



**Morales Ladrón, Marisol (ed.). *Postcolonial and Gender Perspectives in Irish Studies*. A Coruña: Netbiblo, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-9729892-6-8. 240 pp.**

**M<sup>a</sup> Elena Jaime de Pablos**

The collection of essays *Postcolonial and Gender Perspectives in Irish Studies*, edited by Marisol Morales Ladrón, gathers important research by leading Spanish scholars on various aspects of Irish Studies. Their relevance lies in their application of an array of postcolonial theories to the study of Irish literature and cinema, an approach pioneered by the work of the Field Day Theatre Company in the 1980s, and continued by many critics both within and outside the Irish academic field.<sup>1</sup> The critical acclaims put forward in the last four decades by Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi K. Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, together with other theories belonging to the so-called field of Gender Studies, are successfully combined in order to offer illuminating analyses of conflicting and marginal voices who earnestly strive to counterattack the silence they have been imposed to by different hegemonic discourses (i.e. imperialist, nationalist, religious, etc.).

The book is divided into five parts, preceded by Morales Ladrón's illuminating prologue: "Prólogo: Postcolonialism y Género en los Estudios Irlandeses" (Prologue: Postcolonialism and Gender in Irish Studies). Part I "Postcolonialism, Language and Gender" opens up with an essay by Isabel Carrera Suárez entitled: "La teorización postcolonial de Irlanda" (Postcolonial Theorization of Ireland), in which this scholar provides different and contrasting academic discourses about the appropriateness of considering Ireland within a postcolonial framework. After emphasising the difficulties involved in any attempt to interconnect the three fields of Feminism, Irish Studies and Postcolonial Studies, Carrera Suárez explains how feminist perspectives have often been neglected in gender biased pieces of research. In "The Irish Language and Issues on Postcolonialism: An Approach", Asier Altuna García de Salazar shows how the Irish language – an expression of Irishness – has traditionally been promoted as a sign of difference from and rejection of the English identity. The essay ends up by analysing the Irish language from the point of view of hybridism, bilingualism and multiculturalism, key concepts to understand Ireland from a postcolonial standpoint.

Part II of the book includes two essays on Irish poetry examined from a similar viewpoint. In "Northern Ireland: The Poetry in Between", Manuela Palacios González focuses on the geographical, political, religious, class and gender divisions reflected in the work of different generations of male and female writers from the North of Ireland, ranging from John Hewitt, Mac Neice, W. R. Rodgers, John Montague, Seamus Heaney

to Michael Longley, Derek Mahon, Paul Muldoon, Medbh McGuckian. This critic concludes that there are obvious similarities between the poetry published in the North and that published in the Republic of Ireland (with representative names such as Paula Meehan, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Anne Hartigan or Eavan Boland), which implies that there is no such thing as a 'distinctive' Northern Irish poetry. The second essay, "*Acts of Union: El discurso del amor en el texto poético de autoras irlandesas (1980-2005)*" [*Acts of Union: Love Discourse in Poetic Texts by Irish Female Authors (1980-2005)*], by Luz Mar González Arias, deals with the poetry of Irish women writers in the last three decades, in particular Eavan Boland, Eithne Strong, Katie Donovan, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Paula Meehan, Dorothy Molly, Anne Hartigan, Leanne O'Sullivan and Mary Coll. As González Arias shows by applying the critical claims of the philosopher Umberto Galimberti, the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, the critic Linda Hutcheon or the feminist sociologist Wendy Langford, love for these Irish women poets is understood as a non-symmetric bond between a man and a woman, which reinforces the patriarchal order.

The four essays included in Part III of the volume: "Fiction: Novels and Short Stories", examine Irish narrative drawing on postcolonial and gender-orientated notions. In "Glenn Patterson and Robert McLiam Wilson: Two Contemporary Northern Irish Writers and the Question of National Identity", Esther Aliaga Rodrigo focuses on how the controversial concept of national identity is reflected in the work of two writers belonging to opposing religious backgrounds, Catholicism and Protestantism. Interestingly enough, both authors similarly question the possibility of offering a static conception of national identity in a changing society characterised by multiculturalism, globalization and universalisation. Once more, the suitability of the term 'postcolonial' to refer to Irish or Northern Irish literature is discussed. "Espacios femeninos en la novela de la República escrita por mujeres" (Feminine Spaces in the Republic Novel Written by Women), the second essay of this section by María Amor Barros del Río offers an overview of the evolution of the twentieth-century Irish novel by female writers such as Emily Lawless, Edith Somerville & Violet Martin, Kate O'Brien, Edna O'Brien, Kate Cruise O'Brien, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne and Catherine Dunne. Resorting to postcolonial and gender theories, this author discusses the way these writers deal with the identification of woman with nation, their 'sense of place', and their search for a new female identity free from negative and/or male-chauvinist stereotypes. The third essay of this section by Tamara Benito de la Iglesia, "The Anti/postcolonial Trace in Some Stories of the Northern Irish Troubles", studies postcolonial and anti-colonialist traces in short stories dealing with the so-called 'Troubles' in Northern Ireland. Special emphasis is laid on the short stories by Gerry Adams, William Trevor, David Park or Bernard MacLaverty, in order to demonstrate the importance of issues such as power, sectarianism, cultural identity, repression, violence and terror in Northern Ireland, all of them clear aftermaths of British imperial rule. Margarita Estévez Saá's essay "'The Seanchai': Short Fiction by Irish Women Writers from the Republic", puts an end to the postcolonial and gender analysis of Irish short story in the volume. After analysing the

role of the *Seanchai* both as a story teller and as a custodian of the Irish language, culture and history, Estévez Saá denounces the fact that only a few of the many anthologies of short stories include female writers. The recent inclusion of voices such as Mary Lavin, Mary Kelly, Clare Boylan, Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Bernardette Matthews, Anne Le Marquand Hartigan, Eithne Strong, Evelyn Conlon and Judy Kravis, among others, contributes to the enrichment and popularity of this narrative genre.

Part IV of the edited collection of essays is devoted to contemporary drama published both in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. In her essay “La compañía Charabanc (Marie Jones), Anne Devlin y Christina Reid: Estudio postcolonial del teatro norirlandés contemporáneo” [“Charabanc Theatre Company (Marie Jones), Anne Devlin and Christina Reid: A Postcolonial Study of Northern Irish Contemporary Drama”], M<sup>a</sup> del Mar González Chacón offers an insightful postcolonial and gender analysis of the work produced by the above mentioned female playwrights, in order to highlight how they deal with important issues such as ‘trauma’, ‘knowledge’, ‘power’, ‘otherness’ and ‘exile’. Particular attention is drawn to the establishment in 1983 of The Charabanc Theatre Company, as an important and subversive attempt to depict the heterogeneity of women’s experiences and debunk traditional gender roles. “Infantilising Staging of Postcolonial Adulthood: A Study of Tom Murphy’s *A Crucial week in the Life of a Grocer’s Assistant* and Sebastian Barry’s *Boss Grady’s Boys*”, by Rosana Herrero Martín, deals with the drama produced in the Republic of Ireland. The author shows, by carefully analysing the representations of parental overshadowing in Murphy’s and Barry’s plays, that Ireland was conceived as an infant in the nationalist drama produced under Eamon De Valera’s rule. Herrero Martín sheds new light upon these two playwrights by resorting to Jean-François Lyotard’s theories on the plurality of small narratives competing with each other and replacing the totalitarianism of grand narratives. The author concludes that both authors prefer the fragmented voices of marginal characters to establish an Irish cultural identity rather than the well-known protagonists of Irish official history.

The fifth and last part of the book contains a large essay on cinema “Postcolonial Ireland on Screen”, in which Rosa González Casademont uncovers a series of stereotypes (such as the image of a rural paralysed country), which were often employed in cinematic representations of Ireland. González Casademont includes in her scope of research filmic representations of Irishness produced not only in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, but also in the United States, the United Kingdom, with a view to revealing how gender, self-representation and cultural identity is conceived in these filmic discourses.

In short, *Postcolonial and Gender Perspectives in Irish Studies* proves to be an indispensable and obligatory reading for those interested in Irish Studies, Postcolonial Studies and Gender Studies, since it provides a most valuable contribution to scholarship on these three rich and fascinating fields of knowledge.

## Works Cited

- Carroll, Clare & Patricia King (eds). *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2003.
- Deane, "Dumbness and Eloquence: A Note on English as We Write it in Ireland". *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory*. Eds. Clare Carroll & Patricia King. Cork: Cork University Press, 2003. 109-121.
- Graham, Colin. *Deconstructing Ireland: Identity, Theory and Culture*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001.
- Smyth, Gerry. "The Politics of Hybridity: Some Problems with Crossing the Border". *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures: Dislocations*. Eds. Ashok Bery & Patricia Murray. London: Macmillan Press, 2000. 43-55.
- Villar-Argáiz, Pilar. *Eavan Boland's Evolution as an Irish Woman Poet: An Outsider within an Outsider's Culture*. Lewiston, Queenston & Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Poetry of Eavan Boland: A Postcolonial Reading*. Dublin: Academica Press, 2007.

## Note

- 1 Recent research on Ireland's place within postcolonial studies has been carried out by Carroll and King (2003), Deane (2003), Graham (2001), Smyth (2000), and Villar-Argáiz (2007a, 2007b), to name some representative scholars.