

## Introduction

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This special issue of the *Revista Alicantina de Estudios Ingleses* on twentieth century Anglo-Irish Literature is the second in what is planned to be an occasional series devoted to specific subject areas within the broad field of English Studies. Indeed, the very breadth of the field and the diversity of specialisms it gives rise to make the task of selecting and coordinating material for publication an increasingly awkward and, sometimes, a thankless one. Efficiency and coherence, as much as quality, may therefore best be served by concentrating in a single issue on a particular range of interests. Such an arrangement provides an opportunity for a thorough overhaul of current thinking on a specialist topic, as in the previous issue on English Language Teaching, edited by Prof. Enrique Alcaraz, or, as in the present case, for the publication of a fresh collection of articles by scholars working in a field — that of Anglo-Irish Literature — whose appeal is, comparatively speaking, more limited or whose range of applications is narrower.

In saying this, I would by no means be taken as suggesting that the area of Anglo-Irish Studies is in danger of perishing from neglect or inanition. The wide circulation of prestigious journals such as the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, of *Éire-Ireland* (published in the United States) or of the *Irish University Review* (the publication of IASAIL, the International Association for the Study of Anglo-Irish Literature, based in Belfast) ensures that permanent outlets are available for the latest scholarship. Happily it is also the case that a strong interest in Anglo-Irish Literature and its cultural contexts has more recently made itself felt in the English Departments of some European universities. Lille University in France has managed, thanks to the single-minded devotion and the persuasive skills of the late Patrick Rafroidi, to sustain the regular publication of its *Études Irlandaises*, while the equally enterprising Rüdiger Imhof has kept Irish Literature well to the fore at the University of Uppsala in Sweden.

It is really these European examples that I had most in mind when the idea of this issue was first mooted. The recent division of the AEDEAN (the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies) into subject groups, or “panels,” showed what some of us already knew, viz. that there was a small but dedicated group of scholars in Spain who shared an interest in Irish writing and who would jump at the chance of getting together to discuss that interest and examine one another’s work. It was therefore clear to us, when the question of an Irish issue of this journal arose, that the aims would be to provide a platform

for the expression of contemporary Irish writing; to bring together a set of fresh contributions to this field, which has suffered in Spain from the scattered, isolated and episodic nature of the publication of critical material; and, especially, to act as a stimulus to scholars working in Spain by giving them an opportunity to compare their views with those of recognised specialists working in Ireland itself.

A highly favourable circumstance at this juncture was the recent signing of an exchange agreement, under the ERASMUS scheme, between the University of Alicante and the University of Ulster at Coleraine, in Northern Ireland. Though the principle aim of this scheme is, of course, to promote the mobility of university students, the collaborative spirit of the enterprise includes provisions for teacher exchanges and the sharing of research interests and facilities. Thanks to the good offices of Prof. Robert Welch at Coleraine, who happens to be the President of the IASAIL as well as the head of the English Department there, I was able to make contact with colleagues sympathetic to our idea of a joint effort, and some of them eventually contributed articles. I am glad to have this opportunity of acknowledging the support of the ERASMUS bureau which, however indirectly, made this collaboration possible.

Contributors were invited to submit new work on any significant aspect of twentieth century Anglo-Irish Literature, a description of the subject area which we followed others in assuming to be neutral, though I am not unaware that for some it continues to have limiting overtones. The Irish writers represented here include such unquestioned greats as Yeats, Joyce and Beckett, authors with substantial international reputations such as the poets Louis MacNeice, Seamus Heaney and Derek Mahon, and artists who, like the women poets Eavan Boland, Medbh McGuckian, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, the novelists John McGahern and James Plunkett, and the playwrights Brian Friel and John B. Keane, enjoy distinction in their native Ireland, and among discerning readers elsewhere, and who deserve to be better known in Spain. Since translation is one of the issues dealt with by contributors, and a modest translation section is, as usual, included in the journal, I would like to take this opportunity of reminding Spanish readers that one reason for the comparative neglect in this country of all but the most outstanding Irish authors of this, or indeed any, century is the fact that their work has simply not been translated. As the range of the articles included here shows — and it is slight in comparison with the full range of eminent or distinguished writers from Ireland, whose literature is renowned in the English-speaking world for its wealth, variety and originality — there is enough work requiring to be done to keep a large team of translators fully employed for many years to come. The translation section in this issue includes Spanish versions of poems by Seamus Heaney and Michael Hartnett (by Beatriz Villacañas Palomo, of Madrid's Complutense University) and of two Yeats poems and a Synge fragment (by Francisco Javier Torres Ribelles and myself).

Spanish Joyceans generally owe a debt of gratitude to Prof. Francisco García Tortosa, of the University of Seville, for the vigour, skill and enthusiasm he has brought to his teaching of and research into the work of Ireland's greatest modern writer of prose fiction. Two of his younger colleagues, José Carnero and Manuel Almagro, both tried and tested exegetes of this most demanding of writers, read papers at the Joyce Week held last year at Alicante University to celebrate the centenary of Joyce's birth, and their articles are

at Alicante University to celebrate the centenary of Joyce's birth, and their articles are based on the lectures they delivered then. José Carnero's "Leafyspeafing. Lpf!" is a carefully argued attempt to disentangle the multiple levels of narrative embedding in the final section of Part IV of *Finnegans Wake*, which he regards as the finest passage of the entire novel. The interleaved planes (if José Carnero will forgive me the pun, as no doubt Joyce would) of mythology, history, biblical parallel, analogical discourse and realism are teased out and placed in persuasive relation to the all-embracing HCE and ALP principles, the philosophico-religious paradigms represented by St Patrick and Berkeley and the totalising world-views of Giambattista Vico and Giordano Bruno. Carnero's recapitulation also unravels connections between Anna Livia's final soliloquy and Molly Bloom's in *Ulysses*, as well as providing corroboration for suggestions thrown up in such earlier episodes of *Finnegans Wake* as the "Anna Livia Plurabelle" section, with its dialogue between the washerwomen, the sordid mystery of the father's Phoenix Park offence, the gossip of the twin brothers Shem and Shaun, the "Cad with a pipe" and his vinegar-tongued wife, the Parnell-Piggot affair, etc.

Manuel Almagro's essay, "Modernismo y/o postmodernismo en *Ulysses*," deals with the no less complex relation of the two "halves" of *Ulysses*. In line with one influential modern trend, the essay takes the view that the first half, up to the "Sirens" episode, is solidly, though richly, Modernist; with "Sirens" itself, the Postmodernist gauntlet is thrown down, and readers who accept the challenge are left to perform their own Odyssey as they steer through the maze of stylistic wandering rocks to face literary and linguist adventures for which no previous writing had prepared them. To Manuel Almagro, it is the "dialogue of styles" which is the most consistent feature of the later part of the book; his essay is an attempt to show that the novel itself provides careful and patient readers with the clues, often in the form of leitmotifs, which enable us to unravel its many strands and place them in relation to one another, much as the words of a dictionary can be seen by the user who has mastered the language to be an entire system of complex cross-references. Once the reader has grasped the concept of what Fritz Senn calls "righting" (i.e. the continual correcting of the text we are mentally constructing as readers) the first half of the novel is reopened to interpretation, so that here, too, the principle of circularity is in evidence.

Coincidentally, two of the contributors from the University of Ulster, Alan Peacock and Richard York, have chosen to focus not on the original work but on the experiments with translation of two important and highly distinctive Irish poets, Louis MacNeice and Derek Mahon respectively. Alan Peacock's punning title, "Louis MacNeice: Transmitting Horace," refers simultaneously to MacNeice's lifelong fascination, as a scholar and teacher of the classics, with the work of the Roman poet, and to his work as a producer for BBC radio in the forties and fifties. Specifically, the article examines MacNeice's 1956 broadcast "Carpe Diem" and the various kinds of translation of Horatian texts and tags which the Irish poet makes use of in the programme. MacNeice's purpose, argues Peacock, is to combine the pedagogic function with the exemplary exposé by showing how a schoolmasterish and highly literal "construing" of Horace, illustrating the effects of Horace's diction word by word, can actually lead to "English" versions which are unusual and strangely moving. The result, as Peacock says, is the revelation of "a sense of the

commonalty of human experience — a fellow-feeling which shrinks the intervening centuries.”

Whereas Alan Peacock suggests that some forcing of cultural and linguistic paradigms is necessary if they are to be accommodated across the barriers of history and living speech without loss to the “integrity of the experience,” Richard York’s “Derek Mahon as Translator” makes the rather different point that “a preoccupation with the alien has been a distinctive feature of a great deal of Mahon’s writing.” Mahon’s translations and adaptations, unfussy and precise though they often are, tend to cultivate a sense of foreignness or estrangement, leaving behind traces of the strain involved in accommodating the “accumulated cultural tradition” which York sees as Mahon’s objective. A French specialist himself, Richard York carefully follows Mahon through some of his versions of the French classics and moderns, drawing our attention to Mahon’s constant deftness, or his occasional misunderstandings, and, most interestingly, finding evidence of the Irish poet’s tendency to play down the exuberance or expansiveness of some of his models and to bring them into line with his own preference for “constraint and self-discipline,” or, we might say, for clarity over *éclat*. Richard York’s analysis is balanced and subtle, and though his tone is unfailingly courteous and self-effacing, the essay in the end makes very large claims indeed for Mahon’s work, declaring some of his adaptations to be “among the most successful translations of literary history.”

Still on the issue of translation, Michael White, of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, has contributed his “Observations on Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* in Translation.” This is a short commentary on the recent Spanish translation of Flann O’Brien’s comic masterpiece (*En Nadar-Dos-Pájaros*, trans. by J. M. Álvarez Flórez, Edhasa, Barcelona, 1989) but it is also a timely reminder to readers who think of Joyce and Beckett as being the only twentieth-century Irish novelists of stature. This is the novel of which Joyce said it had “the true comic spirit” and which has been “rediscovered” over the past two decades, though it was originally published fifty years ago, by academic critics interested in the modes of comedy and in self-conscious narrative strategies. Michael White expresses himself satisfied with the translation as a whole but takes the opportunity to draw attention to a number of cruxes, where no single translation could do justice to the power, wit or cunning of the original, and to a number of places at which, to his experienced Irish ear, the translator has got caught up — or perhaps I should say bogged down — in one of the many Hibernian detours in O’Brien’s highly original and densely Irish prose.

Rosa González, of Barcelona University, is a specialist in 19th and 20th Century drama and fiction, particularly Irish fiction. Of late, her editorial commitments have led her to conduct an impressive number of interviews with contemporary literary figures, and her skill at this demanding task is apparent in the two articles published in this issue, one an essay based on an interview and the other an interview proper. The interviews were conducted on two recent trips to Ireland, and their subjects are John B. Keane and James Plunkett, respectively an important dramatist and a major novelist. Keane’s solidly realistic attitude to the genre he most cultivates, and his determined commitment to the idea of the playwright as first and foremost a plotter of stories, emerge clearly from the article entitled “The Unappeasable Hunger for Land in John B. Keane’s *The Field*.” Plunkett’s more

lyrical and, ultimately, more historicist approach is the leading lesson of the interview entitled “Writing out of One’s Own Experience,” which affords a very helpful insight into the personal and intellectual background of the author of *Strumpet City*. Plunkett’s store of knowledge, based on personal acquaintance with many of the leading figures of Irish literature and politics of the century, and Rosa González’s probing questions on the relevant topics, eliciting zestful answers from the novelist, make lively and rewarding reading.

Of living poets, Ireland has more than her fair share of the most renowned and, if it were possible to devise a survey to prove it, might possibly turn out to have more poets altogether per head of population than any other modern country. The outstanding gifts of the northerner Seamus Heaney at present give him a lead over most of his fellow-countrymen, northern or southern, and Pilar Abad of Valladolid University has chosen to devote an essay to his work. For her part, Inés Praga of Burgos University College, who is Coordinator of the Anglo-Irish Panel of the Spanish Association of Anglo-American Studies, has, out of a sense of justice, but also from a personal conviction of the intrinsic value of their work, elected to contribute an introductory essay to the four women poets mentioned earlier, i.e. Eavan Boland, Medbh McGuckian, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin and Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. Her essay is significantly entitled “A Voice of Their Own?.” Readers of contemporary poetry as well as feminist critics generally will find much that is intriguing and absorbing in her article. As for the followers of Heaney, in Pilar Abad’s article they will find, among much else, what is, as far as I am aware, the most complete assessment of the value of Heaney’s essay “The Government of the Tongue” as a pointer to his poetics and his practice as a poet.

Of all the contributors to this issue, I am most personally grateful — and I mean no discourtesy to my guests in saying so — to my colleague at Alicante University, Javier Torres Ribelles, who has not only written the article entitled “Predetermination and Nihilism in W.B. Yeats’s Theatre,” but has also performed the lion’s share in the work of conceiving and preparing the “Bibliographical Approach to Irish Literature in English” which we publish here. He was also the instigator of the translation of Synge’s *Vernal Play* fragment, the first draft of which he wrote himself, and was instrumental in selecting the Yeats poems which he and I have translated for this issue. His skill, dedication, professionalism and capacity for sheer hard work are an example to us all. I know he will not mind my saying that the fact that we have so often been thrown back on our own devices gives some idea of the enormity of the task facing Anglo-Irish specialists in Spain right now.

In his article, Javier Torres traces the development he finds in Yeats’s plays from the optimistic to the pessimistic conception of determinism, i.e. from the view that art could triumph over life’s uncertainties and disappointments to the view that it was powerless to do other than reflect them. Torres holds that the former view prevails from *The Countess Cathleen* to the *Land of Heart’s Desire*, where age, unhappy love and death are overcome by the affirmation of the abiding principle of heroism; but thereafter, in the Cuchulain cycle, Yeats’s negative appraisal of modernity — modern art no less than modern life — leads to a finally negative evaluation of the possibilities of poetry and drama and to disbelief in the occult which had provided Yeats with a prop throughout his middle years.

The article draws on the poems of *The Tower* and on the evidence of recent scholarly examinations of Yeats's theoretical positions to reach the conclusion that the late drama puts all its considerable technical accomplishment at the service of the overriding idea that the "slave morality" of urban culture had triumphed over "the old high way" the younger Yeats had dreamed of.

It is a very great pleasure to include an article, displaying his habitual wit and verve, by our distinguished colleague D. E. S. Maxwell, who held academic posts through the British Council in many parts of the world before being appointed to a chair, from which he has now retired, at the Queen's University in Belfast. His essay on the plays of Brian Friel, "Real Grass and the Light of Other Days," is rich in suggested readings of this extraordinarily talented dramatist. Maxwell's title, in alluding to the real grass used for a 1988 production of Friel's play *Aristocrats* and to Moore's famous romantic lyric "Oft in the stilly night," suggests a fundamental tension not so much between the actual and the ideal as between the facts that must be faced and the dangerous byways of delusion. That history and what we are pleased to call "reality" may, equally with whimsy, be instances of delusion is the substance of Friel's plays as Maxwell reads them. Like Vivien Mercier, Maxwell sees Beckett as an Irish author in the sense that his plays are best imagined as taking place, at least intermittently, in recognizably Irish contexts, and he establishes a parallel between Beckett's and Friel's racial and historical awareness. Seeing Beckett's characters as images of "a colonised, post-colonial imagination making do with dispossession," he constructs a view of Friel's plays as "visions of a contemporary world where past and present, discontinuous, seek connections that are rarely more than glimpsed" and compares the selfconsciously "manipulative" habit of both dramatists to conclude that the past as it emerges from Friel's plays is a "sighting of the same disinheritance" as that which comes out of Beckett's.

The importance of the concept of "translation" in Brian Friel's drama is stressed by Elmer Andrews, of the University of Ulster, in his essay "Brian Friel: Two Recent 'Translations' — *The London Vertigo* and *A Month in the Country*." Andrews expects to publish a full-length study of Friel's plays later this year and the *RAEI* is very pleased to have this opportunity of presenting its readers with this foretaste of what promises to be an important critical contribution to discussion of the work of a major contemporary dramatist. The plays discussed here are "versions," respectively, of *The True-born Irishman* (1761), by the Irish dramatist Charles Macklin, and of Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*. Andrews argues that Friel has adapted these earlier works to his own ironic and compassionate vision of the "vertigo" of love and desire, the inner conflicts of the individual (self and world, male and female, etc.), "where the action resides in internal emotion and secret turmoil and not in external events." Behind the disruptions and the emotional turbulence of the individual lives portrayed, Andrews discerns "the ghostly presence of an aesthetic order and harmony" which is a constant in Friel's work.

Beckett's fiction is probably enjoying a greater vogue now than his plays, both because of its exemplary status and, one suspects, because it yields readily to the narratological analysis now universally practised. Perhaps our contributor José Ángel García Landa, of the University of Zaragoza, would wish to say that this method of analysis was partly brought into being by the existence of prose works such as Beckett's. At any rate, his essay

“‘It’s stories still’: la reflexividad en las narraciones de Samuel Beckett” is excellent proof of the suitability of such tools for the task of examining Beckett’s riddling narrative structures. García Landa’s essay is a dense, technically intricate and extremely thorough sifting of the modes of reflexivity in Beckett’s prose fiction. Though he concentrates on *The Unnamable*, virtually all of the prose is touched on at some point, and there are occasional references suggesting how the plays come into the picture. The essay relies partly on some of the techniques of deconstruction as well as narratology, and it ranges over semiotic and related formal issues, though the philosophical underpinning of reflexivity is also given due consideration. García Landa has also prepared a complete and up-to-date checklist of Beckett’s published works, together with the principal Spanish translations, which we are very pleased to publish here. Beckett enthusiasts and researchers in the field will be extremely grateful for this outstanding scholarly contribution.

My own essay, “Remembered Light: Constants in the Fiction of John M<sup>c</sup>Gahern,” is a conspectus of the novels of this realist from the Midlands. The constants I examine are the intensity of the novels, their lyrical quality and their themes of oppressive love, endurance and passionate labour. Though the vision of the novels is, on the face of it, bleak and dark, the main characters share a craving for the absolute which they intuit through the beauty and mystery of the universe. Their indomitable will to survive, despite the pain and monotony of their lives, raises them above the meanness and drabness of their circumstances and justifies the pride in life of these shambling, tongue-tied country people.

Finally, I would like to thank my colleague José Antonio Álvarez Amorós, the editor of the *RAEI*, for his hospitality in inviting me to edit this issue and for his support and expert advice in the (to me) novel and complicated process of preparing it for the press.