over society, feminists have used several techniques devised by Brecht – including the *Verfremdungseffekt*, the historicization, and the *gestus* – to analyse and create new representations of gender, which reveal and question the system of oppression and alienation of women by patriarchy. In Carr’s appropriation, the Midland cycle epitomises the concept of “broken realism” and shows characters which are not anachronistic nor atavistic, but depicts a deterioration of certainty in contemporary Irish society. The disruption of traditional realism is further explored in her adaption to coin a new genre – epic tragedy – which Carr uses in *Phaedra Backwards* and in *iGirl* to create a tragic epic. The author sees Carr’s works, especially in the appropriation of Greek tragedies and the devices used in them, perfectly in line with many Brechtian tenets. Carr’s appropriations therefore foresees the possibility of the birth of a new form of theatre, where myth considered “unalterable” can become “alterable”.

What emerges from the “Conclusion: A Threshold towards an Inclusive Theatre” is that Carr is still aware that both her adaptations and appropriations are far from eliminating fear, injustice, and patriarchal constraints and that happiness is still to be reached. However, she optimistically confides in the new genre of epic tragedy to create critical awareness of traditional tragedies and to point towards a more inclusive gender-aware future.

Paul’s monograph is an innovative book where one chapter smoothly moves into another and demonstrates assimilation of the work of many other scholars in the field. The secondary sources that Paul has consulted to create her interdisciplinary framework are many, ranging from adaptation theory, classical tragedy, feminist critiques and performance studies. However, the theoretical density of her analysis may challenge the less-expert reader in the various fields of research she draws on.

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Monica Randaccio

Mary O'Donnell, *Walking Ghosts*, Cork, Mercier Press, 2025, pp. 251. €16.99. ISBN: 9781917453226.

The past year has been extremely productive for Mary O'Donnell, a writer who has crossed genres in many ways, from poetry to fiction, to academic essays. Her fourth collection of short stories, *Walking Ghosts*, came out in May last year, her latest novel *Sweep the Cobwebs off the Sky* was launched last March and a new poetry collection is expected by the end of the year. Her writing is characterised by great power of observation of the human condition and keen attention to the changing shades of Ireland's life and society. This is particularly remarkable in *Walking Ghosts*, whose seventeen stories were written over the span of several years, some of them having been published elsewhere before being gathered in the present volume.

The title story, "Walking Ghosts", sets the mood and provides a *fil rouge* across the various stories, most of them dealing with people haunted in various ways, often by their past, or persecuted by loneliness and isolation, by decisions taken or not taken, by undisclosed secrets. In "Peach Jam", for example, the narrator, who is also a writer, reflects that "there were secrets everywhere to be uncovered" (81). And these hidden secrets become ghosts haunting the protagonists, unable to come to terms with themselves and with a society in flux.

The stories can be grouped thematically, regardless of the order of publication in the book, as clusters of issues and imagery connect some stories to others, while others share theme, context or setting.

The title story, "Walking Ghosts", is about a land transaction, and it is a land full of ghosts, past and present. After her mother's death, Jane has to deal with the house and the land. Her encounter with a Protestant tenant farmer turns into a source of embarrassment, as she unintentionally offends him, quoting a few lines from the Ulster loyalist song "The Green Grassy Slopes of the Boyne". This is the only story in the collection in which sectarian tensions are hinted at. In other stories situations specific to Irish life are dealt with, for example in "Like Queens, Not Criminals" the protagonist, in her early forties, travels to London for an abortion in the 1990s. "And now Roberta" the doctor asks her "just what are you going to do about the state of things in your country? Can you do something for the women who cannot afford to come here?" (74). The social issue is both enhanced and concealed by the narrative technique of the first-person narrator addressing the unborn child and imagining what it must have been for him/her. The London urban landscape that marks "Like Queens, not Criminals" also recurs in "Peace, Love and Pushpanna", set in the 1970s, shedding light on a young couple's visit to their London relatives. A casual involvement with the Krishna movement enables the protagonist and first-person narrator to catch a glimpse of a possibility of change and of a new beginning, epitomised by the food metaphor of the new flavours she discovers in the meal offered after the opening ceremony at the Krishna centre. In a similar way, the gay man and his transgender partner in "I'm so Lucky" face prejudice and marginalisation, metaphorically expressed by the wall they have to climb to get back home after having lost their key.

In other stories social issues are addressed through contrast or opposition. This is what happens in "All We Can Do Is —", in which the richness of tourists on a Canary island is shockingly juxtaposed to the arrival of exhausted and dying immigrants from Mali. The narrative organization of the text interlaces two stories, the wealthy Russian couple doing suspicious business and the Malian refugees, all this seen through the eyes of an Irish couple on holiday. Jack and Maddie meet the Toporovs on the beach, the man constantly speaking on his mobile phone. Interestingly, the word "topor" in Russian means axe or hatchet, thus implying a subtext of violence especially in relation to their impatience with African immigrants in Russia. The

refugees' arrival is anticipated by "African selling shawls and dresses" (156) as well as "sunglasses on the beach or in the street" (162), and the final part of the story is unexpected, the refugees arriving from the sea look like ghosts in a verbless sentence: "from the water – like sea-spectres – wading straggling people, slipping from an overloaded disintegrating boat" (170).

Also "Luck" is set in Spain, in the Andalusian town of Nerja, where a nameless Irish tarot reader has been forced to move after a dangerous liaison with the English diplomat's wife. He is the epitome of secrets and of the revelation of secrets. He has developed his skills as a con man, but is also aware that the women who turn to him suffer "from the global disease, loneliness" (43). His past and his own secrets turn against him when an embittered middle-aged woman approaches him for a reading. This is his secret made flesh, as he recognizes her as the woman he had deceived years ago in Dublin (51).

As a matter of fact, most stories deal with loneliness and human isolation, in both women and men. For example, the opening story, "Cocoa L'Orange", is set during the Covid lockdown and focuses on the way creativity can counteract isolation and mutual embitterment. Jake's aimlessness after having been forced to close his chocolate enterprise mirrors his neighbour Ned, "a locked-down once fashionable greengrocer" (10). The two men silently acknowledge one another's presence through a glance or a nod, in an unspoken attempt of mutual support. The tension of Jake's "civilised getting along" (15) with his wife Sasha is emphasised by her online work, which gives a purpose to her days. Jake misses his work and the kind of artistry implied in the creation of new recipes, a creativity that can hardly be replaced by preparing dinner. He reacts taking out "a set of moulds" and melting cocoa with "intense orange essence and a hint of chilly" (21), spreading the mixture on his face and body as a form of tattoo, a new identity and a form of survival. The chocolate solidifies and firms "like a mask" (22), to replace the masks made necessary by the spreading virus.

An ideal link leads to the context of the following story, "Stories about Fat People", set in a creative writing course. Ollie, the only male participant, has been made redundant from the restaurant he worked in and is now trying to reinvent himself, which casts a bridge to Jake, with whom he shares "restlessness" (26) in the attempt to find a new outlet in life. He perceives loneliness at the heart of the unnamed text proposed by the course instructor, which is in fact "Fat" by Raymond Carver.

In a similar way, "The Stolen Man" deals with creative writing and the attempt to find a new perspective in life. Once again, in contrast with O'Donnell's priority of giving attention to women and the female experience, a man is at the centre of the story, attending an MA programme as a mature student at Galway University after his marriage has gone to pieces. Persecuted by the thought of his bisexual ex-wife, writing becomes a form of rebirth, the context of a new city and a new house "helps him forget" (108) and gives him a "sense of renewal" he did not expect at the age of forty-nine (109). Details of the activities of the course and the characteristics of the tutors intermingle with folkloric elements widely interspersed in the text. As a matter of fact, the story in a way is a rewriting of W.B. Yeats's "The Stolen Child", a poem that has always fascinated Mary O'Donnell. The title itself with its shift from stolen child to stolen man anticipates the various references to fairies and the fairy world that remarkably characterise the story. The "blackthorn hedges on the fort" (107) opening the second paragraph have a deep symbolic resonance as the tree was believed to be inhabited by fairies and anticipate the climax of the fairy dance that engages the protagonist in the final part of the story. This is gradually but also more insistently introduced, first with the "fairy fort in the field" he sees from his window (113). The use of alliteration in a way foreshadows the mysterious music he

hears, “a ceilí [...] in full swing right in the house”, “Music you could dance to” (117), eerily appearing, disappearing and reappearing. Like the changeling in Yeats’s poem, O’Donnell has the protagonist go “with a fairy, hand in hand” to counteract a world “too full of weeping”. The final paragraph displays a crescendo of intensity, “Happily he dances, being wanted”, he is “included”, then “possessed” (119) and Yeats’s world full of weeping becomes a thing of the past, as “He will weep no more” (119).

In line with the recurring presence of writers and artists in her fiction, Mary O’Donnell has a writer also at the centre of “Peach Jam”, coming and going to and from an artists’ colony known as “Retreat by the Loch”. Deborah is haunted by the memory of her first love she is now trying to trace back, on Facebook, driving past his house and finally sending him a postcard “after forty years” (89).

Other ghosts haunt Dervla, the academic who in “Lifting Skin” is obsessed with the perspective of ageing and decides to undergo cosmetic surgery, and so takes a “four-month break from the Department of Celtic Studies” (187), where her interests involve the Crone in Irish literature, the feminine archetype she does not want to become. Emphasis is given at the opening of the story to the fashionable dark sunglasses she wears in self-protection during recovery, especially to avoid “misguided interest” (187) in her healing face. Therefore, she avoids crowded places and retreats to the isolated Neptune Bay where nobody can see her face and ask questions. Notably, the isolated beach is described as “deadly and haunted” (191), in the same way as the haunting obsession with ageing persecutes her. And in her attention to language, Dervla considers the language of medicine that is “like a piece of elastic” when applied to women. “An abortion was called an ‘operation’ [...] but a facelift was always called a ‘procedure’ ” (190). Her “illusion of youthfulness” (188) clashes with the abuse of domestic violence she is an involuntary witness to, as the young mother, now her neighbour, asks for help: “The woman from next door practically fell into the hall, bubbles of blood beading a split lower lip. Her mouth opened soundlessly for a moment, revealing blood-vivid teeth. The nose was skewed sideways and also bled. The skin beneath one eye was livid though not broken” (193). Her choice of plastic surgery and the scars it leaves are set vis-à-vis the wounds and scars, visible and invisible, in the young woman’s face, who wonders with “a puzzled concerned expression” (196) if the same thing has happened to Dervla too.

The issue of ageing is dealt with more directly in a group of stories in which Mary O’Donnell displays the variety of practical and emotional problems related to ageing women. In “The Capital of Outer Mongolia” the traditional Sunday dinner gathering all the women in the family provides the opportunity to reveal both the burden of the past in a dysfunctional family and the masked aggressiveness of the elderly mother, Honoria, subtly acting as a powerful matriarch behind her apparent helplessness. Geography obsesses Honoria, who is trying to complete the paper’s crosswords puzzle and is ready to spoil her daughter’s Christmas travel plans in the same way as she forced her asthmatic late husband to go to the desert. On the other hand, the past haunts her daughter Kay, “ambushing her with memories” (56). The lexical choice suggesting battles, soldiers, military operations, underlies Honoria as a tyrannical mother who “never cared much for motherhood or marriage” (56). Kay recalls the violence exerted on the younger adopted daughter Sorcha, now living in Australia, as far as possible from the family, the “slappings and beatings, the cane that hung from a hook in the kitchen” aimed at “disciplining Sorcha” (57). Using the medical metaphor of “an unhealed atrial scar”, Mary O’Donnell emphasises Kay’s sense of guilt as a powerless spectator, a “bystander” (57). Honoria’s monstrous maternity falls back on her only natural daughter, now in charge both of her mother and her aunt Rose.

An ideal link connects “The Capital of Outer Mongolia” to “Coins for the Ferryman”, in a way a response to the previous story with reference to the responsibility and commitment involved in taking care of an ageing ailing mother. Like Kay, Laura is a bystander, in that the story opens with her dog’s casual discovery of a corpse in the area where she usually has breakfast. The body frames the text, appearing with particular relevance at the beginning and end of the story. Within this frame, attention is cast on Laura’s thread of thoughts, reflections and worries, while she indulges on her only moment of peace in her day. The choice of the neutral word “body” rather than “corpse” and the use of short sentences and of alliteration emphasise the emotional distance Laura enacts, in particular in a verbless sentence: “Upstream, a weir, where a heron would wait on a rock in the silver-gray cascade” (216). This stylistic choice makes the weir a catalyst, a metaphorical barrier between the accidental discovery of the body and her everyday commitments. She reflects on the trial of dementia and on the burden that is assigned to her, the “plastic aprons, gloves and never-ending nappies” considering elder care in the oxymoronic “senile infantile” (219). We realise she has deliberately stopped giving her mother her medication in an attempt “to accelerate the natural process” (220). Like Kay in “The Capital of Outer Mongolia”, Laura is alone, her siblings having settled down abroad, her brother interestingly in Australia (220) like Sorchia. Reproducing the ancient tradition of placing coins on the eyes of the deceased to pay Charon the ferryman to cross the river Styx, Laura enacts on the body the ceremony she hopes to set up for her mother soon.

In “Edna” the elderly lady is not sick, she is independent and moves freely around the city, but she is certainly lonely and eager to fill the void she feels. The Dublin cityscape with specific references to locations and streets provides a backdrop for her activity, as she walks the Dublin streets looking for homeless people, especially young ones, offering them help in terms of money, food, water, a word of understanding and comfort, and a hug: “Without thinking, she hugs the girl, who looks about the same age as her daughter Flo, currently living in the Middle East” (139). However, Edna unexpectedly discovers that her material and physical generosity can damage somebody’s precarious balance. The young man she approaches in Nassau Street is one of the invisible people and his verbal and physical reaction to her touch is a shock: “he bucks to his knees and pushes her hard in the stomach. ‘Don’t TOUCH me or I’ll fuckin’ lamp ye. Don’t fuckin’ TOUCH me!’” (152). She has invaded or broken his private space.

As an alternative to ageing, Mary O’Donnell faces the loneliness of disability in “Wheelchair Plaza”. Jon’s opening sentence “You could say I had another life once. No, twice. No, many times. Another life in another place” (198) introduces his reflections on life and casts a backward look at the life he used to lead in Hong Kong before a car crash made his life “a fuckin’ disaster” (206). The story displays with tender bitterness but also humour a day in Jon’s life at the centre of occupational therapy he attends regularly, giving attention both to the disabled person and his caretaker, his sister Maud.

O’Donnell exploits a different trend in “The Creators”, a story that mixes ecological concerns and the conventions of dystopian narrative and that recalls her early story “The Deathday Party” published in her first collection *Strong Pagans* in 1991. The story is set in Scotland, or rather in Caledonia, in the twenty-second century – reference is made to “the previous century, around 2082” (136). The increase of population and the consequences of climate change and global warming have radically transformed the world, where “sheep are now bred exclusively in Greenland and Antarctica”, and the protagonist Alistair teaches his class of “perspiring children” “in the heat of January” (122). Subtle references to George Orwell and Margaret Atwood create an entire world of entrapment and control, where the best-looking women are randomly selected to work in the Garden Isles, namely Mull, Iona and Lewis, where “Everything planted

and grown [...] is for our consumption" (123). Fiona, Alistair's wife, is chosen to be sent to work in the Garden Isles, and "There is no opt-out clause" (120) in a dictatorial social frame. The story sheds light on Fiona and Alistair's last evening together, realising that having a child is the only way for her to be released from the Garden Isles: "Liabilities such as pregnant women are immediately dismissed from the Garden Isles, returned to Mainland" (134). Notably, the choice to use the Simple Present Tense forms emphasises the immediacy of a perspective future and the risks involved in change.

Not unlike "The Creators", "The Space between Louis and Me" is a sort of dystopic story, in which the first-person narrator, who works in an addiction centre, acquires a virtual man after reading an ad in the paper. Exploiting special visual devices, Louis materializes before her in virtual reality: "Every pore of his skin, every small hair behind the shells of his ears, his beautiful neck, his startling golden-brown eyes were *real*" (103). The streak of humour that underlies the story does not dispel the deep sadness at the heart of a narrative centred on the protagonist's loneliness and impending ageing: "Now I am fifty-one and feel the downturn of my life, the change that comes the high days have passed [...] Now I really need art" (99). Louis is in fact the art she is looking for.

Walking Ghosts is a rich and complex collection of stories that deserve attention and consideration in the variety and diversity of topics, themes, images, setting and narrative strategies, highlighting the protean quality of Mary O'Donnell's writing. The collection displays continuity and cross-connections with previous stories in the attention to the constant changes in Irish society and to the effects they may have on individual sensitivity. The time span from the past of the 1970s to the future of a dystopian world provides a mirror for the complexity of the present, in which ghosts continue to walk. Readers familiar with Mary O'Donnell's work will find a new challenge in this volume, while new readers will have the opportunity to approach one of Ireland's most resonant voices.

Giovanna Tallone

Evelyn Conlon, Rebecca Pelan, eds, *After the Train. Irishwomen United and a Network of Change*, Dublin, University College Dublin Press, 2025, pp. 151. €30.00. ISBN: 9781068502309.

After the Train is a collection of essays that read like stories. And as a matter of fact, the volume is at the crossroads between the history of the feminist organization Irishwomen United and the individual stories of the women who actively took part in a process of change in the social and political life of women in Ireland from the 1970s onwards.

Edited by writer and activist Evelyn Conlon and academic Rebecca Pelan, *After the Train* is a work with multiple purposes, as it follows the steps of actions taken and goals reached in a celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of Irishwomen United, with the aim to retrieve voices that deserve to be remembered. Not by chance is the book dedicated "To the Unknown Woman", the woman who was oppressed by social and ethical mores, the woman who tried to change the status quo, and the woman who can now appreciate and enjoy egalitarian reforms.

The title *After the Train* makes open reference to the "contraceptive train" event in May 1971, when a group of activists of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement travelled from Connolly Station in Dublin to Belfast to buy contraceptives which were illegal in the Republic.

The subtitle *Network of Change* highlights change as a keyword in the determination to face and take action in issues ranging from contraception to rape, to equal job opportunities and pay, to welfare for unmarried mothers, to gay rights.

The volume is divided into three parts, opening with a page of "Glossary of Terms" including data about Irish political life, public organizations and names such as Gay Byrne, the host of *The Late Late Show* that provided visibility to the activities of Irishwomen United. A "Foreword" by former President Mary McAleese is followed by two Introductions by each of the editors, and by eighteen essays, some of which are individual works, others the result of collective writing. The brevity of many of the essays suggests that the editors have chosen to offer as wide a range of voices as possible, rather than allow a lower number of contributors to write at great length. The result is a mosaic of views, personal accounts, critical opinions, first-person testimonials and recollections, sometimes with an academic stance, but mostly with impressionistic individual perspectives.

The "Foreword" by Mary McAleese points out how different the position of women in Ireland is in 2025 if compared to 1975, the year which saw the beginning of Irishwomen United, highlighting the different backgrounds of the women involved but especially the commitment and the effort made to make change possible. She also describes her own role as legal advisor of the Campaign for Homosexual Law Reform as well as the advice she was requested to give when setting up the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, but in particular, following the volume's subtitle, she praises "the network of women and groups who changed this country in so many ways" (xiii) as "evidence of what can be achieved when women gather to change the world" (xiv).

"Untold Spark" is the evocative title Evelyn Conlon gives to her "Introduction", in which a detailed account of personal experiences highlights her "feminist awakening" (6) and her engagement in contraception programmes as well as the establishment of a *crèche* at Maynooth University; her contribution opens and closes with the Sunday afternoon meetings at 12 Pembroke Street, which she considers "monumental education" (4), and references to such meetings recur regularly in the various essays. She makes clear that the present volume is intended as "one step in the acknowledgement, remembrance, and celebration of those who went before" (7) thus pointing out the collective enterprise of the work done over the years.

In the second "Introduction" Rebecca Pelan reproduces the volume's title, "After the Train. Irishwomen United and a Network of Change", starting with a detailed presentation of the journal of Irishwomen United *Banshee*, printed between 1976 and 1977. The explanation of the choice of the title is engaging, in that the intention was to reverse the original negative connotation of the screeching woman announcing death and provide it with a "powerful meaning" (9), namely giving voice to women. Pelan lists the well-known various forms of exclusion exerted on women in Ireland, from the marriage bar, to the unavailability of contraception, to male-only institutionalised customs. Interestingly, she highlights a parallel event that took place in Brisbane in 1965, when two women "chained themselves to the brass foot-rail of the public bar of Brisbane's Regatta Hotel, in protest at the exclusion of women from public bars" (13), thus anticipating part of the action taken by Irishwomen United in Ireland. Pelan describes the contents of the Charter of demands that was republished in all the issues of *Banshee*, which in a way is a sort of constitution of the organization besides stating clear objectives.

The eighteen essays presented here do not follow a specific chronological, thematic or alphabetical order and in their diversity they are all quite short, with very few exceptions that however do not extend over five or six pages. It will be virtually impossible to take all essays into account in detail in this context, but the variety of related texts is extensive, each of them giving voice to individual perspectives.

For example, several discuss among the various initiatives the occupation of the Federal Union of Employers (FUE) offices, an event that academic and activist Ursula Barry describes as “part of a campaign to force a backdown by government over a derogation of EU equal pay directives” (24). In a similar way, trade unionist Anne Speed recalls her participation in *The Late Late Show* when she pointed out she “had never met a low-paid man lower paid than a low-paid woman” (113). Equal pay was one of the big issues of those years, marked by other provocative radical actions, such as the invasion of the Forty Foot in Sandycove, a traditional male bathing place, or painting graffiti in the men-only Fitzwilliam Lawn Tennis Club, or the request to be served pints of beer in pubs, all of these challenging and openly defying an apparently unchangeable status quo.

Contraception was one of the major concerns of Irishwomen United, and probably one of the most important steps was the Contraception Action Programme (CAP) that allowed for the equal distribution of sexual knowledge and access to contraception for women in Ireland. Perhaps the most daring initiative was a shop selling contraceptives openly and illegally, together with a stall that moved in working-class areas with the same purpose.

A collective essay presents the various steps that led to the opening of the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, with a first meeting in July 1977 and a “significant amount of hard work and research” (34), along with specific training, often emotionally demanding; as Ger Moane, activist in feminist and LGBTQ+ politics, writes, “Our first task was to educate ourselves about rape and sexual assault [...] it was a hidden crime, rarely reported, and rarely prosecuted” (35), and concern with rape within marriage was part of the project. The text reports the contributions of several people who offered support, acknowledging their names and activities, from the automated answering machine made available by Charles Haughey, to the appointment of Anne O'Donnell as administrator, to the assistance of Garda Stations, to the everyday work of volunteers, such as Rebecca Pelan herself. In a similar line, Anne Connolly's essay “The Well Woman Centre” reconstructs the difficulties of making clinics a reality with a full range of contraception services and assistance in the possibility of abortion, facing the obstacles of having no public awareness and no doctors: “When the Well Woman Centre opened its doors in the basement of 63 Lower Leeson Street, Dublin, in late January 1978, it was met with a deafening silence” (39). Again, the role of media and of Gay Byrne in particular gave the Well Woman Centre “a strong platform” (43) for visibility.

Mary Higgins relates the development of Cherish in her contribution “Children Have Equal Rights in Society Here (Cherish)”, established in 1972 by a group of single mothers. The name Cherish was taken from the 1916 Proclamation which declared that Ireland would “cherish all the children of the nation equally”. This was not the case in Ireland in 1972, where the stigma of single pregnant women and of illegitimacy was a reality. Campaign led to change that occurred with the introduction of the unmarried mother's allowance and the abolition of the status of illegitimacy; however, the essay describes sharply but lucidly the conditions of pregnant unmarried girls in both Catholic and Protestant-run institutions, the lack of options and choices except concealment or adoption. Higgins recounts the uneasy task of providing some form of shelter and assistance, having no experience but with stubborn determination (72). Mary Robinson became President of Cherish in 1973 and continued her work with the organisation until she was elected President of Ireland in 1990.

A number of contributions deal with the formation and development of women's publishing houses as well as women's studies programmes at third level education. Writer Mary Rose Callaghan, for example, describes the beginnings and growth of Arlen House in her essay “Arlen House: A Pioneer of Irish Publishing”. Callaghan recounts the determination of the founding

member Catherine Rose in publishing her own book, *The Female Experience: The Story of the Woman Movement in Ireland*, considered unmarketable by Mercier in Cork. This was in 1975, “Arlen House was born” (31). Historian, activist and Dominican nun Margaret Mac Curtain and poet Eavan Boland had their books published by Arlen, which at first devoted its attention mainly to politics and social affairs, education, history and biography, later to extend its interest to fiction too. Inspired by the London based Virago Press, Arlen House started to bring back to print writers like Kate O’Brien and Nora Hoult among others, thus giving new life to women writers risking oblivion. On the other hand, Mary Flanagan and Marianne Hendron focus on the need felt at the time “to empower women by making information more widely available” (63), which led to the Irish Feminist Information (IFI) training course and then to Women’s Community Press. Their essay “Remembering Feminist Publishing of the 1980s” points out that “IFI can be seen to be a continuation of IWU’s assertion [...] that information is power” (63) and their radical publications included lesbian and gay books at a time when homosexuality was considered a crime. The essay mentions the setting up of Attic Press in 1984 “as an imprint of IFI” (64), and the topic is discussed by Mary Paul Keane, who had worked for Wolfhound Press, in “Attic Press: A Reflection”. Keane contextualises the foundation of Attic Press at a difficult time for Ireland and for Irish women, and yet it was a brave and challenging enterprise, which like Women in Community Publishing devoted its energy also to training thanks to the Government Training and Funding Agency: “We were successful and trained women in the art and skills of community publishing” (78). The publication of *The Best of Nell*, a collection of Nell McCafferty’s articles for *The Irish Times*, with an introduction by Eavan Boland, was followed by titles on history and social sciences before casting attention to contemporary women’s fiction. Notable names in this respect are Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Evelyn Conlon, Melissa Murray and Linda Cullen.

Irishwomen United had a crucial role in decriminalizing homosexuality, and some essays deal with lesbian and gay rights as discussed in the Pembroke Street meetings on Sunday afternoons. These meetings represented regular appointments for the attendees, provided a forum for discussion regarding contraception, divorce, abortion, for projects and practical action, but were also an opportunity for developing friendships or same sex relationships. Recollections of the place are vivid, Evelyn Conlon defines the room “not strictly a confined space, more a crossroads, where minds met, argued, planned, revolted and moved forward” (3); Ger Moane has aural and visual memories: “We could hear the buzz before we entered the room. It was packed with women – sitting on chairs, on the ground, on the windowsills” (81); and Betty Purcell highlights the emotional side of such meetings: “Butterflies in the tummy; a sense of mission. The world was really changing, and we were the makers of that change” (99).

Other essays shed light on the entertainment provided by the Women’s Disco (Joni Crone), on the crucial significance of feminist readings (Mary O’Donnell), or on the personal development that underlies most of the testimonials, such as in Sandra Stephen’s “Fabulously Blasphemous: Finding Myself in Irishwomen United”.

The volume closes with the reproduction of the “Charter of Irishwomen United” in Appendix I, and a “Chronology of Changes Relevant to Women in Ireland 1861-2024” in Appendix II, followed by a detailed bibliography. A set of iconographic material is inserted in the book, reproductions of posters and placards, of leaflets announcing public meetings, of stamps issued to mark 1975 as International Women’s Year, of *Banshee* magazine covers, of photos of demonstrations or pickets, most of them from private archives and published here for the first time. This adds value to a collection whose aim is not to forget the passionate work of

Irishwomen United to provide a forum for discussion but also for concrete and practical action in making at least some form of change possible. After fifty years, *After the Train* represents an apt celebration of all the efforts made and the dreams come true.

Giovanna Tallone

Luca Sarti, *Voci di Erin. Il fairy tale irlandese nel terzo millennio fra identità, tradizione e nuove narrazioni*, Napoli, UniorPress, 2024, pp. 298. ISBN: 978-88-6719-310-3.

Recensire questo volume di Luca Sarti è per me quasi un atto dovuto, per almeno due ragioni. Innanzitutto per la tematica affrontata, dal momento che coincide in buona parte con quello che è stato il mio principale campo di ricerca, a partire dai tempi del dottorato e fino a pochi anni fa. In secondo luogo perché l'autore chiama direttamente in causa il frutto più concreto di quel lavoro, la mia monografia sul *fairy tale* irlandese, nella quale, fra l'altro, avevo proposto una ridefinizione di tale genere nel più ampio contesto della tradizione narrativa irlandese.

Voci di Erin è un'opera costituita da quattro parti ben distinte, ognuna dotata di una propria specificità. Tuttavia, come suggerisce il titolo stesso, c'è un elemento che fa da collante a tutto il testo ed è l'Irlanda, anzi Erin. Più precisamente, come si evince dal sottotitolo, l'interesse dell'autore è focalizzato sulla tradizione narrativa irlandese sotto le specie, per così dire, del *fairy tale*. Questo genere – che viene reinterpretato, alla luce della mia sopra citata proposta teorica, come una categoria onnicomprensiva dei racconti in cui si narra di incontri e/o scontri fra piano definito e piano indefinito (soprannaturale) della realtà – assurge a emblema e punto di convergenza degli altri due concetti che indirizzano e sostanziano l'intera opera: *Irishness* e *storytelling*. Sulla base di questi tre pilastri l'autore imbastisce un complesso percorso dall'indubbio valore scientifico, non fosse altro che per aver colmato una lacuna: in tanti, infatti – compreso il sottoscritto – si erano “concentrati sul periodo che intercorre tra il Medioevo e il Novecento”, ma mancava, quanto meno in Italia, una “mappatura in forma sistematica delle storie raccontate, trascritte e soprattutto riscritte a più di cento anni di distanza dal famoso *Revival*” (11), come rimarcato da Rossella Ciocca nella Prefazione.

Al libro di Sarti, tuttavia, si possono ascrivere anche altri meriti, non ultimo la passione genuina con cui l'oggetto di ricerca viene esaminato e sviscerato, una passione che l'autore non cela e con cui cerca anzi di contagiare il lettore, tanto da avvertire l'urgenza di allegare al testo un'appendice fotografica intitolata “Un'estate irlandese nel Munster”, una suggestiva e inattesa carrellata di immagini che, nel mostrarci alcuni scorci di un preciso angolo d'Irlanda, sembrano volerci suggerire quanto sia intimo e prezioso il legame che spesso (ma non sempre) si crea tra uno studioso e il contesto nel quale e/o per il quale conduce la sua ricerca.

Ma riavvolgiamo il nastro. Nella breve Introduzione, che si apre significativamente con una citazione dello *storyteller* contemporaneo Eddie Lenihan (protagonista assoluto del terzo capitolo), l'autore sintetizza il contenuto, i paradigmi e le finalità dell'opera, ribadendo la necessità di colmare un gap a suo avviso presente negli *Irish Studies* e nei *Fairy Tale Studies*. Di conseguenza conclude: “Lo scopo principale di questa monografia risiede quindi nel tentativo di offrire un contributo che indagli sui motivi che, nel terzo millennio, spingono tutta una serie di scrittori e scrittrici a trascrivere o rielaborare, raccogliere e (ri)narrare gli *Irish fairy tales*” (18).

Tale scopo viene specificamente perseguito nella seconda parte del libro. Nella prima, intitolata “Il *fairy tale* nell’Irlanda otto-novecentesca: questioni di *Irishness*”, Sarti si impegna a costruire e chiarire le basi teoretiche del suo discorso, prima ripercorrendo la storia d’Irlanda secondo la prospettiva dell’*Irishness* e dell’ultrascolare relazione intessuta con la madrepatria britannica, poi soffermandosi sul Celtic Revival e dunque sul ruolo svolto dalla letteratura e dal folklore nel processo di emancipazione culturale e politica irlandese.

Il primo capitolo, “*Eire*, la colonia fantasma”, ci introduce nell’acceso dibattito concernente lo status di colonia dell’Irlanda e la conseguente opportunità di riconoscerla come oggetto di studio dei *Postcolonial Studies*. Con la sua documentata disamina, Sarti mette chiaramente in evidenza come l’Irlanda sia un’“entità problematica per la teoria postcoloniale” (28) e sente anzi la necessità di ridefinire la questione in termini di “colonia fantasma”, riferendosi da un lato alla “‘trasparenza’ dell’Irlanda [...] alla sua assenza in tante teorie postcoloniali”, dall’altro alla “sua posizione ‘liminale’, al confine tra due ‘mondi’ – uno ‘anglo’ e uno ‘celtico’ ” (36-37). Ad ogni modo, dal paragrafo specificamente dedicato alle vignette satiriche pubblicate nel corso del XIX secolo sulla rivista *Punch* (43-55) emerge un’idea fortemente derisoria e discriminatoria degli irlandesi, raffigurati, di volta in volta – come si evince dalle illustrazioni a corredo del testo – nelle vesti di scimmie, maiali, piovre, vampiri e mostri. La reazione a tanta acredine si riassume, secondo Sarti, in un’opera di ribaltamento dei pregiudizi inglesi, che si concretizza nel cosiddetto “Celtic Revival”, a cui è dedicata l’ultima sezione del primo capitolo (55-69), e che consiste sostanzialmente in un recupero e rivalutazione delle radici celtiche: “Trasformando la loro immagine negativa di gente superstiziosa, non evoluta e irrazionale, essi [i revivalisti] costruirono quindi un’immagine positiva, autodefinendosi un popolo religioso, tradizionale ed emotivo. Se discendere dai Celti era per gli inglesi una ‘colpa’, per gli irlandesi diventò un tratto distintivo, una qualità, addirittura un ‘vanto’ ” (57). Di fronte al “dilemma significativo”, tipico di una realtà coloniale, della lingua da utilizzare per dare corpo a tale opera di riscossa culturale, l’adozione dell’inglese da parte di alcuni autori – primo fra tutti Yeats – non si configurò come un tradimento, ma come la scelta strategica di chi voleva raggiungere un pubblico più ampio. Inoltre, richiamandosi a due voci autorevoli della teoria postcoloniale quali Homi Bhabha e Benedict Anderson, Sarti sottolinea come, tra fine Ottocento e inizio Novecento, in Irlanda sia avvenuto l’incontro/scontro tra due mondi che dà vita a “uno spazio ibrido, un ‘terzo spazio’, che corrisponde a quello anglo-irlandese” (63). Un concetto di terzo spazio che sarà ripreso più avanti.

Che cosa fu effettivamente il Celtic Revival, almeno dal punto di vista folklorico-letterario, lo scopriamo nel secondo capitolo, “Protagonisti di altri mondi, protagonisti del passato”. Il capitolo si apre con un *excursus* teorico che si sofferma sulla definizione e classificazione dei generi della narrativa orale – mito, leggenda, fiaba, racconto popolare – attraverso un esame dei contributi di diversi studiosi quali Malinowski, Thompson, Bascom, Zipes, Tatar, Teverson (71-79). Senonché, ravvisata la fluidità della materia e tenendo conto della peculiarità del repertorio irlandese, l’autore opta per la già menzionata revisione terminologica, in virtù della quale tutta la tradizione narrativa identificabile nella dialettica definito/indefinito viene ricompresa sotto l’ombrello del *fairy tale* (79-85). Coerentemente con tale scelta, il sottoparagrafo seguente (85-94) è incentrato sul concetto di *fairy* e sulla genesi degli esseri soprannaturali irlandesi per eccellenza, i *fairies* appunto, a partire da uno specifico studio di Massimo Conese, che si richiama a sua volta a quanto espresso in merito da Yeats nella sua prima antologia folklorica. Il secondo capitolo si chiude proprio con una sintetica, ma a mio avviso esaustiva, rassegna delle principali antologie di racconti della tradizione orale irlandese pubblicate a cavallo fra Ottocento e Novecento (94-106). Dall’opera pionieristica – e controversa – di Thomas Crofton Croker fino ai frutti più

maturi del Celtic Revival, rappresentati dalla triade Yeats-Lady Gregory-Stephens, passando per Kennedy, Lady Wilde e gli statunitensi McAnally e Curtin, Sarti delinea un quadro esemplare dell'incontro tra folklore e letteratura in Irlanda che funge da "punto di partenza, termine di paragone indispensabile per l'analisi delle raccolte di *fairy tales* pubblicate nel terzo millennio" (106).

La seconda parte del libro, intitolata "Il *fairy tale* irlandese nel XXI secolo: fra trascrizioni e rielaborazioni", si suddivide in ulteriori due capitoli: "Preservare e diffondere storie locali nell'era globale", forse il capitolo che più mi ha intrigato, incentrato com'è su un tema, lo *storytelling*, oggi più che mai attuale – ma troppo spesso travisato o invocato a sproposito – e su una figura decisamente affascinante, lo *storyteller* Eddie Lenihan, e "Nuove narrazioni per nuove generazioni", che costituisce probabilmente il contributo più originale dell'opera.

La prima sezione della seconda parte (109-123), soffermandosi sull'egemonia esercitata da Walt Disney e sull'influsso che le sue trasposizioni cinematografiche hanno avuto sulla ricezione, più o meno distorta e banalizzata, della tradizione fiabesca europea, si rivela come un elogio indiretto della genuinità delle fiabe irlandesi, che a detta dell'autore sono state preservate dalla disneyficazione imperante – salvo che per il caso di *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*, film Disney del 1959 ispirato appunto a un *fairy tale* irlandese – e forse, proprio in virtù della loro singolarità, "faticano a uscire dai propri confini e a conquistare il 'grande pubblico'" (123), mentre continuano a riscuotere successo in patria, a dimostrazione di una forte identificazione, tuttora presente, fra *storytelling* e *Irishness*. Tale aspetto emerge con forza nella sezione seguente, dedicata alla "magia dello *storytelling* orale" – concetto che viene qui opportunamente esaminato nel suo significato primario – e alla sua incarnazione più emblematica, lo *seanchaí* Eddie Lenihan (124-133). A proposito di incarnazione, è interessante notare come l'innata narratività irlandese sia materialmente identificata da Sarti nel castello di Blarney e nella sua "pietra dell'eloquenza", un'attrazione turistica che è anche un simbolo della "passione e la predilezione per lo *storytelling*", nonché della "credenza negli esseri fatati, la cosiddetta *fairy faith*" (130), ingrediente essenziale di tale narratività.

Ma è appunto nella biografia e nell'opera instancabile di Eddie Lenihan che l'autore riconosce l'essenza stessa della narrazione orale e del suo radicamento nella storia e nella cultura irlandesi. Identificato innanzitutto come "un raro esempio di conservatore di storie", a Lenihan viene anche attribuito il merito di essere "un preservatore di simboli 'naturali', di luoghi del paesaggio irlandese ritenuti 'sacri'", tanto da riuscire a far deviare il tracciato di un'autostrada pur di non far abbattere un biancospino che, secondo la tradizione, era abitato da *fairies* (132-133). All'interno di una smisurata "produzione crossmediale", che annovera libri, audiocassette, CD, DVD, documentari e podcast che hanno l'obiettivo di mantenere vivo e rendere fruibile a un ampio pubblico uno dei più ricchi patrimoni narrativi del nostro pianeta, Sarti si focalizza su *Meeting the Other Crowd* (134-140), un volume del 2003 che comprende *fairy tales* raccolti in circa tre decenni. La scelta non è casuale, in quanto, già dal titolo, quest'antologia si presenta come il racconto di un incontro con il mondo indefinito dei *fairies*, un mondo parallelo "oscurato dall'avanzamento tecnologico, nonché dalla presenza di forme di espressione culturale egemoniche" (136). Dall'accurata descrizione dell'opera emerge chiaramente come essa si ponga in stretta continuità con quanto fatto un secolo prima sotto gli auspici del Celtic Revival, senza contare che nei *fairy tales* raccolti da Lenihan è possibile ravvisare quel "lato oscuro" (140-148) che li contraddistingue rispetto agli standard fiabeschi impostisi da un secolo a questa parte. Sarti coglie anche l'occasione per ritornare sul concetto di "terzo spazio", ovvero sulla natura ibrida di un'antologia che deriva tanto dall'incontro fra oralità e scrittura, quanto dalla fusione linguistica e culturale fra inglese e irlandese, tema a cui viene dedicato un apposito sottoparagrafo (148-158).

Nell'ultima sezione del capitolo, giocando sull'ambivalenza dell'aggettivo (*ever*)green, l'autore sottolinea sia l'intimo legame dei *fairy tales* irlandesi con la natura e con il paesaggio nei quali

sono ambientati, sia l'attualità del loro messaggio, in quanto veicoli di un approccio rispettoso e responsabile nei confronti del mondo naturale – anche se ritengo eccessivo parlare di “una concezione del mondo che è possibile definire ‘animistica’ ” (167). Infine, per restare al lato più contemporaneo dell'opera di Lenihan, vengono esaminate le sue “rimediazioni” della tradizione irlandese (164-168), ovvero il ricorso ai nuovi canali offerti dalla rivoluzione digitale per diffondere i suoi contenuti narrativi, così che questi da locali diventano sostanzialmente “glocali”.

Il quarto e ultimo capitolo si apre con un'estesa e approfondita analisi di una categoria specifica, i *retellings* per bambini, questi ultimi divenuti, già a partire dall'Ottocento, i destinatari privilegiati delle fiabe, benché in origine esse si rivolgessero a un pubblico adulto. L'autore evidenzia, richiamandosi all'idea genettiana di transtestualità, come quello fiabesco sia un *retelling* più complesso rispetto ad altri, dato che si fonda su “ ‘più’ ipotesi o un ipotesto che, generalmente, rappresenta il prodotto di una stratificazione di narrazioni piuttosto che di un singolo racconto ‘originale’ ”; si tratta in sostanza, per citare Cristina Bacchilega, di “testi che sono già ‘plurali’ perché in essi è possibile individuare più di un solo ipotesto” (171-172). Pertanto, al di là del pubblico di riferimento, le raccolte prese in esame permettono a Sarti di osservare in che modo una parte non trascurabile della tradizione irlandese viene preservata e tramandata alle nuove generazioni. Questo ci riconduce al concetto di *Irishness*, dal momento che è su tale caratteristica che si appunta l'attenzione dell'autore e che rende le fiabe in questione “alternative” rispetto a un canone ormai (purtroppo) consolidato. La selezione del materiale analizzato è fatta secondo criteri particolarmente stringenti, in modo da circoscrivere in maniera coerente e pragmatica l'ambito della ricerca: antologie eterogenee (cioè non monotematiche), pubblicate nel primo ventennio del XXI secolo, riguardanti esclusivamente l'Irlanda, ricche di illustrazioni e rivolte a bambini dai sette anni in su; di conseguenza, tutto ciò che non è rivisitazione di storie della tradizione e che non rispetta i suddetti criteri viene escluso. Ecco allora che “questa modesta indagine introduttiva” (177) si concentra su appena cinque antologie, due provenienti dalla Repubblica d'Irlanda, due dall'Ulster e una dalla diaspora (Stati Uniti), quasi a rimarcare la persistenza di quel “terzo spazio” anglo-irlandese (e americano) nel quale si conserva e rielabora il patrimonio narrativo dell'Isola di Smeraldo, per usare una perifrasi cara a Sarti.

L'*Irishness* dei racconti antologizzati viene sottolineata attraverso un'accurata “analisi (para) testuale” (180-197), dalla quale emerge come tanto gli elementi testuali – temi, luoghi, personaggi, registro linguistico – quanto quelli paratestuali, ovvero le illustrazioni (a colori) che accompagnano il testo, restituiscano al lettore la chiara impressione di storie profondamente radicate nel paesaggio e nella cultura irlandesi. Peraltro, ribadendo come questi racconti non sempre si concludano in maniera lieta e non sempre risultino appropriati a un pubblico infantile (198-203), Sarti evidenzia – ancora una volta – il loro essere alternativi al modello disneyano.

Il paragrafo dedicato ai “*retellings* per giovani adulti” permette all'autore di spostare il discorso dall'identità culturale a quella di genere, in particolare sulla condizione e la percezione della donna nelle fiabe, una cui svolta è individuata nella seconda metà del Novecento grazie a una serie di riscritture femministe. Queste ultime sono definite “contro-egemoniche”, in quanto sovvertono la fiaba di matrice disneyana, “non-normative”, dal momento che presentano trame, personaggi e prospettive che deviano dalla norma, e “attiviste”, poiché, come nota Bacchilega, si assumono il compito di combattere una visione egemonica non più accettabile e di suscitare nei destinatari una risposta adeguata, anche attraverso l'uso di più canali mediatici. Ne deriva così un fiorire di “fiabe postmoderne” in cui “si assiste a una ‘rottura’ dei confini di genere, inteso sia come ‘genere’ fiabesco, sia come ‘gender’ ” (210).

Esemplari in tal senso risultano gli adattamenti femministi della scrittrice irlandese Deirdre Sullivan, in particolare la “pluripremiata raccolta” *Tangleweed and Brine*, pubblicata nel

2017 e destinata, come detto, a un pubblico di giovani adulti. All'incrocio tra femminismo e postmodernismo, si tratta per Sarti di un'opera "che sovverte il modello fiabesco egemonico attraverso contenuto e forma – raffigurando personaggi ed epiloghi non-normativi e usando tecniche narrative e un linguaggio 'anticonvenzionali'. Le protagoniste di questi adattamenti, più o meno giovani, più o meno belle, sono donne consapevoli di essere 'intrappolate' in un mondo dominato da uomini" (214). Insomma, racconti adatti a stimolare riflessioni e prese di posizione rispetto a tematiche ancora troppo attuali quali discriminazione e violenza di genere. Tuttavia, quasi a dimostrazione della non canonicità del *fairy tale* irlandese, solo una delle storie incluse nella raccolta proviene dalla nostra isola: *Fair, Brown and Trembling*, ossia la variante irlandese della celeberrima Cenerentola, trascritta per la prima volta da Jeremiah Curtin, versione di cui l'autore si serve per illustrarne trama e caratteristiche principali (218-226). Il distacco dal canone fiabesco si denota nel lieto fine non atemporale ma inserito in una temporalità umana e sociale, la cornice realistica e non fantastica (con tanto di toponimi gaelici, come già evidenziato per altri *retellings*) e la presenza della religione (le due sorelle cattive vanno a messa).

Dopo "uno sguardo rapido" a due rivisitazioni di questa fiaba incluse in due delle cinque raccolte per bambini esaminate in precedenza, giungiamo finalmente al *retelling* di Deirdre Sullivan, che ha il merito (e il coraggio) di ribaltare la prospettiva e stravolgere il contenuto stesso del racconto. La protagonista non è più Trembling ma Fair, che protegge piuttosto che vessare la sorella minore, fino a sacrificarsi per salvarla dalla meschinità di un personaggio maschile che da eroe si trasforma in antagonista, nel quadro di una società di stampo chiaramente patriarcale. La narrazione è in seconda persona, così da favorire l'immedesimazione nella protagonista, e un'insolita (per una fiaba) enfasi è data all'interiorità di tutte e tre le sorelle, ciascuna dotata di una propria personalità. Appare pertanto giustificato da parte di Sarti affermare, sulla scorta di Lidia Curti, che "le ri-narrazioni incluse in *Tangleweed and Brine* possono definirsi 'pericolose' per il modello fiabesco egemonico, ma 'curative', vitamine per l'anima, per chi è alla ricerca di storie e personaggi 'diversi' in cui immedesimarsi" (240).

Nel brevissimo paragrafo conclusivo l'autore ribadisce il senso più profondo della sua ricerca, ossia l'aver messo in evidenza la diversità e persino l'unicità dei *fairy tales* presi in esame, capaci di dischiudere "universi da esplorare, labirinti da risolvere e un caleidoscopio di possibilità da considerare", riconnettendosi così, aggiungo io, all'idea di pluridimensionalità che aveva guidato a suo tempo il sottoscritto nella ridefinizione del genere *fairy tale*. Da ricercatore coscienzioso, Luca Sarti si congeda affermando che la sua opera va considerata come un punto di partenza e non di arrivo, tanto da suggerire lui stesso dove condurre ulteriori e più approfondite indagini.

L'ampiezza e l'eterogeneità della bibliografia giocano senz'altro a favore del rigore scientifico del testo, così come il fitto apparato di note, benché ce ne sia qualcuna che appare sovradimensionata e il cui contenuto avrebbe meritato di essere trattato più distesamente nel corpo del testo. Lo stile è piano e scorrevole e la lettura procede quasi sempre spedita e senza intoppi. Qualche refuso qua e là salta all'occhio – penso, ad esempio, alla nota 51 di p. 129, dove in una stessa riga troviamo "Glasglow" e "scozzesse"(!) – così come qualche scelta lessicale non sempre perspicua – mi chiedo, ad esempio, perché usare i termini "collezionista/i" e "collezionare" come sinonimi di "raccolgitore/i" e "raccolgiere", o perché non tradurre in italiano i nomi dei sovrani inglesi. Ciò che conta, tuttavia, è la certezza di essere di fronte a un'opera che per acume, originalità e raggio d'azione merita il plauso di tutti gli studiosi e i cultori di *Irishness* e *storytelling*, interessati o meno che siano al genere *fairy tale*.

Vito Carrassi

Riccardo Michelucci, *Il giorno in cui morì la musica. La strage della Miami Showband e l'Irlanda nel caos*, Milano, Milieu edizioni, 2025, pp. 233. € 18,00. ISBN 979-12-82104-06-7.

Una nuova fatica di Riccardo Michelucci, noto cultore della storia e dell'attualità irlandesi, che si legge come un libro giallo, pur essendo invece un saggio. Tratta, a cinquanta anni dai fatti, della strage ai danni della Miami Showband, il più popolare gruppo musicale irlandese di quel tempo, avvenuta nella notte del 31 luglio 1975 vicino al confine tra la Repubblica irlandese e la provincia britannica dell'Irlanda del Nord: tre dei cinque membri di quel gruppo musicale presenti in quel momento vennero sterminati da terroristi lealisti della Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) che erano però – come spesso accadeva – al tempo stesso membri del reggimento territoriale dell'Esercito britannico Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR), ed erano guidati da un capitano in incognito dei servizi di intelligence dello stesso Esercito britannico, Robert Nairac.

Michelucci illustra nei dettagli questa storia truce, rimasta non chiarita per decenni, avvenuta in uno degli anni più violenti dell'ultima fase (1969-1998) del conflitto anglo-irlandese (o *Troubles*, cioè 'guai' o 'triboli', eufemismo quasi vezzeggiativo già applicato al periodo 1919-1923 del medesimo conflitto), conflitto che l'autore illumina con efficacia nei suoi complessi elementi anche per un lettore che ne ignori tutto. E descrive magistralmente che cosa quello stesso gruppo musicale rappresentasse nella cultura musicale popolare irlandese delle *showbands* tra anni Sessanta e anni Settanta, e come la sua fine violenta affrettasse l'esaurirsi di quel fenomeno culturale e di costume.

L'autore ripercorre la formazione della cosiddetta 'banda di Glenanne' (dal luogo di una fattoria usata per tenere e distribuire all'occorrenza le armi e gli ordigni esplosivi), che apparentemente coincideva con la brigata del Mid-Ulster della UVF, molti dei cui membri erano al tempo stesso soldati dell'UDR dell'Esercito britannico, il reggimento territoriale delle Sei Contee che era stato creato nel 1970 per assorbire i membri dei disciolti B-Specials, la polizia ausiliaria volontaria unionista, sciolta per avere apertamente partecipato nel 1969 ai pogrom ai danni dei civili cattolici che avevano fatto riaprire il conflitto anglo-irlandese. L'UDR si dimostrò essere una toppa ben peggiore del buco, e ciò ovviamente per disegno, non per "deviazione" ("deviazioni" che, anche in altri contesti e paesi, in realtà non sono per nulla tali). La doppia appartenenza, a una banda di assassini lealisti impegnati nello sterminio di civili cattolici e a un reggimento ufficiale dell'Esercito britannico, favoriva naturalmente il prelievo di armi ed esplosivi dalle caserme dello stesso UDR, e il potersi muovere in uniformi dell'Esercito: "A partire dall'autunno del 1971 dalle caserme dell'UDR iniziarono a sparire enormi quantità di armi e munizioni. Spesso non era neanche necessario sottrarle dai depositi, perché molti soldati avevano l'abitudine di portarsele a casa e i controlli erano tutt'altro che rigorosi" (48).

Ma la 'banda di Glenanne' era molto di più della brigata locale della UVF, e dei locali soldati volontari territoriali dell'Esercito britannico. Infatti, come illustra Michelucci, i suoi esponenti di punta erano al tempo stesso informatori della squadra politica (Special Branch) della polizia ufficiale dell'Irlanda del Nord, il Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), e agenti locali del servizio segreto inglese MI5, guidati inoltre da ufficiali dei servizi segreti dell'Esercito britannico. Quanto all'MI5 (che sarebbe la sezione dello Special Intelligence Service – il servizio segreto civile - competente per la sicurezza interna del Regno Unito), esso era impegnato in quel momento in una faida riguardo alla giurisdizione sul conflitto anglo-irlandese con i colleghi dell'MI6 (la sezione del medesimo SIS invece competente per lo spionaggio all'estero), e la ideazione dei peggiori attentati di cui i lealisti della 'banda di Glenanne' furono i meri esecutori era parte anche di tale faida.

L'autore racconta le truci vicende di questo micidiale conglomerato nel corso degli anni, descrivendone le origini e i protagonisti, ma al tempo stesso ampliando il panorama e illustrando la fondazione e i primi delitti della UVF a opera (ma con incoraggiamento da parte di politici unionisti) di Gusto Spence nel 1966, e le parti in causa – come l'Ordine d'Orange – del secolare conflitto riaperto come conseguenza dei pogrom unionisti del 1969. Michelucci segue i comandanti della brigata del Mid-Ulster della UVF (prima Billy Hanna [1929-1975], poi Robin Jackson detto "lo Sciacallo" [1948-1998], che dopo avere assassinato il primo il 27 luglio 1975 gli succedette al comando) e i loro uomini più legati alle operazioni descritte, come il proprietario della fattoria e armeria di Glenanne, James Mitchell (1920-2008), riservista della polizia ufficiale RUC e al tempo stesso organizzatore di eccidi, e come Harris Boyle e i fratelli Somerville.

Viene ripercorsa la interminabile serie di delitti che vedevano vittime civili scelte soprattutto sulla base dell'odio confessionale o *sectarianism*, e assai raramente membri dello IRA (Esercito Repubblicano Irlandese) o in generale del movimento repubblicano, che erano in teoria quelli contro cui le bande armate lealiste combattevano. Non si trattava solo del tradizionale odio contro nazionalisti e cattolici degli unionisti dell'Irlanda del Nord, tenuto vivo e rinfocolato periodicamente dall'Ordine d'Orange e dai politici unionisti: era l'applicazione di una pratica contro-insurrezionale standard, impiegata di fatto universalmente dagli Stati contro ogni genere di insorti o guerriglieri in tutto il corso del ventesimo secolo, infischandosene delle leggi internazionali e dei diritti umani. In Inghilterra questa pratica, vista nelle guerre coloniali cui aveva partecipato, venne trasformata in sistema teorico dall'allora colonnello Frank Kitson in due volumi pubblicati a distanza di una decina d'anni, il secondo all'inizio dei nuovi *Troubles* in Irlanda¹. La teoria sosteneva che alle bande degli insorti si dovessero contrapporre "contro-bande" organizzate localmente, che era meglio figurassero come indipendenti dallo Stato coinvolto; e che, non potendosi ovviamente cancellare le cause del conflitto, per togliere l'acqua al pesce guerrigliero si dovesse colpire la popolazione civile presso cui i ribelli si basavano, di preferenza mediante le "contro-bande", in modo che la popolazione (in questo caso quella nazionalista e cattolica dell'Irlanda del nord-est), terrorizzata ed esasperata, smettesse di fornire rifugio o di appoggiare gli insorti. Non ci si meraviglia quindi che chi passava al vaglio i candidati a diventare membri dello Ulster Defence Regiment fossero la squadra politica della RUC e la intelligence militare britannica della provincia, e non è quindi casuale che la maggior parte dei soldati dello stesso reggimento fossero al contempo membri di gruppi terroristici lealisti. Non è nemmeno strano che le stesse bande armate lealiste fossero occultamente dirette, tramite infiltrazione il più delle volte accettata dai lealisti stessi o almeno dai loro capi, dalla intelligence militare britannica, dalla squadra politica della RUC e dalle due sezioni del servizio segreto inglese. Il nostro autore finge meraviglia, a scopo drammatico: e in effetti la propaganda dello Stato britannico, amplificata dai mass media inglesi e dalla maggior parte delle agenzie di stampa (anche se in modo meno totalitario di quanto sia avvenuto in tutto l'Occidente dalla caduta del muro di Berlino), presentava il conflitto come uno scontro religioso tra folli terroristi repubblicani e altrettanto folli terroristi lealisti. Lo stesso Stato britannico vi figurava soltanto come mediatore e forza d'ordine la cui presenza impediva che tali folli si scannassero a vicenda e che scannassero l'intera popolazione. La medesima propaganda negava con assoluta certezza che vi potesse essere collusione alcuna tra gli organi dello Stato e i terroristi lealisti. Un simile sospetto (per quanto ben fondato) non poteva che essere frutto della propaganda dei guerriglieri repubblicani, anche quando persone che con i repubblicani irlandesi non avevano nulla a che fare, come alcuni giornalisti più indipendenti

¹ Frank Kitson (1926-2024), *Gangs and Counter-gangs*, London, Barrie and Rockliff, 1960, e il più noto *Low Intensity Operations*, London, Faber and Faber, 1971.

e come i sacerdoti cattolici Raymond Murray e Denis Faul, individuavano i chiari indizi della collusione tra forze dello Stato e terroristi.

I delitti della 'banda di Glenanne' avevano di solito luogo nella zona di competenza della brigata del Mid-Ulster della UVF, a sud del lago Neagh, prevalentemente nelle contee di Tyrone, di Armagh e di Down. L'assassinio di una coppia di contadini cattolici di fronte al loro bambino di due anni, occorso nel 1973 dopo una lunga serie di altri omicidi settari di civili innocenti, spinse i due sacerdoti summenzionati "a denunciare apertamente l'inerzia delle autorità nell'individuare i responsabili di questi crimini" (55). Furono padre Murray e padre Faul a coniare il termine di "Triangolo della morte" per la zona in cui quest'onda di delitti aveva luogo, anche se solo in seguito poterono rendersi conto pienamente della collusione (non dell'inerzia) tra le autorità e gli assassini lealisti. Le uccisioni attribuibili alla 'banda di Glenanne' fino al massacro della Miami Showband furono molte decine, e continuarono anche in seguito, fino al cosiddetto processo di pace. Ma l'episodio più atroce prima del massacro di quei musicisti furono gli attentati di Dublino e Monaghan del 17 maggio 1974, il 'Venerdì nero' in cui quattro autobombe, tre nella capitale della Repubblica, una nella città vicino al confine, uccisero 33 civili, compresi vari bambini. A posteriori si sa che l'intera operazione, pur condotta dalla brigata del Mid-Ulster allora guidata da Billy Hanna, era stata ideata e organizzata dalla squadra politica della RUC e dai curatori inglesi della brigata lealista, cioè il servizio segreto militare e l'MI5. "Le bombe di venerdì 17 maggio facevano parte di un piano decisamente troppo sofisticato per essere state opera soltanto dei paramilitari lealisti" (94); e quegli ordigni esplosivi richiedevano competenze tecniche che la UVF non possedeva. Come nota Michelucci, l'attacco ebbe luogo durante lo sciopero generale unionista che pose fine agli accordi di Sunningdale, un tentativo di risoluzione pacifica del conflitto che anticipava gli accordi di Belfast del 1998: era naturale che settori dell'apparato statale britannico contrari agli accordi volessero contribuire a farli saltare. L'autore ripercorre e descrive vividamente molti dei delitti della 'banda di Glenanne', ponendoli sullo sfondo degli sviluppi politici, e dà giustamente molto spazio all'attentato di Dublino e Monaghan, sempre indagando sulla personalità delle vittime. Anche se da allora gli omicidi di civili cattolici continuarono, sembra che il capobanda Billy Hanna, che si riteneva un soldato, fosse sempre più a disagio per la morte di bambini nelle stragi di Dublino e Monaghan, tanto da essere considerato da alcuni suoi commilitoni un rischio per la sicurezza. E sembra che la sua opposizione alla pianificazione dell'attacco alla Miami Showband segnasse il suo destino, spingendo Robin Jackson – con ogni probabilità autorevolmente "consigliato" – a sbarazzarsi di lui pochi giorni prima dell'azione.

Un racconto parallelo che fa Michelucci è quello che riguarda la biografia di Stephen Travers, il bassista della Miami Showband, uno dei due sopravvissuti alla strage. Attraverso di lui fa la descrizione della scena musicale irlandese di quegli anni: tra le sette e ottocento *showbands* (gruppi musicali composti da un numero di musicisti tra gli otto e i sei) si aggiravano con successo nelle balere e negli auditori di tutta l'isola, suonando diversi generi di musica di intrattenimento moderna, dal rock'n'roll al country, dal soul al pop, facendo le cover di cantanti e di gruppi famosi, come Elvis o come i Beatles, o, come la Miami Showband, creando le proprie canzoni, evitando però ogni brano di musica con valenza politica (che erano invece il pane delle bande repubblicane e di quelle unioniste). Il grande successo di tali *showbands* in entrambe le parti dell'Irlanda divisa, con fenomeni di adorazione dei divi simili a quelli che avvenivano in altri paesi (in particolare il cantante della Miami Showband, Fran O'Toole, poi perito nella strage, aveva un grande numero di *groupies* adoranti), dipendeva anche proprio dal fatto che si trattava di musica d'evasione, non impegnata, che dal 1969 permetteva soprattutto agli spettatori delle Sei Contee di astrarsi dalla realtà terribile del conflitto. L'autore ripercorre

la storia della Miami Showband, la band più famosa dell'Isola, chiamata da alcuni "i Beatles irlandesi", i cui sei membri nel 1975, al tempo del massacro, erano Fran O'Toole (cantante e pianista), Des "Lee" McAlea (sassofonista), Tony Gherarty (chitarrista), Stephen Travers (bassista), Brian McCoy (alla tromba) e Ray Miller (batterista). Si noti che mentre due di loro (O'Toole e Travers) provenivano dalla Repubblica, gli altri quattro erano del nord-est dell'isola, due cattolici e due protestanti (questi ultimi McCoy e Miller).

I due racconti di Michelucci, quello politico e quello musicale, convergono al momento del massacro ("Il giorno che morì la musica", 101-111). Alla fine di un concerto a Banbridge, nel nord (il gruppo musicale suonava cinque o sei sere a settimana, e un paio di queste serate avevano in genere luogo nelle Sei Contee), mentre il batterista Miller andava ad Antrim dai suoi genitori, gli altri cinque, che invece tornavano a Dublino, vennero fermati sul loro furgoncino Volkswagen prima dell'alba del 31 luglio 1975 ad un posto di blocco dell'Ulster Defence Regiment nella campagna deserta vicino al villaggio di Buskhill. I posti di blocco dell'esercito o della polizia erano comuni in quel clima di guerra, e i cinque musicisti non si preoccuparono più di tanto. Il posto di blocco era però dedicato proprio a loro, e quella decina di soldati del reggimento territoriale locale dell'Esercito britannico erano tutti membri della Ulster Volunteer Force e quindi della 'banda di Glenanne'. Comparve in macchina un ufficiale inglese che sembrava dare ordini al gruppo, con ogni probabilità il capitano dell'intelligence militare Robert Nairac (che due anni dopo venne catturato ed eliminato dallo IRA), e due dei soldati (Harris Boyle e Wesley Somerville) cominciarono apparentemente a perquisire il retro del furgone, mentre i cinque musicisti erano allineati al margine della strada. Di colpo vi fu una violentissima esplosione, che ridusse in pezzi i due lealisti, e a quel punto gli altri soldati/terroristi cominciarono a sparare ai musicisti. Des "Lee", colpito di striscio, si finse morto, e così fece Stephen Travers, colpito invece in pieno, seppur non mortalmente, da una pallottola dum dum. Gli altri tre, tra i quali Brian McCoy, che paradossalmente era figlio del Gran Maestro dell'Ordine di Orange della contea di Tyrone, vennero massacrati a raffiche di mitra e a colpi di pistola.

Il piano di chi indirizzava i lealisti era alquanto machiavellico, mostruoso e bizzarro: un ordigno a tempo doveva essere nascosto dentro al furgone della Miami Showband, ordigno che sarebbe esploso oltre il confine, polverizzando i cinque musicisti. In tal modo si sarebbe sostenuto che quella *showband*, la più famosa e apprezzata dell'Irlanda, trasportava in realtà esplosivi per conto dell'Esercito Repubblicano Irlandese, e si sarebbe posto fine al fenomeno delle stesse *showbands*, che di fatto unificavano l'intera isola (cosa che in effetti comunque avvenne). Come ha scritto infatti la giornalista Anne Cadwallader citata da Michelucci,

le sale da ballo erano uno dei pochi luoghi in cui le due comunità [la cattolica/nazionalista e la protestante/unionista] potevano ancora mescolarsi e vivere insieme come se niente fosse. Continuare a frequentarle nonostante il clima di terrore che regnava nel paese era anche una forma di ribellione e pensavamo che nessuno avrebbe mai potuto prendere di mira le sale da ballo, né tanto meno i musicisti. (126)

Inoltre, se il piano fosse riuscito, si sarebbe messa ulteriore pressione sul governo di Liam Cosgrave a Dublino, che era già assolutamente anti-repubblicano e che perciò aveva di fatto impedito le indagini sugli attentati del 17 maggio 1974, affinché varasse nuove e ancora più draconiane misure contro il repubblicanesimo irlandese. Solo il fatto casuale che l'ordigno era difettoso, o che probabilmente i due lealisti che lo stavano piazzando avevano toccato un contatto provocandone l'esplosione prematura, aveva impedito la riuscita del piano.

L'autore illustra poi le reazioni politiche alla strage (anche a quell'epoca il coinvolgimento degli apparati dello Stato britannico era evidente), e dà minuzioso conto delle indagini senza

risultato (o delle finte indagini che servivano a coprire gli ideatori britannici del massacro e il loro principale agente tra i lealisti coinvolti, lo “Sciacallo” Robin Jackson). Segue poi le vite dei due sopravvissuti alla strage, in particolare la vita e la ricerca di Stephen Travers, che a pochi anni di distanza da esso cominciò a impegnarsi per individuare i mandanti del massacro, e il graduale svelarsi tramite prove giudiziarie e testimonianze, soprattutto dopo gli accordi di Belfast del 1998, della collusione tra gli apparati statali britannici e gli esecutori, gli assassini lealisti.

Scriva il Michelucci alla fine dell'opera:

Fin dal mio primo incontro con Stephen Travers ho capito che la tragedia della Miami Showband era terribilmente paradigmatica della collusione tra i gruppi armati lealisti e le cosiddette forze di sicurezza britanniche negli anni del conflitto anglo-irlandese. I retroscena di quel lontano massacro spiegano alla perfezione quali furono le dinamiche coloniali che lo scatenarono e lo alimentarono per quasi tre decenni. (225)

Verissimo. Un racconto avvincente e serrato, che si legge come un romanzo ma che non lo è. “Saggistica narrativa”, come definisce il libro Michelucci, ma assolutamente priva di “particolari inventati o dialoghi immaginari” (*ibidem*). Per il lettore italiano, non solo una finestra sui sordidi aspetti della guerra contro-insurrezionale inglese in Irlanda, ma qualcosa che riecheggia vicende stranamente simili che si svolgevano qui in Italia qualche decennio fa.

Carlo Maria Pellizzi

Barry Houlihan, Patrick Lonergan, Máiréad Ní Chróinín, eds, *Druid Theatre 1975–2025*, London, Bloomsbury Academic, 2025, pp. 465. Paperback. £29.99. ISBN: 9781350542594

Since its foundation in 1975, Druid Theatre has occupied a distinctive and influential position within modern Irish theatre. Emerging from Galway rather than Dublin, the company has consistently demonstrated that the most vital dramatic engagements with Irish identity, history, and place need not originate from the traditional metropolitan centre. *Druid Theatre 1975–2025*, edited by Barry Houlihan, Patrick Lonergan, and Máiréad Ní Chróinín, is a timely and substantial volume that marks the company's first fifty years by combining an extended introductory essay with six plays and six shorter contextual introductions. The result is both an anthology and a critical act of recovery, one that documents Druid's achievements while also clarifying the cultural logic that has shaped the company's work.

In the opening essay, “Introduction: Druid and New Irish Playwriting, 1975–2025”, the editors make their purpose clear from the outset. Druid, they write, has

played an essential role in the development of new Irish writing for the stage” [through] supporting emerging dramatists, premiering works by established playwrights and reassessing older plays, many of which would otherwise have been unjustly forgotten (8).

That formulation is important because it captures the dual movement that has long characterised Druid's artistic practice. The company has not simply produced new work, nor has it merely revived older texts. Instead, it has continually brought the two activities into relation, allowing theatrical recovery itself to become a mode of innovation. This anthology, the editors explain, seeks to celebrate those achievements “by collecting six key plays from the company's

first 50 years” and by including introductory essays that offer “a sense of Druid’s distinctive approach to making theatre” while also “highlighting possibilities for future publications, and for future productions too” (*ibidem*). Particularly striking is the account given of Druid’s rootedness in Galway and the west of Ireland. Quoting Garry Hynes’s statement from the programme for the company’s opening season, the editors recall her insistence that

Theatre has for long been regarded as a night time fancy of the elite. I feel it must be an expression for the community in which it is rooted, serving its educational, recreational and creative needs. If it fails in this it will not survive. (*ibidem*)

This principle of rootedness is shown to be neither provincial nor restrictive. On the contrary, Druid’s Galway base becomes the condition of its imaginative reach. As the editors note, the company has brought plays “from parish halls around Ireland to Broadway” and in doing so has explored Irish life through an ongoing engagement with “the cultural and social history of the island of Ireland” (*ibidem*). In this respect, the volume offers a persuasive model of how regional theatre can function as a national and indeed international force.

The anthology’s structure reinforces this argument effectively. Of the six plays included, several are especially worthy of note for the way in which their introductory essays illuminate Druid’s broader artistic development. The section on M.J. Molloy’s *The Wood of the Whispering* is particularly valuable. Garry Hynes is quoted as observing that any attempt to explain why Druid produced the play “is also an attempt to explain Druid’s artistic policy” (18). This is a revealing claim. Molloy’s drama, rooted in rural Galway, economic stagnation and emigration became for Druid a means of articulating its own theatrical commitments. The introduction records Hynes’s view that the play was “strikingly relevant” because its characters had “an ambiguous attitude towards Ireland and towards what it is to be Irish” (19). Such ambiguity, as the editors show, became central to Druid’s later work. The discussion of the 1983 production’s opening image is equally memorable. Fintan O’Toole described how, after de Valera’s idealised rhetoric of Ireland as a pastoral national space, the audience saw Sanbatch Daly “picking fleas and lice from his hair”, an opposition that moved “beyond the ironic to the absurd” and then “beyond the absurd to some kind of meaning, some kind of hope” (*ibidem*). This is an excellent instance of the volume’s ability to show how Druid reimagined neglected plays through performance.

Geraldine Aron’s *Same Old Moon* is another welcome inclusion. The introduction explains that the play was commissioned by Druid for Galway’s quinquennial year in 1984 and was met with remarkable enthusiasm, with box office records showing “over 98 per cent attendance” across its initial run (88). This contextual detail is useful but more significant is the essay’s account of the play’s thematic preoccupations. Brenda Barnes, even as a child, imagines herself as an explorer and this is neatly linked to Druid’s own development as a company “exploring new work and finding international audiences as well as those in their home city in the west of Ireland” (*ibidem*). The essay is particularly good on the play’s hybridity of place and identity and it demonstrates how Aron’s drama registers Galway, London, memory, migration, and family without reducing any of them to a single coherent narrative.

Tom Murphy’s *Conversations on a Homecoming* occupies a central place in the volume, and rightly so. The introduction notes that the play “emerged” from Murphy’s association with Druid, premiering in Galway in 1985, and is now remembered as “a major breakthrough, both for the company and the playwright” (163). For Druid, the production “firmly established them as champions of new Irish writing”, while for Murphy it was “a kind of homecoming” (*ibidem*), the first time one of his plays premiered in his home county. The account of the play’s development out of *The White House* is especially helpful, allowing the reader to see how Murphy’s revisionary

process paralleled Druid's wider artistic interest in return, reworking, and historical excavation. Particularly telling is Murphy's own statement that the play is about "the way that you analyse the past and how you look at the present situation that you're in", with retrospection forming "part of the fabric and make up of the play" (163). The later discussion of *Druid*, Murphy is equally illuminating, especially the observation that placing *Conversations* at the start of the cycle turned it into "a kind of excavation of Irish history" (164).

Vincent Woods's *At the Black Pig's Dyke* demonstrates the company's willingness to stage difficult and politically charged work. The introduction links the play's development to mummification traditions and to Stafford's interest in the strawboy mask as a metaphor for "the dark underbelly of border violence" (240). The production history is equally revealing. Premiering as *Druid*'s one hundredth production in 1992, the play received immediate acclaim and toured widely, even as its Derry run was disrupted by masked protestors. Far from diminishing the production's significance, this response helped cement *Druid*'s reputation as a company willing to platform "courageous new voices in Irish theatre" (*ibidem*).

Nancy Harris's *The Beacon* brings the anthology to the present. The introduction is strong on Harris's emergence as a major dramatist and on the significance of Jane Brennan's casting as Beiv. Brennan's remark that "I was married to a playwright so I know a lot about that single minded approach to the work" (360) offers a vivid point of entry into the play's concern with art, compulsion, and interpretation. Harris's own comment, "I do think the unconscious is the most interesting thing" and that "Visual artists are never trying to explain themselves" (*ibidem*), is equally well chosen. It captures the modernity of the play, but it also demonstrates its continuity with *Druid*'s longer interest in memory, place, and the unstable meanings of artistic expression.

The negatives of this volume are few while the positives are manifold. Given the anthology format, some introductions are necessarily brief and more extended scholarly engagement with the afterlives of particular productions would have been invaluable. There is also an understandable emphasis on the celebratory. Yet these are minor reservations in a volume that is so evidently useful, well-conceived and historically important. The editors have produced more than a commemorative publication. They have assembled a compelling account of *Druid*'s role in reshaping modern Irish theatre through new writing, recovery work and a sustained interrogation of place, memory and identity. Students and scholars of Irish theatre, modern drama, performance history, and cultural memory will find *Druid Theatre 1975–2025* an invaluable resource. The volume demonstrates with clarity that *Druid*'s achievement lies not only in the plays it has staged but in the particular theatrical imagination it has brought to them. That imagination, rooted in Galway yet never bounded by it, has altered the landscape of Irish theatre for half a century.

Robert Finnigan

M.G. Cronin, *Revolutionary Bodies: Homoeroticism and the Political Imagination in Irish Writing*, Manchester, Manchester UP, 2022, pp. 207. Hardback. £80.00. ISBN: 9781526135421.

In recent years, scholarship within Irish Studies has increasingly turned its attention to the intersections between sexuality, politics and literary form. Michael G. Cronin's *Revolutionary Bodies: Homoeroticism and the Political Imagination in Irish Writing* represents a significant

intervention within this evolving field. Rather than offering a conventional literary history of gay writing in Ireland, Cronin instead examines how depictions of the homoerotic male body have functioned as sites for imagining revolutionary political possibilities. By bringing together readings of authors such as Brendan Behan, John Broderick, Colm Tóibín and Jamie O'Neill, Cronin's study offers a sustained exploration of the relationship between sexual desire and radical political imagination in Irish literature.

In the introduction, "Wilde Atlantic Ways: Homoeroticism, Irish Literature and Revolution", Cronin situates his argument within a broader theoretical and historical framework. Beginning with Oscar Wilde, whose work functions as a recurring point of reference throughout the book, Cronin argues that Wilde anticipated many of the intellectual concerns that animate the study. As he explains, the central problem of the book concerns "the relationship between styles of writing homoerotic passion and styles of writing which cultivate a hopeful revolutionary imagination" (9). For Cronin, Wilde's essay "The Soul of Man under Socialism" provides an especially important conceptual foundation, since it links sexual freedom with broader forms of social transformation. Wilde's insistence that "the proper aim [...] is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible" (*ibidem*) becomes, for Cronin, a starting point for examining the ways in which literary depictions of homoerotic desire can also function as critiques of capitalist social relations. Cronin's introduction is particularly effective in demonstrating the ways in which literary form itself can operate as a vehicle for political thought. Drawing upon theorists such as Raymond Williams and Joseph North, Cronin argues that literature should not simply be read as a reflection of historical conditions. Rather, literary works possess a dynamic capacity to shape political imagination. As he notes, approaches that treat literature merely as historical documentation risk suppressing "the actual work on material [...] which is the making of any work of art" (11). By foregrounding aesthetic form, Cronin therefore positions his study as an example of literary criticism that seeks to intervene in cultural debates rather than simply observe them.

The first chapter, devoted to Brendan Behan, establishes the book's central methodological approach. Cronin reads Behan's *Borstal Boy* (1958) as a text in which political radicalism and homoerotic desire intersect in complex ways. The prison environment of the novel provides a space in which the narrator's encounters with other male bodies become intertwined with a broader critique of imperial authority. In this context, Cronin suggests that the homoerotic male body functions not merely as an object of desire but also as a symbolic site for imagining forms of solidarity and resistance. Equally compelling is Cronin's discussion of John Broderick's fiction in the second chapter. Broderick's novels, published during the 1960s, depict a recognisably modern figure of the homosexual at a moment when Irish society was undergoing significant cultural transformation. Cronin demonstrates that Broderick's work complicates the narrative of progressive liberalisation often associated with post-war Ireland. Instead of presenting homosexuality as a "social problem" awaiting resolution, Broderick's fiction constructs what Cronin describes as an unsettling constellation of figures, including "the 'homosexual', the 'fallen woman' and the republican 'gunman'", each of whom represents forms of disruptive social difference (27). In doing so, Broderick's work challenges the modernisation narrative that has frequently shaped interpretations of mid-twentieth century Irish culture.

Cronin's analysis of Colm Tóibín's fiction offers another important contribution to the study. Focusing particularly on novels such as *The Story of the Night* (1996), Cronin situates Tóibín's work within the broader historical context of the emergence of modern lesbian and gay political movements, and the neoliberal restructuring of global capitalism. He argues that Tóibín's gay male characters often embody the political rationality of neoliberal subjectivity.

Yet Cronin also demonstrates that the aesthetic texture of Tóibín's prose frequently destabilises these ideological frameworks. As he notes, when Tóibín's novels focus most intensely on the male body, they generate "affects which unsettle the hegemonic 'common sense' which the novels are otherwise committed to endorsing" (29).

The later chapters of the book shift from individual authors to broader literary genres. In his discussion of the coming-out narrative and the historical romance, Cronin demonstrates how these narrative forms have shaped the representation of gay male identity within contemporary Irish fiction. These novels, he argues, give imaginative expression to the tensions between liberation and assimilation that characterise modern LGBTQ+ politics. While some texts reproduce the ideological assumptions of neoliberal culture, others generate what Cronin identifies as more radical political possibilities. Particularly striking is Cronin's analysis of spatial imagination within recent Irish fiction. Examining novels by writers such as Keith Ridgway and Barry McCrea, he argues that literary representations of urban space can reveal the contradictions of contemporary capitalism. These novels, Cronin suggests, function as examples of "chronotopic writing in which styles of writing social space generate modes of temporal reasoning" (30). In other words, the depiction of particular environments enables authors to explore broader historical processes and political transformations.

Much of the intellectual energy of *Revolutionary Bodies* derives from Cronin's engagement with Marxist and Queer theoretical traditions. Drawing upon thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse and David Alderson, he develops a sophisticated account of the relationship between sexuality and capitalist modernity. As Cronin observes, the apparent liberalisation of sexual norms within contemporary culture should not necessarily be understood as a form of genuine liberation. Instead, it often represents what Marcuse famously described as a system that can "extend liberty while intensifying domination" (27). By situating literary texts within this broader theoretical framework, Cronin provides readers with a compelling analysis of the contradictions inherent in contemporary sexual politics.

The negatives of this study are few while the positives are considerable. At times, the theoretical density of Cronin's argument may prove challenging for readers unfamiliar with the critical traditions upon which he draws. Nevertheless, these theoretical discussions are generally well integrated into the broader analysis and rarely feel superfluous. Indeed, one of the book's principal strengths lies in its ability to connect detailed literary readings with larger political and philosophical questions. Overall, *Revolutionary Bodies* represents a significant contribution to the study of Irish literature and queer theory. Cronin's analyses are consistently thoughtful, rigorous and intellectually ambitious. By exploring the ways in which representations of homoerotic desire intersect with revolutionary political imagination, the book opens new avenues for understanding the relationship between sexuality, aesthetics and radical politics. Scholars working in Irish Studies, queer theory and modern literary criticism will find this study both stimulating and invaluable.

Robert Finnigan

C.K. Gott, *Experience, Identity & Epistemic Injustice within Ireland's Magdalene Laundries*, London-New York-Dublin, Bloomsbury, 2022, pp. 248. £29.99. ISBN: 978-13-5025-446-6.

L'opera di Chloë K. Gott rappresenta un intervento teorico e, al tempo stesso, "politico" volto a scardinare non solo il silenzio storico che ha avvolto le Magdalene Laundries, ma anche le strutture di potere che continuano a delegittimare le sopravvissute nel presente. Al centro della riflessione di Gott non si trova solo l'intento di documentare gli abusi fisici e psicologici subiti dalle donne, ma anche la volontà di analizzare come le istituzioni abbiano minato la loro capacità di essere riconosciute come soggetti portatori di conoscenza. Alla base dell'argomentazione risiede la tesi che queste istituzioni non siano state semplici luoghi di internamento, bensì parte integrante di quella che James Smith definisce "architecture of containment"² dell'Irlanda post-indipendenza. In un nuovo Stato impegnato a costruire un'identità nazionale basata sulla purezza morale cattolica³, le donne che trasgredivano le norme venivano percepite contemporaneamente come vulnerabili e minacciose, rendendo necessaria la loro rimozione dalla società per il "bene comune". Gott descrive questo approccio come "vicious paternalism", un sistema che, con la motivazione della protezione, disciplina le donne, privandole però di ogni capacità decisionale sulle proprie vite.

Questo contenimento è stato accompagnato e sostenuto da una vera e propria "epistemology of ignorance", definita dall'autrice come un sistema attivamente mantenuto in cui "knowledge about and acknowledgement of survivor voices is not prioritized" (1). Secondo l'autrice questa mancanza di conoscenza non è una lacuna accidentale di dati, ma un rifiuto politico e sociale di validare l'esperienza dei soggetti marginalizzati, garantendo che la narrazione ufficiale rimanga incontestata. Questo confine della conoscenza è stato blindato dalla chiusura degli archivi delle congregazioni religiose, che rimangono tuttora inaccessibili ai ricercatori e alle stesse sopravvissute, impedendo una piena ricostruzione storica e una reale assunzione di responsabilità. Gott sottolinea come questa segretezza abbia permesso alle istituzioni di mantenere la loro invisibilità per decenni, perpetuando il trauma delle donne attraverso l'oscuramento dei dati.

L'analisi si sposta poi sul modo in cui le Magdalene Laundries sono state prima cancellate dalla cultura contemporanea irlandese e poi "recuperate", non per iniziativa istituzionale, ma attraverso i media e le arti. Opere come il dramma *Eclipsed* (1988) di Patricia Burke Brogan e documentari come *Sex in a Cold Climate* (1998) hanno obbligato il paese e l'opinione pubblica a confrontarsi con una realtà che molti "had chosen to ignore but, invariably, already knew" (Smith 2007 in Gott 2022, 8). Un momento di importante presa di coscienza è stato il caso delle tombe di High Park nel 1993⁴. Gott critica la retorica ufficiale di quella che viene definita da Pine "anti-nostalgia" adottata dallo Stato nelle scuse di Enda Kenny del 2013:

² Smith definisce "architecture of containment" il sistema istituzionale dell'Irlanda post-indipendenza volto a rendere invisibili i soggetti "indesiderabili". Il sistema funzionava con una sinergia tra Stato e Chiesa, legittimando l'internamento, da un lato, come protezione delle donne "vulnerabili", dall'altro come regolatore delle minacce per la moralità pubblica (in Gott 2022).

³ L'articolo 41.2 della Costituzione del 1937 formalizzava il ruolo della donna all'interno delle mura domestiche, facendone un pilastro della purezza morale cattolica nazionale: "[...] by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved".

⁴ Nel 1993, la scoperta di una fossa comune nei terreni del convento di High Park a Dublino portò alla luce lo scandalo delle Magdalene Laundries in Irlanda. Quando l'ordine religioso decise di vendere parte del terreno, le suore chiesero e ottennero il permesso di riesumare 133 corpi dal cimitero del convento per cremarli e spostarli. Di molte donne non esistevano certificati di morte ufficiali e alcune non avevano nemmeno un nome di battesimo, ma venivano identificate solo con nomi religiosi o con numeri. Questo evento costrinse le autorità a indagare. I resti trovati a High Park furono cremati e risepolti nel cimitero di Glasnevin a Dublino.

[...] anti-nostalgia's vision frames the past as inherently unstable and traumatic, encouraging audiences to be grateful that they have escaped. (Pine 2011 in Gott 2022, 163)

Tale strategia narrativa tenta di relegare il trauma in un passato oscuro e remoto per presentare l'Irlanda contemporanea come un'entità "illuminata", sfuggendo dalla responsabilità per il dolore che continua a manifestarsi nella vita quotidiana delle donne. Come scrive Gott, "The projection of what is unjust onto the past allows shame to be represented here as a collective shame that does not affect individuals in the present" (*ibidem*).

Il perno su cui ruota l'intera opera è il concetto di *epistemic injustice*, elaborato da Miranda Fricker e inteso come "a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower" (2007 in Gott 2022, 20). Questo danno si articola in due forme interconnesse: l'"ingiustizia testimoniale" e l'"ingiustizia ermeneutica". L'"ingiustizia testimoniale" si manifesta nel "deficit di credibilità" attribuito alle donne a causa di pregiudizi identitari: reputate delle peccatrici, la loro parola era considerata priva di valore. Questo processo iniziava già al momento dell'ingresso, quando i nomi venivano sostituiti da numeri o nomi di sante per annullare il sé precedente. Dall'altro lato, l'"ingiustizia ermeneutica" si verifica quando le sopravvissute, a causa del loro isolamento, non dispongono delle risorse relazionali e concettuali fornite dalla società e non sono in grado di dare senso alla propria sofferenza. Immerse in un sistema dominato dalle categorie di "peccato" e "penitenza", le donne non disponevano di un linguaggio pubblico per descriversi come vittime di abusi, rimanendo intrappolate in un silenzio alimentato dalla vergogna.

Per contrastare questo sistema di silenziamento, Gott propone la storia orale non solo come fonte di dati, ma come strumento di resistenza che assegna alle sopravvissute il ruolo di "experts on the subject of their own experiences" (2022, 158). La risorsa principale utilizzata per la ricerca di Gott è l'archivio del progetto "Magdalene Institutions: Recording an Archival and Oral History"⁵ che permette di sfidare le narrazioni ufficiali, come quella prodotta dal "Rapporto McAleese" del 2013⁶. Gott critica tale rapporto per aver ignorato quasi ottocento pagine di testimonianze fornite dalle sopravvissute, preferendo i resoconti di medici e poliziotti e minimizzando le accuse di abusi fisici. Ciò rappresenta una reiterazione dell'ingiustizia testimoniale a livello istituzionale, dove lo Stato fa un passo indietro rispetto alle scuse di Enda Kenny del 2013, tornando a una posizione in cui evitava di assumersi la responsabilità dei danni causati alle sopravvissute delle Magdalene Laundries.

Un ulteriore elemento di analisi nel testo di Gott è rappresentato dal tema del silenzio. Il silenzio delle donne non deve essere letto solo come assenza di voce, ma anche come una strategia di sopravvivenza in un ambiente dove "both voice and silence pose risks" (Patterson 2000 in Gott 2022, 73)⁷. L'autrice afferma che il silenzio può nascere dal senso di umiliazione,

⁵ "Magdalene Institutions: Recording an Archival and Oral History" è un progetto di ricerca collaborativa del Governo irlandese, finanziato dall'Irish Research Council. Il progetto è stato guidato da Katherine O'Donnell dell'University College Dublin e si è svolto principalmente tra il 2012 e il 2013. L'obiettivo generale dello studio è stato quello di approfondire la comprensione del sistema delle Magdalene Laundries, attraverso la raccolta e lo studio delle testimonianze di persone direttamente o indirettamente legate a queste istituzioni. Il progetto mirava a intervistare le sopravvissute e i loro familiari, le suore che lavoravano nelle Magdalene Laundries, e i visitatori ricorrenti come, ad es., i medici che periodicamente si recavano a esaminare le donne internate.

⁶ Nel 2013, un'inchiesta guidata dal senatore irlandese Martin McAleese, ufficialmente conosciuta come il "Rapporto McAleese", tentò di far luce sul ruolo del governo e della polizia irlandese nell'internamento di giovani donne nelle Magdalene Laundries e sulla mancata protezione dei loro diritti come lavoratrici.

⁷ All'interno degli istituti, la regola del silenzio era imposta per impedire amicizie e aumentare la produttività. Tuttavia, molte sopravvissute lo trasformarono in tattica di sopravvivenza: tacere davanti alle autorità diventava un modo per preservare uno spazio interiore sottratto al controllo istituzionale. Anche dopo l'uscita, il silenzio fungeva da protezione, evitando la "visibilità" di un'identità rovinata.

ma può anche essere uno spazio di resistenza contro un sistema che pretende di interpretare la vita delle donne senza ascoltarle.

L'argomentazione di Gott vuole dimostrare che la guarigione dal trauma non può prescindere dal riconoscimento della credibilità e dell'autorità intellettuale di chi è stato ridotto al silenzio. La resistenza delle donne si manifesta anche come "a descent into the ordinary" (Das 2007 in Gott 2022, 141): il tentativo di ricostruire un sé rispettabile attraverso la maternità e gli atti quotidiani, cercando di recuperare quel capitale sociale negato in precedenza.

Solo attraverso questo ascolto attivo sarà possibile impedire che la storia venga di nuovo sepolta, oscurando così la memoria materiale del trauma:

We talk so often in Ireland about a "culture of silence" around abuse. This suggests that those who have been abused are not speaking out, not giving testimony. It is time to recognise that we don't have a culture of silence, we have a culture of not listening. (Pine 2019 in Gott 2022, 201)

L'opera di Gott non è dunque solo un racconto di fatti avvenuti, ma un monito contro la persistenza di una cultura che non è tanto del silenzio, quanto del "non ascolto".

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Francesca Salvadori

María Amor Barros-del Río (ed.), *Transcultural Insights into Contemporary Irish Literature and Society: Breaking New Ground*, London-New York, Routledge, 2025, pp. 230. £155.00. ISBN: 9781003428350.

María Amor Barros-del Río definisce la curatela, *Transcultural Insights into Contemporary Irish Literature and Society: Breaking New Ground*, come un volume collettivo che vuole approcciarsi per la prima volta alla letteratura irlandese nell'ottica dei Transcultural Studies, un ambito di ricerca interdisciplinare che analizza i processi di interazione, scambio e ibridazione tra culture. Questo approccio consente di analizzare in un'ottica nuova le diverse culture nella

società globalizzata e fluida, superare la concezione che le identità nazionali siano statiche e omogenee, adottare, come sostiene Ralf Haekel, un'ottica "post-nazionale" che superi le dinamiche di colonialismo e decolonialismo nella costruzione di una nazione.

Nell'introduzione viene delineato il contesto storico e teorico in cui si colloca la raccolta di saggi. Barros-del Río ricorda come le origini dei Transcultural Studies vengano solitamente attribuite all'antropologo, sociologo e filosofo, Fernando Ortiz che negli anni Quaranta del Novecento studia le trasformazioni culturali nei contesti coloniali; arrivando poi a sostenere che il termine "acculturazione" non sia sufficiente a descrivere in modo esaustivo le reciproche influenze interculturali fra madrepatria e territori colonizzati. A partire dagli anni Novanta, queste riflessioni vengono sviluppate dalle teorie di Homi K. Bhabha sul "third space", di Mary Louise Pratt sulle "contact zones" e dal filosofo tedesco Wolfgang Iser che elabora il concetto di "transculturality". Su queste basi teoriche si sviluppano gli attuali Transcultural Studies, la cui flessibilità metodologica permette l'analisi dei processi di circolazione, contaminazione e negoziazione culturale in una prospettiva globale e interdisciplinare.

Da queste premesse si evince lo scopo del volume, cioè applicare l'approccio transculturale per interpretare la natura dinamica della società irlandese contemporanea attraverso la sua letteratura. I contributi raccolti mostrano come la prospettiva transculturale possa offrire nuove chiavi di lettura per interpretare la società irlandese contemporanea mettendo in discussione il concetto di "Irishness". La cultura irlandese, soggetta a pregiudizi e interpretazioni folkloristiche assodate, dimostra invece di essere dinamica e sensibile alle trasformazioni che hanno investito il paese dalla seconda metà del Novecento a oggi quali: l'ingresso nell'Unione Europea; gli anni della Celtic Tiger; la crisi economica del 2008; il rilancio economico successivo; le dinamiche migratorie; la crescente multiculturalità della società irlandese; il referendum sul matrimonio egualitario; la legalizzazione dell'aborto e il progressivo declino dell'influenza della Chiesa cattolica, anche a seguito dello scandalo delle Magdalene Laundries.

All'introduzione seguono dieci saggi divisi in tre sezioni tematiche. La prima "Texts that Blur Frontiers: The Island of Ireland and Beyond" raccoglie contributi dedicati a opere letterarie del Novecento, ma reinterpretate in ottica transculturale: attraverso la figura di Roger Casement in *Ulysses*, viene evidenziato come le esperienze di mobilità, esilio e confronto con l'alterità abbiano contribuito a ridefinire tanto l'identità individuale quanto la critica dell'imperialismo britannico. Invece, i saggi dedicati a Ciaran Carson, Marin Sorescu e Seán Dunne, condividono una riflessione sul ruolo della traduzione poetica come pratica di resistenza culturale e attraversamento dei confini politici e linguistici fra Irlanda, Romania e Russia. La seconda sezione, "Transcultural Writers and Global Entanglements", si concentra su *case studies* della narrativa contemporanea irlandese in cui emergono le forme di mobilità, ibridazione e marginalità. I contributi dedicati a Leland Bardwell, Evelyn Conlon e Ken Bruen evidenziano come gli spazi urbani, le migrazioni e le identità diasporiche diventino luoghi privilegiati di contatto transculturale. In particolare, la *crime fiction* di Bruen offre un'interessante riflessione sul rapporto tra multiculturalismo e violenza sociale: le trame dei singoli casi sono secondarie, mentre risulta centrale la critica sociale al contrasto che vede, da un lato, il boom economico a seguito della Celtic Tiger, e dall'altro la corruzione politica e il razzismo. La terza sezione, "Irish Social Diversity and Contemporary Literature in Dialogue", esplora la rappresentazione letteraria delle questioni femminili, di genere e le fragilità mentali e mediche. Tematiche attuali e politicamente rilevanti, che emergono anche in relazione ai processi di globalizzazione che hanno interessato la società irlandese negli ultimi decenni. Un percorso di progressiva secolarizzazione culturale che permette l'emersione di tematiche prima considerate tabù come l'aborto fra le giovani generazioni – tema della *young adult fiction* –, la rappresentazione delle identità queer, la rappresentazione dell'HIV/AIDS nel teatro irlandese, e i fenomeni di migrazione post Brexit.

In chiusura del volume viene proposta una riflessione di Gerry Smyth tra passato, presente e futuro degli Irish Studies in una contemporaneità segnata da crisi ambientali, ridefinizioni identitarie e crescente interconnessione. Smyth amplia ulteriormente la prospettiva del volume invitando a ripensare gli studi irlandesi in chiave interdisciplinare e transculturale, sottolineando come le categorie nazionali tradizionali risultino ormai insufficienti per interpretare la complessità dell'Irlanda contemporanea nel contesto globale.

Concludendo, la raccolta, anche grazie alla varietà dei temi affrontati, rappresenta un importante tassello degli Irish Studies. Pur muovendosi prevalentemente nell'ambito letterario, i saggi dialogano costantemente con la sociologia, la storia culturale, gli studi sulla mobilità e le scienze politiche, offrendo una visione complessa e stratificata dell'Irlanda contemporanea. La raccolta mostra come la letteratura possa costituire uno spazio privilegiato di negoziazione identitaria e di dialogo interculturale.

Alessandra Lana