

Round table: *The Lost Female Tradition: Predecessors, Contemporaries and Successors of James Joyce in Irish Writing*

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To study the connections between a series of Irish women writers and Joyce implies doing justice to those among them who were ahead of their time on a formal level or as regards the content of their works, in spite of the fact that critics have not always recognised this, due to some prejudices and critical stances which are erroneous in our opinion, namely the unfounded consideration that Irish women writers have opted for conservative non-experimental forms and have dealt with the private sphere of experience (O’Faolain 1885; Patten 1990).

In the case of those Irish women writers who came after Joyce, little has been done with regards to a fair assessment of their formal and thematic contribution to the history of Irish literature, and comparisons with the Irish genius have been avoided, probably due to the late critical appraisal of their contribution to Irish literature (basically from the 1990s onwards) and, above all, because of the still on-going debate that separates critics who see Joyce as a misogynistic author from others who signal his interest for gender studies and go as far as to interpret his aesthetics as representative of “écriture féminine”.

Therefore, we point out 1) the pioneering aesthetic of Joyce’s predecessors such as Maria Edgeworth, Mary Tighe, Margaret Callan, Mary Ellen Downing, Julia Kavanagh, Rosa Mulholland or Charlotte Riddell as predecessors of Joyce’s innovative style; 2) the literary contributions to the Irish writer’s work from his female contemporaries such as Lady Gregory, Alice Milligan, Emily Lawless, Mary Lavin, Kate O’Brien, Sarah Grand or Somerville and Ross (Edith Anna Somerville and Violet Martin); 3) Joyce’s thematic and formal influence on his successors such as Edna O’Brien, Eavan Boland, Eilís Ni Dhuibne, Emma Donoghue, Jennifer Johnston, Julia O’Faolain, Anne Haverty, Deirdre Madden and Claire Kilroy.

Our project intends to be a contribution to the rewriting of the history of Irish Literature written by women and to dismantle critical prejudices towards it which have led to its being undervalued thematically and formally. Our research will also mean an advance in Joycean studies, as his work has not yet been analysed in relation to the literary output of Irish women writers.

María Jesús Lorenzo Modia and José María Tejedor referred to the interest of taking into account the formal and aesthetic contribution of 19th century Irish women writers and their more than plausible influence in Joyce’s work, exemplifying it with Maria Edgeworth (María Jesús Lorenzo Modia) and Somerville and Ross (José María Tejedor Cabrera).

Maria Edgeworth, is certainly one of the predecessors of James Joyce in that she uses literary devices and techniques later developed by the author of *Ulysses*. A complete study on the subject is still lacking. However, some similarities between both writers can be depicted (Fernández 2009-2010). The first resemblance lies in the fact

that both writers travelled abroad, and had a cosmopolitan concept of literature (Butler 1999: lxxv), but always had Ireland as their central and constant preoccupation. On a second level, it should be taken into account that one of the main features of *Ulysses*, its colloquial narrative voice and the syntactic lapsus, fluency, and irony so characteristic of Leopold Bloom's discourse are already present in the character of Thady (*Castle Rackrent* 1800) (Cronin 1982: 25). A third point of similitude between Joyce's Dublin in *Ulysses* and Edgeworth's texts can be traced in *Belinda* (1801) in the presentation of the city of London (Kilfeather 2003: xxxix). The fourth analogy between these two writers' works is present in *Castle Rackrent*, and can be spotted at the beginning of *Ulysses* when in Martello Tower we are before the equation of Irish art and the 'cracked lookingglass of a servant', which according to Brian Caraher is already present in the Irish woman writer (2000: 139). Like Joyce, Edgeworth wrote about anxiety, disintegration, incompleteness, and alienation in the modern world.

José M^a Tejedor Cabrera's contribution was focused on Edith Somerville and Violet Florence Martin, two Anglo-Irish writers writing jointly under the name of Martin Ross. He selected the novels *An Irish Cousin: An Experiment* (1889), *The Real Charlotte* (1894) and *Further Experiences of an Irish R.M.* (1908) in order to demonstrate that, despite many differences, he has found similarities such as the occasional use of alliteration and the attention to sound that Joyce relished, the punctual employment of an elevated lexical register as well as the taste for classical allusions, and the popular song or limerick used for both serious and comic effect, the way Joyce would also use them. Tejedor also proposed a comparison between Francie in *The Real Charlotte* and the Penelope chapter of *Ulysses*. Tejedor Cabrera also mentioned and exemplified gender identity subversions and the adaptation of different styles and of diverse narrative perspectives as points in common in Martin Ross's and in Joyce's works.

José Manuel Estévez and Margarita Estévez Saá succinctly indicated how 20th- and 21st-century Irish women writers allude to Joyce's contribution to Irish literature, how we detect his influence on their works and how critics have avoided linking their production to the work of Joyce due to certain prejudices that have not favoured a fair evaluation of Irish women writers' technical mastery and innovative aesthetics.

José Manuel Estévez-Saá studied the case of Edna O'Brien who has publicly proclaimed James Joyce as her literary mentor. Their writing careers have been usually compared since both are highly provocative artists who display an ambiguous relationship with their native Ireland, and whose works have been censored in the isle. Critics have not failed to notice and study concomitances between the literary career of both authors –initially censored in their native land and later on acclaimed by readers and critics– and between their respective works; they can be considered to be two of the Irish authors who have been more severe in their portraits of their fellow countrymen and countrywomen. Notwithstanding, José Manuel Estévez-Saá maintains that little has been said and written on the formal features and literary techniques that O'Brien could have borrowed from her mentor. Therefore, he began focusing on a particular collection of short stories by O'Brien, *Lantern Slides* (1990), so as to demonstrate how Joyce's "style of scrupulous meanness" is emulated and that notions such as "simony", "gnomon", "paralysis", and "epiphany", that are essential for understanding and interpreting Joyce's short stories, also describe Edna O'Brien's attempt at reproducing her mentor's technical mastery. More recently, O'Brien has published a new collection of short stories, *Saints and Sinners* (2011) and, once again, Estévez-Saá worked on the analysis of her literary techniques since with regards to the topics she focuses on, concomitances between Joyce and O'Brien were immediately signaled by early

reviewers of her collection. José Manuel Estévez-Saá offered examples from both collections of short stories which prove 1) that Edna O'Brien owes to James Joyce more than topics and a similarly complex view of Ireland and the Irish, 2) that the author has been able to dexterously emulate and update Joyce's technical mastery of the short story and that her style should be described as highly symbolic and certainly elusive, that her use of language is scrupulously economic, and that even the epiphanic or revelatory moments that unveil the meaning of the stories foster a debate around who experiences them.

Finally, Margarita Estévez-Saá mentioned the cases of authors who can be considered as successors of James Joyce, such as Deirdre Madden, Anne Enright, Emma Donoghue, or Claire Kilroy, pointing out the influence of the Irish genius that can be detected in some of their works.

As a provisional conclusion, the members of the round table maintained that 1) Joyce read and was interested in Irish women writers who came before him and many Irish women writers have also shown their admiration towards Joyce's figure and work; 2) Irish women writers can and should be compared to Joyce, especially if he is a useful referent that will encourage critics to pay more attention to women's brilliant contribution to the history of Irish literature; 3) Relating Joyce to Irish women writers and Irish women writers to Joyce will also benefit Joycean scholars and critics who are still nowadays debating whether Joyce was a feminist or an anti-feminist writer; 4) Gender studies of Joyce's work are still scarce in Spain despite the brilliant and varied contribution of the Spanish Joycean academic community to the study of the work of the Irish genius.

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