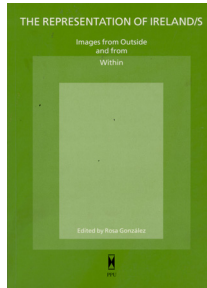


The Representation of Ireland/s

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***The Representation Of Ireland/s – Images From Outside And From Within.* Edited by R. González. Barcelona: PPU, 2003, pp. 380. ISBN 84-477-0841-1.**

Based on the contributions made to the II International Conference of the Spanish Association for Irish Studies, hosted by the University of Barcelona in 2002, this collection of 32 essays approaches issues which range from law, history, sociology and cultural theory to film, media and literary studies. Grounded on the notion that every society, as a response to conflicts it is subject to, tends to create particular modes of representation, the volume provides insights into attempts at defining Irish culture at home and abroad; in this context, the word *representation* acquires a very broad sense, involving the construction and the reproduction of images and ideas. The essays were grouped into eight sections, commented below.

The opening section of the book, entitled “Modes of Representation”, starts with Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh’s essay, which evaluates the critical role of the Irish oral tradition in historical narrative and reveals the forms of representation in which the “story of Ireland” has been written in the shifting circumstances of Ireland through the centuries. By viewing popular memory as an “alternative history”, the next two essays focus on the importance of images in the representation of disputed events in contemporary history. The phenomenon of wall murals, and their connections to political transformation in Northern Ireland, is discussed by Bill Rolston. The other essay, by Lance Pettit, takes the Bloody Sunday, made into a film by Paul Greengrass in 2002, and examines how drama-documentary TV films challenge society by dramatising popular versions of the past. The notion of “national culture” is questioned in the following two contributions: in Jean Mercereau’s essay on Irishness in *The Irish Times*, and in Inês Praga-Terente’s, which analyses the representation of Irish identity by the national-international band U2.

“Images of Colonial Ireland” is the following section, and Timothy Keane opens it up with an essay which suggests a re-evaluation of the role that Ireland played in the agitation for political reform in England during the 19th century, in efforts which culminate in the publication of William Cobbet’s *A History of the Protestant “Reformation” in England and Ireland*, a book that deconstructed the perception “Ireland” and “the Irish”

held in English popular culture. Next, Silvia Diez-Fabre investigates Somerville & Ross' *The Real Charlotte* (1894) and Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929), by arguing that both books present a "transcendental approach" to the physical universe of Anglo-Ireland, leading to a view of the land as "a powerful spiritual element that passes judgement on the Ascendancy and brings in a verdict of guilty" (p. 107).

Misrepresented or under-presented aspects of Northern Ireland are investigated in the third section, called "Images of the North". Based on interviews carried out in 1999 on Nottingham residents, Lesley Lelourec reveals the link that exists between the average English person's knowledge on Ireland/Northern Ireland and their perception of The Troubles. Christian Mailhes discusses the Good Friday Agreement (1998) and its reform of the Criminal Justice system. At last, looking at the narrative of the Battle of the Diamond in (1795), Wesley Hutchinson examines the way Orange historians represent the beginnings of the Order, markedly in their "tales of wonder".

The importance of orality in the Irish language is the main topic of the section entitled "Language". Ríona Ní Fhrighil addresses the question of the country's linguistic heritage in the work of the contemporary Irish poet Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill. Ruth Lysaght examines films made by the Irish language television TG4, especially the short films of the Oscailt scheme, which pose a new version of the Irish through fictional narratives set in contemporary Ireland, evincing an interest in the Irish language as a cultural entity. Rosana Herrero discusses the verbomotor society depicted in Synge's play *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), analysing the dynamic language of the country people of Mayo, inventively recreated in their lavish domestic rhetorical imagery.

The next section, "Gender", is engaged in the analysis of recent plays that challenge the traditional identification of gender and nationhood. Luz Mar González Arias shows how the romantic Cathleen Ní Houlihan is transformed into an Irish Medea in Marina Carr's play *By the Bog of Cats...* Marisol Morales-Ladrón looks into gender relations in the controversial play *Translations* (1980), by Brian Friel, which exposes the historical clash between Britain and Ireland. The plays *Ourselves Alone* (1986) and *After Easter* (1994), by the Northern Irish playwright Anne Devlin, are studied by Auxiliadora Pérez-Vides, who argues that both plays challenge the traditional process that naturalises women's passive role within the nationalist and religious construction of Irishness.

A wide variety of literary genres are covered in the section "Literary Imagining". Two Irish autobiographies, *The Islandman* (1929), by Thomas O'Crohan, and *Paddy the Cope* (1942), by Patrick Gallagher, are analysed by Munira Mutran, who punctuates the value of the autobiographical mode in the historical texture as both document and intimist literature. Revisiting the play *On Baile's Strand*, Keith Gregor discusses Yeats's vision of Irish nationhood and his interest in the prolific Irish lore, opening the debate over whether a "national" drama should just resurrect legends or look for a more contemporaneous Irish voice. Two plays written by Beckett, *Rough for Theater I* (1956) and *The Old Tune* (1963), are analysed by Katherine Weiss, who deals with the problematization of Irishness in Beckett's texts.

Still concerning “Literary Imagining”, Carlos Villar-Flor explores traces of Irish Catholicism in two of Flann O’Brien’s early novels, *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939) and *The Third Policeman* (1940), and argues that O’Brien’s Catholic upbringing pervades these novels in such a deep way that the characteristic relativity and scepticism associated with postmodernism are absent from both, a fact that calls for a further evaluation of O’Brien’s position as forerunner of postmodernity. Anne Goarzin discusses texts that involve photographic devices: the “reversed image” produced by a *camera obscura* in Joyce’s short stories, the traceable photographs framed in Neil Jordan’s visual text, and those that Paul Durcan’s poems create before the reader’s eyes. Finally, Juan Elices-Agudo discerns the mock-heroic background that pervades McLiam Wilson’s novel *Ripley Bogle*, tracing the way Wilson subverts the epic ideals by applying its satire not to the formulas of classic epics, but to the corruption of ongoing political, economic, religious and social debates.

Six essays form the section titled “Contesting Received Images”, which focus on writers, artists and practices that undermined the prevailing normative social discourse and, thus, accelerated shifts in “official” representation of national culture in the Republic and in Northern Ireland. Two of them share a feminist posture: first, the tendency the poet Eavan Boland has to reject the nationalist images of Ireland (as the vulnerable virgin or the mourning mother) is discussed in Maria Pillar Villar Argáiz’s essay; next, by analysing short stories written by contemporary Irish women who discussed crucial issues of women’s condition in the 1970’s and 80’s, Angela Ryan argues that these writings assisted social change by replacing, in the Irish *imaginaire*, a series of new attitudes to various social questions.

Images of Ireland from a Spanish speaking context are addressed in the last section, called “Intercultural Links”. Patricia Trainor evinces the similarities between “Hibernia” (Iberland, Iverland, Ireland) and “Iberia” (Hispania, Spain); supported by a series of historical episodes, Trainor’s essay concludes with the idea that the Irish were in fact a Latin tribe lost in the North. The image of Ireland and the Irish in Galicia during the 20th century is discussed in Margarita Estévez Saá and José Estévez Saá’s paper, that reinforces the historical concomitants between Galicia and Ireland. Asier García de Salazar studies the play *The Guerrilla: Sketches of Spanish Character* (1837), by James Sheridan Knowles, and reveals how Knowles, by representing the Spanish character, throws light into the Irish discourse of the period, marked by a biased approach that depicted “the other” as picturesque and debased. At last, a study of the “gauchos ingleses”, originated by the Irish settlement in Argentina in the 19th century, is presented by Edmundo Murray, who relates the elements of the Anglo-Irish heritage as joined with the local post-colonial culture forming a unique set of shared values, as they come to be represented in the form of an Irish-Argentine literature.

To understand the Irish and its representation, one cannot disregard that Ireland self-image was conditioned by its protracted colonial status, years of economic stagnation and mass emigration, facts that curtailed the opportunities Irish people had to represent

themselves, and generated images of Irishness often mixed and competing – not only from outside but also from within the island. Besides, one cannot forget that, in parallel, Ireland has also been viewed, in the diasporic imagination, as a mythic place. All these elements make a thorough understanding of the Irish difficult. This is why *The Representation of Ireland/s* is an elucidating book, for it successfully reveals the multiplicity of Irelands that emerge from different historical, geographical, and mental locations. This collection of essays enlightens the way Irish thought evolves, from that previous notion of Irish identity established by values such as the Catholic religion, the Gaelic language and the commitment to an Irish Republic, to a more flexible identity that represents Irish culture and national heritage.

Also worth mentioning are the discussions the book raises on the history of the Irish people, and the long-term consequences of their colonial past. Many essays approach the psychic price the colonized paid when they succumbed to the devaluation of their native culture by the colonizer, in a process of rejecting their heritage; in this context, it is relevant to consider that for the Irish who stayed in their country during the years of massive emigration, the use of the English language, and a life conducted through the medium of English, became also a sort of exile.

Evincing how sensitivity to different forms of representation is essential in the “excavation of *mentalités*”, *The Representation of Ireland/s* contributes to put the study of Irish culture on a solid footing, based on open-minded critical investigations. The book illustrates that the study of Ireland/s has an ample spectrum, encompassing multiple aspects which happen to form the reality of a place constantly discovering and rediscovering, formulating and reformulating its own identity, to be subsequently expressed through diverse modes of representation.