

# Continente *Irlanda*

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Undertaking this fascinating trip through *Continente Irlanda* (*The Irish Continent*), which goes from the episodes of *History* to the poems of *Farewell*, passing through the analysis of *Words*, through Theatre and Cinema (*Scenery*), and finally through the essays of Prose & Poetry (*Writings*), I wanted to stay a little longer in the places that seduced me more... Driven, as one could expect, (being myself a “woman of letters”) by the Bakhtinian dialogue with “the other”, but also by the Aristotelian conviction that in its particulars lives the universal, I started from Poetry.

I started looking for Ireland from the *Farewell*, in “Petrarch’s Laura”, by Desmond O’Grady (translated into Italian by Maria Stella): “*She was born of good name and came from that/Hill country twenty miles outside the city/In which she settled; secure after they got/ a well made marriage for her. [...]She mothered children, but painfully died of fever;/Wrinkled, withered. Her name lives forever*”. and in “Pigmalion’s Image” by Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin (with an Italian translation by Carla de Petris): “*Not only her stone face, laid back staring in the ferns,/But everything the scoop of the valley contains begins to move/(And beyond the horizon the trucks beat the highway.)/ [...] The lines of her face tangle and catch, and/A green leaf of language comes twisting out of her mouth.*” — but I started interpreting Ireland from Francesca Romana Paci’s “*Seamus Heaney: The Ripple and The Riddle*”

Referring to *Crediting Poetry* (Heaney’s Stockholm speech of 1995, when he was granted the Nobel prize) – a kind of balance the poet makes of his work –, Paci uses as a key to penetrate the dualism (“the binary phenomenology of experience”) which seems to distinguish Heaney’s poetry (*denlife/ outside world; archaic/modern; aerial wire/wireless; local accents/resonant English tones; pen/gun; spade/pen; etc.*), a very keen model of poetic world: the image of the *ripples*, the small concentric undulations of the water surface, in a bucket – which would correspond, in its whole, to the mind’s centre and its circumference. The intricate way from centre to circumference is the

ideal map she finds to follow the passage from pre-conscious silence to conscious thinking, that is, to language.

But beyond the *ripples* you need the *riddles*, to complete the image of the poetical world of the author. "Riddle", which is also the title of a poem in one of the latest collections of the poet, means not only "puzzle" (a *quaesitum* from man to man about the things of world and life, about the value and the means of knowledge "), but also "sieve", "to sift the sense of things from what's imagined", as Heaney says in one of his verses

In another crucial point of his poetry, "From the Frontier of Writing" (in *The Haw Lantern*, the same collection where "The Riddle" can be found) there's a discussion, now philosophical, about how to separate the concrete factuality of things from the way they appear when imagined, when transformed into mental images (" 'The frontier of writing' is the passage from mundane order into poetical order, where the thing happens again, transformed into fiction, and both converge in their search of what is 'true' ")

From the universals of Poetry I passed to the particulars of History.

The editors, in their *Introduction*, give us the script where there is one Ireland for each interpreter: a Protestant one for the German people, a Gaelic and revolutionary one for the French, a Catholic one for the Spanish, and others, more contemporary, but over all of them looms the ancient Ireland of the first Celts, a kind of Atlantis of the European consciousness. However, they opt for one only *partitura*, able to maintain the effect of continuity, notwithstanding the multimediac and interdisciplinary character of their research.

So, after Joseph Small's view of the perspectives for Ireland in the third millennium, we may read a series of essays by Italian professors who deal with Irish culture.

Eva Guarino establishes a relation among the facts that happened in Ireland in the years of '98, from the episode of 1598, known as *The Battle of the Yellow Ford* (a fight between English and Irish during Queen Elizabeth's reign), to the repressed rebellion of 1798 (*United Irishmen*), which proposed the cause of a republican and independent Ireland, and which gave birth to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland that lasted more than a century. Finally, after the vicissitudes which led Ulster Catholics to find in Sinn Fein a political guide and in the IRA a military structure, we arrive to the *British-Irish Agreement* of 1998, which gathers (successfully) representatives of the Republic of Ireland, the United Kingdom and of the various political parties of Northern Ireland, *Sinn Fein* included.

Donatella Abbate Badin tells the fascinating history of the 2 years voyage of Lady Morgan to Italy, described in her 1821 book (*Italy*), where the writer discovers parallels between the Irish revolt of the United Irishmen and the attempt to institute a Neapolitan Republic.

The series of essays which compounds the chapter called *Words* starts by the research of glottologist Diego Poli about the impact of Celtic tradition over the Christian

one (Latin Christianization), and about the consecutive meetings/ collisions: Vikings x Normans, Gaelic x English, that will constitute the Irish cultural speech.

The way this speech runs into the twentieth century is the object of Clara Ferranti's essay, about the manifestation of *la langue* (Ireland's English) in the rhythmical poetical record of *la parole* (the speech) of J.M. Synge and Frank Mc Court, as it is the object of the next essay: Fiorenzo Fantaccini's analysis of the novel *The Commitments* by Roddy Doyle, as linguistic representation of the new Dubliner generations.

Among the *Sceneries*, the first belongs to the nationalistic parades (*unionist*) of Northern Ireland, studied by anthropologist Ciro De Rosa; the second one is a valuable analysis of the phenomenon which led "Celtic" music to its recent revaluation, undertaken by musician Kay McCarthy.

Moving to theatrical scenery, Margherita Giulietti proposes an original confrontation between author and actor, having no-one less than Samuel Beckett and Jack MacGowran as protagonists; and Carla de Pretis, when discussing the perennial success of Irish playwrights on the English scene, focuses on Marie Jones' voice, that leads us to an unusual reading of the cultural civilization produced by U.S. cinema, in her recent work *Stones in His Pockets*.

Finally, Ruth Barton thinks of a relation between "Irish cinema and gender identity" studying the *clichés* formation process as is the case of the *feisty colleen* and of the *faithful son* and their transformation into new icons of masculine and feminine.

Here we are back to *Writings*. Agostino Lombardo studies Joyce's relation to Italian writers: Italo Svevo, Tomasi di Lampedusa, Debenedetti, Montale, Calvino and contributes to explain why and how *Ulysses* has become, nowadays, an Italian classic. Joan FitzGerald studies Yeats' usage of *aisling* (vision of gaelic tradition of jacobite age) stressing in it the emphasis given to the figure of the Goddess of Sovereignty, who comes back in Yeats's drama as old Cathleen, who incites the Irish youth to die in the 1798 revolt.

Giuseppe Serpillo proposes a reflection about some linguistic and semantic aspects of the *Elegy*, from seventeenth to twentieth centuries; and e Romolo Runcini, from a sociological point of view of literature, sees the *fantastic* in Wilde, Yeats and Stoker, who, though being Protestants, present a perfect hierarchical gradualism, more proper to the Catholic world, and responsible for the distance from the *gothic* ("nearer to Protestant radical ethics") and for the vicinity to the *marvellous*.

The type of archetypical interior landscape of the Anglo-Irish women is the object of Maria Stella's essay "Islands: spaces in Elizabeth Bowen's narrative", and of Viola Papetti's, that studies the work of novelist Molly Keane in her essay: "Cruelty in the *big house*: Molly Keane's case". The critic focuses the novel *Good Behavior*, where the *big house* theme (the big residence of the *haute bourgeoisie* of those times, in palladian or georgian style, "brown and imperial outside, refined and womanly *rococó* inside"), which makes essential part of the imaginary of the Ascendancy (the Anglo-Irish *haute bourgeoisie*), is inclemently scrutinized in details, as strictly tied to the life of its inhabitants. As a matter of fact, the numerous Catholics in servitude were made an

integral part of the family, with its secret hybridizations, as happened in Brazilian *Casa grande e senzala*, in the classic description of Gilberto Freire. The *casa grande*, as the *big house*, fades into decay and transforms itself: the first, living as the symbol of *Coronelismo* (the status of the political fazendas' owner, called *Coronel*) in many of the feudal properties which still exist in Brazil; the last, remaining as an interior symbol or "phantasm" of the *Ascendancy*, transforming itself into a *torched house*, burnt by the IRA, or finally deserted or destroyed.

A cruel novel, *Good Behavior*, can be read – as critics say – as an extreme paradigm, however necessary, to the history of this so close to us Ireland: *acid humour*; nostalgic fascination of sweet familiar perversions, cancellation of morbid remembrances, but also tentative of redemption, impossible perhaps, but rich in hope, for us also.