



**Praga Terente, Inés (Ed) *La novela irlandesa del siglo XX*  
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David Clark

The field of Irish Studies is currently going through a period of quite incredible fruitfulness in Spain. It is surprising, perhaps, to contemplate the sheer amount of scholarship on Irish matters appearing from a variety of different Spanish universities. One of the most important figures in this boom is the editor and co-author of the volume under discussion, Inés Praga Terente who, from her Chair in Humanities at the University of Burgos, has founded the Spanish Association of Irish Studies and has consistently encouraged young scholars from a number of institutions in the different regions of Spain to delve into the field.

This volume, as the title suggests, presents a refreshing study of the Irish novel in the twentieth century. Written in Spanish, its accessibility for readers in Spain and in other Spanish-speaking countries is undeniable, and the volume provides a wonderful starting point for students wishing to broaden their knowledge on the subject.

The book is divided into five chapters, each of which examines a specific area of the Irish novel in the last century. Chapter One, written by Praga herself, is entitled “About the Irish Novel: Notes towards a Tradition” and gives a general overview of the history of the novel in Ireland. Praga Terente, supporting the views of one of Ireland’s most interesting contemporary writers, Dermot Bolger, claims that the novel has now overtaken the short story as constituting the “national art form” in contemporary Ireland. Recognising the enormity of the shadow cast by Joyce, the author takes the reader painlessly through the diversity and quantity of Irish long fiction in the twentieth century with an admirable sense of tact and of taste, resuscitating the importance of often unrecognised early writers such as Eimar O’Duffy and Mervyn Wall, whilst recognising the status deserved, but so grudgingly awarded, to James Stephens. Her analysis of contemporary writers is just and illuminating – nobody is overstated, and few writers are missing.

The second chapter, by Mará Amor Barros Del Ríó, under the title “To Name the Unnameable: Women and Literature in Ireland” reviews the situation of women’s fiction in the island. Whilst acknowledging the early predominance of Ascendancy writers in the woman’s novel in Ireland, Barros Del Ríó links the Anglo-Irish tradition to the contemporary novel in that there exists a common concern in “the presentation of the female psyche subjected to social force”. Accepting J.M. Cahalan’s grouping of Elizabeth Bowen, Mary Lavin, Kate O’Brien, Maura Laverty and Molly Keane as “a literary generation”, the writer stresses the importance of a novel like Bowen’s *The Last*

*September*, in which “the knot of loyalties which members of her social class felt towards Ireland and England” are stretched to limits which, like Kate O’Brien in her treatment of the Catholic middle-classes are based on an intensity of personal experience and the public revelation of the personal consciousness. Barros Del Río cleverly equates the generation of writers which came to the fore in the early 1960’s – Julia O’Faolain, Jennifer Johnston and Edna O’Brien – with Judith, the elderly protagonist of Julia O’Faolain’s *No Country for Young Men* because, like Judith, they can be seen to be “re-writing multiple sub-histories, or marginal histories which had not before that time been related”. Contemporary writers are covered with competence and skill, although one perhaps misses reference to such magnificent writers as Anne Enright and Anne Haverty, as well as the rising star of contemporary Irish narrative, Lia Mills.

Leonardo Pérez García is responsible for chapter three, “Representations of Dublin in the Contemporary Irish Novel”. In this thoughtful essay, Pérez García provides a fascinating journey through twentieth-century Dublin as reflected in its narrative. For the author, the Dublin of the earlier years of the century retains the characteristics of the “knowable community” in which the individual has an identifiable place and accepts an identifiable role. Thus the characters that haunt the worlds of Joyce and Stephens, for example, are in a sense rural urbanites, inhabiting a community which is without any intrinsic hostility and which is, to all intents and purposes, generally protective. This contrasts with the Dublin of the mid to late twentieth century – a city where the new housing estates in the North and South of the city are linked, correctly or not, with the collapse of the traditional values which the Church and State struggled to maintain. Pérez García gives a detailed analysis of novelists such as Ardal O’Hanlon, Bolger and Val Murkens before centring his discussion on the works of Roddy Doyle.

Chapter Four is the only chapter in the book which deals specifically with an individual writer. “A Treasury of Irish Memories: Secrets and Lies in the Novels of Patrick McCabe”, written by Ana Esther Rubio Amigo, provides an analysis of the work of the “bad boy” of contemporary Irish fiction, an analysis which concentrates mainly on *The Butcher Boy*, *The Dead School* and *Breakfast on Pluto*. It is, undeniably, an extremely risky affair to single out any individual writer for such special treatment, and I am sure that many readers will not agree with the choice of McCabe. Why not McGahern? Banville? Or Colm Tóibín? Personally, I defend the choice of McCabe, whose sheer subversion of the traditions of “Irishness” must be seen as a breath of fresh air in a world of Irish theme pubs and green wigs on St Patrick’s day. It is precisely this air of subversion which Rubio Amigo celebrates in this chapter. McCabe holds “iconoclastic views towards the cultural symbols of postcolonial Ireland” which he uses to “revise the most significant aspects of the recent history of Ireland”. The author, according to Rubio Amigo, reflects “the effects of the clash between tradition and progress” while at the same time analysing “the pressure exerted on the subject by the community” and the futility of traditional mythical structures.

The final chapter, Chapter Five, is again written by the General Editor, Professor Praga Terente, and is entitled "The Novel in the North". Here Praga Terente convincingly argues in favour of a separate treatment for the novel from the North without implying any ideological reasoning behind such a decision. The Troubles are obviously central to her discourse, but the writer also stresses the fact that the "bad press" to which the city of Belfast (and the North in general) has been submitted is nothing new, predating not only the Troubles but, in fact, the twentieth century itself. Praga Terente, following A. Bradley, makes some interesting comments with reference to the different attitudes towards place in the writings of authors from both communities in the North. For Catholic writers, "place" is generally celebrated in atavistic terms, whereas for Protestant authors "place" often responds to a sense of alienation, and hence the tendency towards the Gothic. Thus the atavism of the early Michael McLaverty can be contrasted with the Gothic decadence of Sam Hanna Bell. Belfast, like Joyce's Dublin, is for many writers from the North, a city of paralysis, and Brian Moore's *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* inhabits the same spiritual and geographical territory as that which later writers such as Robert McLiam Wilson, Eoin McNamee and Glenn Patterson would use. Deirdre Madden is afforded her just role in the pantheon of great contemporary writers from the North, as are Bernard MacLaverty and Linda Anderson. Interestingly, perhaps, Praga Terente justly praises Mary Beckett's *Give them Stones* but does not mention Anna Burns' masterful *No Bones*, perhaps one of the most poignant studies of the Troubles to appear in any novel.

*La novela irlandesa del siglo XX* is, in conclusion, a most welcome addition to the steadily growing Spanish-language contribution to Irish Studies. The bibliography provided in the book is extensive without losing a sense of perspective, and the scale of Praga Terente's scholarship (and that of her collaborators) is amply demonstrated by the constant reference to existing materials in the field. Particularly illuminating, perhaps, is the amount of Spanish bibliography cited by the authors. As well as being a generous gesture towards Spanish scholars working in the field, this also bears testimony to the flourishing status of Irish Studies in Spain today. This volume provides the raw material for the formation and training of new generations of students of Irish literature, as well as supplying an intelligent and reliable reference work for Spanish speakers working in the field of Irish Studies.