

**Munira Mutran & Laura Izarra. *Irish Studies in Brazil*. São Paulo: Associação Editorial Humanitas, 2005, 408 pages.\***

Rosa González

A quick glance at the multi-authored and diverse table of contents of *Irish Studies in Brazil* might initially disconcert the prospective reader as to the rationale behind the inclusion of the thirty miscellaneous contributions that make up the collection. A careful perusal, though, will reveal that the book charts the fruitful cultural dialogue established by the University of São Paulo (USP), and other Brazilian universities, with Irish Studies in the widest sense of the term. The articles cover Ireland's cultural heritage as well as the long list of living writers and academic scholars from Ireland and abroad that have visited

Brazil and lectured on the subject over the last twenty-five years.

Originally emanating from the centre of the Postgraduate Programme of Estudos Lingüísticos e Literários em Inglês at USP set up in 1980, interest and research in Irish Studies have developed exponentially, as testified to by the establishment of the Associação Brasileira de Estudos Irlandeses (ABEI) in 1988, the publication of the *ABEI Journal – The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies* since 1999, the organisation of the 2002 conference of the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures (IASIL) and a solid corpus of academic research including books on George Bernard Shaw, William Butler Yeats, Sean O'Casey, Sean O'Faolain and John Banville. There have also been a large number of PhD and MA Dissertations on both canonical and recent Irish drama and fiction.

The first part of the volume *Irish Studies in Brazil* contains contributions by four creative writers. It opens with John Banville's "Fiction and the Dream" (21-28), a reflection on the process of writing a novel where the writer traces his own evolution from a "convinced rationalist" who saw himself as "the scientist-like manipulator of [his] material" to the increasing awareness that sometimes "things happen on the page" that fall outside the control of the conscious, waking mind, and that although "the writer is not a priest, not a shaman, not a holy dreamer [...] yet his work is dragged up out of that darksome well where the essential self cowers, in fear of the light" (24-26). Banville concludes by saying that "the writing of fiction is far more than the telling of stories. It is an ancient, an elemental, urge which springs, like the dream, from a desperate imperative to encode and preserve things that are buried in us deep beyond words. This is its significance, its danger and its glory" (28). Then come two poems, Paul Durcan's record of an epiphanic moment at Congonhas airport in "The Last Shuttle to Rio", from his collection *Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil* (1999) and Michael Longley's "The

Leveret” which captures the poet’s measured excitement on the occasion of his grandson Benjamin’s first night in his beloved Carrigskeewaun. Part One ends with the short story “Maggie Angre” by playwright Billy Roche, a tale about an overweight and graceless girl who only forgets her freakiness when she dives into the Rainwater Pond and “her arched body resemble[s] a bird in flight” (38), the very pond that had swallowed up her brother Stephen, the only person who had ever cared and stood up for her.

Part Two, the longest and most outstanding contribution in the volume in terms of scholarly input, includes fifteen essays, organised around generic clusters –Drama, Fiction, Poetry, and Culture and Translation. Each is written by a leading specialist in the area, and arranged in alphabetical order. Though the lack of a unifying topic means that the discussion is somewhat scattered in focus, the fact that many of the contributions come from their authors’ current research work renders the book an excellent showcase of the range of interests guiding present scholarship in Irish Studies. Two of the essays devoted to drama dwell on the potential of recent plays to move beyond the burden of the country’s colonial and post-colonial past. Dawn Duncan (“Compassionate Contact: When Irish Playwrights Reach out for Others”, 49-67) discusses the work of two female dramatists – Anne Le Marquand Hartigan’s *La Corbière* and Delores Walshe’s *In the Talking Dark* – that make tactical use of voices outside Ireland. Believing that dramatists are particularly equipped to respond to and shape changing times, Duncan wistfully wonders whether the move from internal examination to external vision, and from isolated solidarity to global union in these plays might point towards the next phase in post-colonial writing. In this phase, the opposition between the self as victim, and the oppressor as evil, gives way to a “concentrat[ion] on people in all their humanity, their wickedness and their virtues.” (65). In “The Easter Rising versus the Battle of the Somme: Irish Plays about the First World War as Documents of a Post-colonial Condition” (89-101), Heinz Kosok traces the reaction of Irish society, and in particular of Irish playwrights to the two key and divisive events of 1916: the much mythologised Easter Rising and the often overlooked Battle of the Somme. In recent plays such as Sebastian Barry’s *White Woman Street* (1995), Kosok sees a sign that “the ghosts of the country’s colonial past are perhaps at last being laid to rest” (99) in that the contribution of Irishmen to other colonialist measures is included.

In an absorbing and wide-ranging essay Nicholas Grene (“Reality Check: Authenticity from Synge to McDonagh”, 69-88) uses his well-known dislike of Martin McDonagh’s *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* (1996) – a reaction he has qualified elsewhere by dubbing it a black comedy playing with its own artificiality (Grene 2000) – as a starting point to ponder on the authenticity that Irish audiences have traditionally expected of their drama. By considering contemporary reactions to Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World*, O’Casey’s *The Plough and the Stars* and Friel’s *Translations*, Grene traces this expectation of reality from the commitment of the Irish national theatre

movement to challenge the colonialist misrepresentation of Irish country people to the post-Independence period: the past is never past but “a continually unfinished present” (84), national validation and self-conviction still depend on faith in the reality of the way history is represented, a “generic and absolute [reality], prototype of what [the] Irish people really are or aspire to be” (87). The section on drama concludes with Ann Saddlemyer’s “Shaw’s Playboy: *Man and Superman* (103-126), an enlightening reading of Shaw’s multi-faceted 1903 play which he had described as “a modern religion [providing] a body of doctrine, a poesy, and a political and industrial system”. (104-5)

The section on fiction begins with essays on the radically disparate work of two female novelists in the 1960s. In ““Beasts in the Province’: The Fiction of Janet McNeill” (127-142) John Cronin regrets the way McNeill, who, though born in Dublin, spent thirty-five years in Northern Ireland, thereby restricted her own formidable narrative gifts. Cronin ascribes McNeill’s muted quality and concern with the restricted sphere of middle-class, middle-aged Protestants on whose joyless creed and “hysteria of spawning mission hall” (130) she casts a critical eye without ever engaging with the Province’s sectarianism and violence, to a calculated response to what Cronin considers to be her unwarranted fear of being considered a regional writer. In “Growing up Absurd: Edna O’Brien and *The Country Girls*” (143-161) Declan Kiberd offers an entertaining assessment of O’Brien’s 1960 controversial portrayal of lack of innocence in the self-proclaimed Holy Ireland of De Valera. Kiberd draws attention to the novel’s fairytale elements and argues that by challenging the notion of innocent childhood *The Country Girls* also questions the colonial stereotype of a childlike Hibernian peasantry. Maureen Murphy, who has published on female immigration to the USA, is the author of the article entitled “The Literature of Post-

1965. Indian and Irish Immigration to the United States” (163-173). Here Murphy undertakes a comparative analysis of the experiences of Irish and Indian immigrants who have recently settled the New York borough of Queens, and briefly considers their process of assimilation as reflected in the work of contemporary Irish-American and Indian-American writers. Murphy notes that the texts share some version of the American dream of success, though there is violence, or the shadow of violence, pervading the realisation of the dream.

The Poetry section contains three essays that range from nuanced close readings of particular texts to reflections on the intersection between poetry and political violence. In “Personal Helicons. Irish Poets and Tradition” (185-210) academic-cum-poet Maurice Harmon offers a personal survey of how Irish poets such as W.B. Yeats, Thomas Kinsella, Seamus Heaney and Michael Longley have negotiated the use of indigenous sources with literary and intellectual traditions from European and other cultures, in particular the classics. Confident in their own tradition, which they have helped to fashion, concludes Harmon, contemporary poets are free from the anxiety of influence and “relate

at will to tradition and achievement elsewhere” (210). Terence Brown (“John Hewitt and Memory: A Reflection”, 175-184) offers an insightful reading of the persistence and significance of memory in Hewitt’s poetry. Far from mere nostalgia, regret or romantic longing for what is gone, memory, argues Brown, gives Hewitt both pleasure and pain. Furthermore, memory embraces the personal and the public level, as seen in the poet’s awareness of death – which he felt naturally drawn to, and at the same time saw as a duty incumbent on responsible citizenship – or in those familial memories that are intimately intertwined with Irish history and which allow the poet to claim his identity as an Ulsterman of Planter stock. Edna Longley (“Poetry & Peace”, 211-222) revisits a long-time concern of hers: the notion that in the Northern Ireland context, where language has become highly politicised, poetry has no direct influence on politics and is not *ipso facto* pacifist but “carries symbolic weight as the most distinctive creative achievement from NI since the mid 1960s” insofar as it “both manifests and explores cultural complexities simplified by political enmities” (213). Despite the writer’s pessimistic view of the current political impasse, she believes poetry can undertake a more beneficial conversation about peace “than most versions of politics, whether in the academy or the street” (214). After considering poems of the past decade by Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, Michael Longley, Sinead Morrissey and Medbh McGuckian she concludes that “ ‘peace’ not only entails real conversation, pragmatic negotiation and the slow dismantling of civil-war mindsets: like poetry, it must also be imagined” (222).

The section on Culture and Translation includes a series of miscellaneous texts. In “Northern Ireland: Politics and Regional Identity” (223-233), geographer R.H. Buchanan of Queen’s University Belfast maps out the background to the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, stressing the regional distinctiveness of the province in terms of environment and spatial relations, tracing the differing traditions and contrasting aspirations of the population, and advancing the contentious assertion that the “island of Ireland, a natural unit in terms of physical geography, is not necessarily a cultural or political entity” (229). In “Meanderings” (235-241) historian David Harkness provides an enthusiastic account of the many signs of the sophisticated interest and detailed appreciation in Irish literature and culture that he has come across during his visits to academic institutions round the world over a period of thirty years.

The translation section, which begins with “Nausicaa”, Episode 13 of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, and its transcreation into Brazilian Portuguese by the late poet and critic Harold de Campos (45-46), includes two further essays on Joyce’s latest fiction. In “A Alquimia da Tradução” (247-260) Donaldo Schüler, the Brazilian translator of James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*, ponders on the challenge of writing and translating such a text. He considers the problem of translating a non-lexical text. Invention and translation, he says, compete at the moment of re-educating our senses to perceive the non-understandable; the truth of *Finnegan’s Wake* is in the alchemy of its flow, transition

and translation. Maria Tymoczko's "Joyce's Postpositivist Prose. Cultural Translation and Transculturation" (261-294), is an extended theoretical essay that elaborates on her previous work on textual heterogeneity in *Ulysses* (1994) and cultural translation (2003). The essay makes a series of nuanced points about the function of the stylistic variations in the second half of Joyce's text, the part that most reflects the Irish half of Joyce's dual culture. That section of the book displays a postpositivist approach to knowledge and to narrative on account of its emphasis on and validation of subjective, and even metaphysical orientations to experience.

Throughout the one hundred odd pages making up Part Three, entitled *Irish Studies in Brazil: A Backward Glance* (295-408), witness is borne to the development of Irish Studies since the inception of the postgraduate programme in Irish literature in 1980 under Professor Munira Mutran. The section begins with the abstracts of the twenty-three postdoctoral, doctoral and masters theses submitted at USP, with subjects ranging from the short stories of Sean O'Faolain (Mutran 1977), John Banville's aesthetic synthesis (Izarra 1995), Sean O'Casey's letters and autobiographies (Harris 1999), feminine identity in the novels of Kate O'Brien (Araújo 2003) and the fiction of Flann O'Brien (Sousa 2004), to a large number of studies of playwrights Dion Boucicault, Bernard Shaw, J.M. Synge, Lady Gregory, W.B. Yeats, Lennox Robinson, Denis Johnston, Brian Friel, Stuart Parker, and Billy Roche. This is followed by the seven publications emanating from academic research, each of which is reviewed by a different author, and which due to lack of space we can do no more than list here:

- Mutran, Munira H. ed. *Sean O'Faolain's Letters to Brazil*. São Paulo: Editora Humanitas, 2005, 174 pp. ISBN 85-98292-44-3. Reviewed by Marie Arndt (315-318).
- Sepa, Fernanda Mendonça. *O Teatro de William Butler Yeats: Teoria e Prática*. São Paulo: Olavobrás/ABEI, 1999, 136 pp. Reviewed by Beatriz Kopschitz Xavier Bastos (319-323).
- Harris, Peter James. *Sean O'Casey's Letters and Autobiographies: Reflections of a Radical Ambivalence*. Trier: WWT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2004, 194 pp. ISBN 3-88476-687-2. Reviewer Richard Allen Cave (324-330).
- Haddad, Rosalie Rahal. *George Bernard Shaw e a Renovação do Teatro Inglês*. São Paulo: Olavobrás/ABEI, 1997, 136 pp. Reviewed by Peter James Harris (331-335).
- Haddad, Rosalie Rahal. *Bernard Shaw's Novels: His Drama of Ideas in Embryo*. Trier: WWT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2004, 165 pp. ISBN 3-88476-654-6. Reviewed by Peter James Harris (336-340).
- Izarra, Laura P.Z., *Mirrors and Holographic Labyrinths. The Process of a "New" Aesthetic Synthesis in the Novels of John Banville*. San Francisco-London-Bethesda: International Scholars Publications, 1999, 82 pp. ISBN 1-57309-258-4. Reviewed by Hedwig Schwall (343-348).

The volume concludes with a bibliographical list of Irish literature translated into Brazilian Portuguese since 1888, the date that *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift was first published in Brazil, and a list of Irish plays performed on the Brazilian stage since 1940. The lists were compiled by freelance researcher Peter O'Neill, who keeps

the information updated on the web site “Links between Brazil and Ireland” at <http://www.visiteirlanda.com>. The books most widely translated are those of Oscar Wilde, followed by James Joyce, Jonathan Swift, Bernard Shaw, Bram Stoker and Samuel Beckett, while the plays most frequently performed have been those by Beckett, followed by Shaw, Wilde and Synge.

While this book will be particularly useful to anyone wishing to follow the progress of Irish Studies in Brazil, the overall high standard of its contributions makes it also recommended for readers interested in the diversity of approaches within the discipline at the opening of the twenty-first century. Munira Mutran and Laura Izarra, the editors of the volume, are to be commended for having wisely promoted, and nurtured, such an active and fruitful national and international network of Irish Studies. The nineteenth-century flow of Irish migration to Brazil, a country which was advertised as Paradise on Earth, did not result, as the editors point out (16), in substantial Irish settlement in the south of this tropical country. Nevertheless, as attested to by *Irish Studies in Brazil*, the cultural flow between the two countries has broadened incessantly during recent decades.

## Note

\* This review was first published in *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*. Vol. 4, No. 3 (July 2006): 90-94. [www.irlandeses.org](http://www.irlandeses.org). ISSN 1661-6065. The editors of *ABEI Journal* thank editor Edmundo Murray and Associate editor Claire Healy of *IMSLA* for their permission.

## Works Cited

- Greene, Nicholas. “Black Pastoral: 1990s Images of Ireland” in *Litteraria Pragensia* Vol. 10, no. 20 (2000). Available online at <http://komparatistika.ff.cuni.cz/litteraria/no20-10/greene.htm>, (accessed 20 June 2006).
- Tymoczko, Maria, *The Irish ‘Ulysses’*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. “Cultural Translation in Twentieth-Century Irish Literature” in *Kaleidoscopic Views of Ireland*. Munira H. Mutran and Laura P.Z. Izarra (eds.). São Paulo: Editora Humanitas/USP, 2003, pp.189-223.