

**DIALOGUE AND  
WOMEN'S LIVES IN  
JOHN MCGAHERN'S  
*AMONGST WOMEN* AND  
CLAIRE KEEGAN'S "THE  
FORESTER'S  
DAUGHTER"**

*Melania Terrazas Gallego  
Universidad de La Rioja*

*Abstract*

According to Ingman (2009:253), throughout the history of the Irish short story the dialogue between male and female writers has been constant. Stories by women do not necessarily reveal a different approach to the form, but a strong determination to put women's lives at the centre of their work. The purpose of this paper is to study whether there is dialogue between John McGahern's novel *Amongst Women* (1990) and Claire Keegan's short story "The Forester's Daughter" (2007) and, if so, to explore how Keegan takes up the ironic challenge explicit in McGahern's work concerning issues such as marriage, family relations, religion and women's lives and makes it her own.

*Keywords:* dialogue, marriage, family relations, religion, women's lives and rhetoric of satire.

*Resumen*

Según Ingman (2009:253), a lo largo de la historia del relato breve irlandés, el diálogo entre escritores y escritoras ha sido constante. Las historias cortas escritas por mujeres no muestran necesariamente un enfoque distinto en cuanto a la forma, sino una gran determinación por situar las vidas femeninas en el centro de sus obras. El objetivo del presente trabajo es estudiar si existe diálogo entre la novela *Amongst Women* (1990) de John McGahern y el relato breve de Claire Keegan titulado "The Forester's Daughter" (2007) y, si es así, explorar cómo Keegan adopta el reto irónico explícito en la obra de McGahern en lo que concierne a asuntos tales como el matrimonio, las relaciones familiares, la religión y las vidas femeninas hasta hacerlo suyo propio.

*Palabras clave:* diálogo, matrimonio, relaciones familiares, religión, vidas femeninas y retórica de la sátira.

## INTRODUCTION

In a valuable essay, Ingman (2009) dwells on Irish women's short story writing from 1980 to the present in order to point out its extraordinary range and quality. Here, she sets women's stories alongside those of their male counterparts and emphasizes that this does not necessarily reveal a different approach to the form, but "women writers' determination to put women's lives (the mother-daughter relationship, female emigration, female sexuality) at the centre of their work" (Ingman 2009:253). Ingman concludes that the "dialogue between male and female writers echoes down the history of the Irish short story, from Maria Edgeworth's influence on Gerald Griffin and William Carleton, to Joyce's influence on Edna O'Brien and Elizabeth Bowen's on Seán O'Faoláin" (*ibid.*). Inspiration for this paper comes from Ingman's recognition that in Irish short fiction of the last three decades important topics move back and forth between female and male authors. More specifically, this paper examines Claire Keegan's clever reworking of John McGahern's novel *Amongst Women* (1990) in her short story "The Forester's Daughter" (2007).<sup>1</sup>

McGahern's masterpiece centres around a veteran of the War of Independence and the Civil War in the early years of the Irish Free State. Moran is a patriarchal Catholic figure who has a strong sense of responsibility for preventing famine from affecting the lives of his family again. Moran also has an extreme fear of external attack ("Within the house the outside world was shut out" (MacGahern 1990:93)). The development of the story reveals that this principle leads to abusive treatment of his wife Rose, and his sons and daughters; in his presence they endure a suffocating routine. Despite Moran's winning manner, the narration develops the increasing irony of his position amongst women, since he has to resign himself to dying surrounded by them.

Keegan's "The Forester's Daughter" tells the story of Victor Deegan, who, like Moran, is eccentric and dominant and emotionally distant; he has a slavish devotion to his work in the fields, a fear of famine and a need to save money and maintain his rural household. Contrary to Moran, Deegan is a Catholic non-conformist and does not pass away at the end of the story. However, he is also subject to humiliating circumstances until his house is burned down accidentally. As a result of this, he experiences an epiphany, one which leads him to believe that

---

<sup>1</sup> The research on which this paper is based is funded by the University of La Rioja through project reference number API10/11. I am very much indebted to those colleagues (especially, to Alan Munton) who have read earlier versions of this article, and thank them for their cogent suggestions.

he may be able transform his life and achieve happiness surrounded by his offspring. It is his wife Martha –who maintains an ambivalent attitude as to whether she wants to be a married woman and a caring childminder, or to escape to Dublin and leave her world behind– who becomes the target of the narrator's irony. But why would Keegan's short story set a dialogue with McGahern's novel? Why would McGahern and Keegan use different genre forms to recreate a similar ailing relationship between a bad father figure and his children? And, finally, why would Keegan's narrator ironise Deegan's partner Martha, whereas McGahern makes Moran the object of satirical invective?

Concerning the first question, the young female writer not only acknowledges to have imitated McGahern's way of writing in the past, but also shows admiration for his work (Meade 2000-2001). At the same time, various scholars (Meade 2000/2001; Enright 2007; Harte 2007; Nolan 2007; Spain 2007; Hadley 2008; Ní Dhuibhne 2008; Ryan 2009; Meiller 2010; Wood 2011) have pointed out that McGahern's influence is felt in Keegan's stories deeply. For instance, Enright (2007) observes that, like McGahern, Keegan holds the tragedy of her characters' lives close and her impulse towards the real is remarkable. In addition, Hadley (2008) posits that "Keegan's debt to McGahern is significant, and avowed. [...] Her best stories seem to grow, like McGahern's, from the underside of the precise detail, up towards their shape and implication." Like Chéjov, Keegan neither judges people, nor rationalises or explains their emotions; her short stories attempt to make readers see her characters' enormities and absurdities, and leave readers with the inescapable burden of the present. This assumption is also corroborated by Ingman (2009:255), when she argues that "in contrast to many of her female predecessors of the 1970s and 1980s, Keegan eschews the short story as a vehicle for socio-cultural messages, concentrating instead, like McGahern, on the quality of seeing." In an interview with Meade (2000/2001) Keegan corroborates this idea, also reckoning that the short story genre implies intensity, visual impact, contemplation and imagination. Like McGahern, Keegan favours the poetic image and aims at achieving visual directness in fiction. Thus, the dialogue between the Irish male and female writer not only seems to be an ascertained fact, but also deserves further critical attention.

Regarding our second question on why McGahern and Keegan choose the novel form and the short story genre, respectively, to recreate a dysfunctional relationship between a bad father figure and his offspring, Kiberd's words are worth mentioning here. According to the well-known critic, the novel is the form "calibrated to a fixed and settled society" whereas the short story is "appropriate to the hunted outsider figure". [...] "*Amongst Women* may have begun as a short story about" Moran, "only to turn into a novel whose real focus is on his daughters: it is with them that the narrative begins and ends" (2003:197). As explained, Moran's

skewed relationships with his relatives, friends and neighbours do convert him into an example of “the hunted outsider figure.”<sup>2</sup> Moran causes their world and family life to be more and more fragmented and disrupted as time passes by. As Moran becomes increasingly less valued in a dissimulated manner by all these people, the novel genre is ideal for McGahern to tell the story of a group of unhappy adults, most of whom are women, who fight for stability once free of Moran in a place of their own in Western Ireland.

As regards “The Forester’s Daughter”, it recounts the story of another “hunted outsider figure” called Deegan and of his family who live an unsettled way of life in Aghowle, Wexford, Ireland. This is what Keegan (Meade 2000/2001) suggests about the adequacy of the short story genre to recreate such peculiar household:

I think *short stories are about coping*. [...] A lot of your stories deal with terrible events [...] and *how people survive these traumatic events happening around them*. Well, that's life. [...] It is necessary to get on. And there is a point where people know that if they continue on the vein they are on they will sacrifice that which is their own. So *they become relentless and a switch takes place. That interests me*. [...] *suddenness interests me*. I like sudden people. *You can see it boiling up in somebody and you know they're going to switch and I like that point. It's revealing*. (my emphasis)

At a certain point in the story, Deegan takes back in a careless manner a gift (a dog with a very symbolic name, Judge) which he gave to his daughter Victoria for her birthday. This act of betrayal has disastrous consequences for Deegan, since he loses his daughter’s trust and his wife begins to show her hatred towards him in front of his children and neighbours. It is at this point when Keegan’s characters become “relentless” and “a switch” takes place in Deegan. Accordingly, he experiences an *anagnorisis*, which is the realization about his father’s condition. This recognition causes him to wish always to remain with his offspring, living a settled type of life. At the end of the story, it is Deegan the one who changes and reveals the ironic implications derived from that switch, whereas Martha adopts Deegan’s former outsider stance and maintains that position until the end. In other words, it seems as if the short story genre allowed Keegan to show a glimpse into changing social issues and an insight into these changes. The brevity, tension and irony that characterise the short story make it a particularly suitable means by which to engage with the dilemmas arising between men and women.

---

<sup>2</sup> McGahern’s narrator undertakes this task by recounting Moran’s daily family routine while pretending not to do it, or by proposing some action from his wife, daughters and sons in the opposite of Moran’s words. For further reference on the definition of irony and how it works, see Dane (1991:47).

Concerning our third question on why Keegan converts Deegan's wife, Martha, into the target of the narrator's ironic intention, it is relevant to recall Ní Dhuibhne's (2008) insightful words. As the critic claims, Keegan's short stories are characterised by some kind of "mischievousness", something that may be "an issue of gender, an issue of generation, or an issue of personality", yet which "definitely sets her apart from McGahern."<sup>3</sup> Without any doubt, Keegan's playful or teasing use of language is a defining feature of her fiction. What is more, her sharp social observation, dexterity with language, detached sense of narration, combine with irony and wit to create a provocative and enquiring text. In other words, Keegan's mischievousness is an instance of the satirical way of writing, which is "deeply rooted in the Gaelic tradition" and in a "literature which now even more than in the past is the preserve of an intellectual *élite*" (Mercier 1962:209). Keegan's narrative virtuosity deserves to earn her a place in today's Irish intellectual *élite*.<sup>4</sup> As it will be pointed out, Keegan's satiric practice depends to a large extent on its ability to be indirect, an indirectness which she achieves "by drawing upon a series of technical devices" (Elices Agudo 2005:79). Keegan's use of some of these rhetorical strategies such as verbal and dramatic irony, wit, detachment and animal imagery in her short story aims at taking on the ironic challenge explicit in McGahern's novel, but also questioning women's lives in a veiled way. Martha is subject him to humiliating circumstances at the end of the story, thus, because she behaves as a submissive housewife and childminder, yet she is an energetic and rebellious feminist trying without much success to forge a new identity for herself. To put it slightly differently, Martha would like to escape from homely routine and family duties, but –lacking the energy to carry out her liberating plan– she becomes listless and the "hunted outsider figure" Kiberd refers to above, whereas the rest of the members of her family embark on a life changing experience that will be fulfilling from then on.

In sum, Keegan's acknowledged admiration for and debt to McGahern, and the similarities between the two writers' works which an array of critics have reckoned point to the fact that Keegan's "The Forester's Daughter" may set a dialogue with McGahern's *Amongst Women*. Keegan deals ironically with

<sup>3</sup> Keegan pays homage to McGahern in the story "Surrender," which is inspired by the latter's own father, a terrifying patriarch who sat on a bench in Galway and ate 24 oranges before he married. See Ryan (2009).

<sup>4</sup> As Mercier (1962:2) claims, satire represents a "stage of complexity, both quantitatively and qualitatively, for, besides employing a great variety of [...] comic devices –wit and humour among them– it usually depends in some degree upon the fundamental satiric device, irony. [...] Irony, in the basic sense of saying one thing and meaning the exact opposite, demands a more complex intellectual response than wit does: wit confronts us with a patent absurdity and asks that we make sense of it, whereas really subtle irony may be mistaken for the literal truth."

traditional Irish topics such as marriage, family relations and religion, which were previously tackled by McGahern in realistic and tragicomic forms, yet by using a naturalistic style and an extremely mischievous<sup>5</sup> or satiric discourse. The purpose of this study is, first, to illuminate some of the implications that can be derived from the dialogue between the two writers and, second, to discover whether Keegan demonstrates a stronger determination than McGahern for exploring women's lives (the mother-daughter relationship, female emigration, female sexuality) in her work. This paper attempts to show that in her short story Keegan not only comes to own the debate between her and McGahern, but that by writing in this way she is a post-modern sensibility, whereas McGahern is not.

## MARRIAGE, FAMILY RELATIONS AND RELIGION

Moran and Deegan are two figures of legendary patriarchal Ireland. As such, they hold a patronizing attitude towards women, children, and property. However, from the onset, Moran and Deegan present certain dependence on women and so, embark on finding a wife just to be of use in the house. Rose has been a governess in Glasgow, yet she desires to have something of her own one day. On the other hand, Martha is idle and, having been unsuccessful with men in the past, she fears of staying single for the rest of her life. This is the narrator's description of Moran's courtship of Rose.

He knew that he would have to go to her if he wanted her. [...] Rose Bardy's attention had been as unexpected as it had been sudden and welcome. It was as if she had fallen out of a generous sky. She was much younger than he, strong, not unpleasant to look at. He had reason to suspect that she had saved money and his life could glow again in the concentration of her attention. It was unlikely that such luck would fall his way again no matter how long he waited. [...] 'What would you think if I were to bring someone into the family? [...] A woman would be able to help you in ways that I can.' (McGahern 1990:26-27)

This is equally the case of Deegan and Martha in a crucial passage from Keegan's story, which is related:

While the question was in mid-air, Martha hesitated. Deegan was standing with his back to the amusement arcade. With all the lights behind him she could hardly

---

<sup>5</sup> The term "mischievous" is used to recall Ní Dhuibhne's earlier right words about Keegan's fiction.

make him out; all she could see were slot machines and shelves of coins. [...] Martha's instinct told her to refuse but she was thirty years of age and if she said no this question might never be asked of her again. She wasn't sure of Deegan but none of the others had ever mentioned marriage, so Martha, with her own logic, concluded that Victor Deegan must love her and accepted. (Keegan 2007:52-53; my emphasis)

In the first passage, McGahern depicts the moments previous to the marriage proposal from Moran's point of view. Moran is aware that meeting Rose has been a stroke of luck for him, because she is young, beautiful and financially self-sufficient, yet he exhibits extreme pride in the way he manages the situation. The narrator soon shows Moran's practicality is mixed with emotional paralysis. Moran is ironised because the wedding overwhelms him and so, needs to "work [it] off" (McGahern 1990:46) in the fields, where he finds peace.

In the second excerpt from Keegan's story, the narrator recreates the moment of Deegan's and Martha's decision to marry, yet the focus is not on the former, but on Martha. Here, Keegan provides this female character with full control of the situation in order to question that she neither ponders at length Deegan's marriage proposal, nor makes a decision about it in the tranquillity of the fields; Martha agrees to this contract almost suddenly and next to an amusement arcade. The emphasised parts of the text above indicate that the narrator uses wit, irony and the absurd<sup>6</sup> to convert this marriage proposal into a laughable event. Moreover, this liaison differs from Moran and Rose to some further extent as well. The latter's marriage brings about many positive effects for Moran's offspring, yet Keegan's playful recreation of Deegan's and Martha's loveless formal agreement is also an inquiry into subordination that will have implications for the lives of the children who will be born. To summarise: McGahern recreates with full force Moran's self-interested view of marriage, an attitude and context entirely different from the possibilities that would have been open to a woman such as Rose in the 1990s, who would have been able to discriminate among men. By contrast, Keegan's ironised description of Deegan's proposal to Martha is purposely aimed at exploring how a bad marriage might arise as a response to loneliness, to fears about the biological time clock, and pressure from neighbours about the necessity of acquiring a husband.

Immediately after their marriage, Rose's love relationship with Moran appears entirely satisfactory. In addition, she shows herself to be fulfilled as a conforming housewife and caring childminder, providing her family with all the necessary

---

<sup>6</sup> As Mercier (1962:1) claims, "Humour, though it sometimes achieves considerable subtlety, is intellectually the simplest form of the comic. It springs from the absurd, that which is laughable because it is untrue or irrational or, at the very least, exaggerated."



support.<sup>7</sup> However, Rose's expectations soon become disrupted by Moran's idiosyncrasies, which leave no room for spontaneity in their amorous relationships, and by his insular attitude towards the society around him. As time passes by, this increasingly separates her from her biological family and the rest of the world. Their emotional relationship becomes dysfunctional, their daily routine excruciating.

As regards the family institution, Moran believes that this is the basis of all society and every civilization: "Alone we might be nothing. Together we can do anything" (McGahern 1990:84). Moran locates personally-held religious faith, rather than the instruction of priests as the basis of such a family: "They say the family that prays together stays together"<sup>8</sup> (*ibid.*:139). Moran sticks to his household, his land and his religious faith, but his offspring do not conform to his ideology and practices. After suffering abusive treatment, one of his sons, Luke, emigrates to London and only comes back when Moran is about to die; his daughters, despite behaving as "conspirators" (*ibid.*:46) and learning to use "camouflage [...] for safekeeping" (*ibid.*:68), become automata: "All their movements were based more on habit and instinct and fear than any real threat but none the less it was an actual physical physical state. They would wash up the same way even if they were not watched" (*ibid.*:79-80).

Indeed, Moran maintains his defence of an Irish past of custom and values previous to a Free State Ireland, but this ideal becomes irrelevant for his children. For example, saying the Rosary together becomes a nuisance or even a vacuous practice that provokes laughter. As time passes and the distance between generations widens, so the narrator's verbal and dramatic irony<sup>9</sup> establishes Moran's increasing distance from those around him.

Moran felt so outside their circle of concentration that he had to resort to tiptoeing into the room in an exaggerated parody of someone trying to enter unheard but his only audience was the boy, and that not often, [...] 'God, I don't know what's

<sup>7</sup> If we apply González Arias' assumptions (2000) about mother Ireland, Rose would impersonate, for the most part, *the Mother Ireland* image of compassion and suffering.

<sup>8</sup> As O'Connor (2005:46) proposes, when one reads McGahern's fiction, his characters may "talk about the rain, about children and food, but you know something else is being discussed all the time".

<sup>9</sup> As Elices Agudo (2005:84-85) explains, "verbal irony, [...] simply seeks to imply the opposite of what is said. [...] It depends on wit and lexical playfulness because there are some times in which the ironic implication of a particular statement resides in the use of a word in a purposefully [sic] decontextualised situation. Apart from verbal irony the other fundamental variable is the dramatic, [...]. It occurs whenever the audience or readers possess more information than the characters, provoking an incongruous situation since we anticipate what is going to happen before the characters do."



wrong with this house,' Moran rose, preparing to go out. Getting information from anybody is like trying to extract teeth.' [...] 'I don't know why things can't be the same in this house as in every other house in the country. I don't know why it is always *me* that has to be singled out.' (McGahern 1990:77-82)

The end of the story reveals that, despite emigrating to Dublin and London and leaving Great Meadow behind –something which all Moran's daughters except Mona achieve– they feel undervalued in these big cities. Indeed, they feel together, a community, in Great Meadow. Here they also feel confidence within and among each other. Despite ignoring their father's principles, emigrating to the cities and instilling liberal ideals into their own children. Moran's daughters learn to love the family as an institution: "This once powerful man was so implanted in their lives that they had never really left Great Meadow, in spite of jobs and marriages and children and houses of their own in Dublin and London. Now they could not let him slip away" (McGahern 1990:1). By recreating this troubled behaviour and these difficult relationships within the family context, McGahern provides us with not only an ironic portrait of Moran and of a lost world in the west of Ireland, but also an enduring reflection upon "the foregrounding of family relations" (Patten 2006:262) within Irish society.

The concepts of marriage and the family institution in Keegan's story differ in significant respects from McGahern's novel. In "The Forester's Daughter", Deegan somehow overlooks his wife and offspring, yet he is desperate to get the deed back from the bank that will enable him to own his land again: "Secretly, he knew that the place gave him more satisfaction than his wife and children ever would" (Keegan 2007:57). For their part, the family do not reciprocate. Indeed, the story is in effect an account of a fragmented Irish country family where lack of communication and loneliness cause its members often to feel emotionally and psychologically damaged. Furthermore, Deegan's peculiar view of the external world and of religion contributes to a worsening of the family's wretched situation.

Deegan is not a religious man. He knows that beyond this world there is nothing. God is an invention by one man to keep another at a safe distance from his wife and land. But always he goes to Mass. He knows the power of a neighbour's opinion and will not have it said that he's ever missed a Sunday. (Keegan 2007:58-59)

Deegan assumes this peculiar nihilism as the operating philosophy of his own self and of his family. These skewed religious beliefs and practices prove that he is obsessed with attending Mass merely to prevent his neighbours from approaching Martha and to keep up appearances, which contributes to influencing their quality of life negatively and furthering their predicament. This is why Deegan is shown to get worse as a human being. Moran's attitude contrasts with Martha's to a very large extent, because Martha seems to generate her own attitudes without authorial

intervention. Contrary to Rose, Martha shows a lack of interest in getting integrated into her neighbourhood: "Let them all get sick, she thinks" (Keegan 2007:64). In fact, it is only when Deegan sells Victoria's dog carelessly that she makes up her mind to challenge him by confessing her past unfaithfulness with a traveller selling roses in their neighbourhood. It is after this that the narrator offers a subtle, quietly subversive commentary on Deegan's real view of society and of the Catholic Church.

A lid of silence comes down on the Deegan household. *Now that so much has been said there is nothing left to say.* The neighbours stay away these times. Deegan gives up going to mass; he no longer sees the point in going. He works later, eats, milks the cows and throws money on the table every Thursday. (Keegan 2007:87; my emphasis)

As explained, it is Deegan's selling of the dog and Martha's confession that cause Deegan to experience uneasiness, yet also an epiphany, something that makes him cease to care what the neighbours say, and become very much concerned about his young offspring and their future ahead.

To sum up: these dysfunctional marriages are in one sense project an oblique attack upon the folly of men and women. The practical considerations of daily life in *Amongst Women*, and external social pressure in "The Forester's Daughter" bear upon two families made conformist by two patriarchal, yet overwhelmed husbands, two subjugated women, and a group of insecure children. Such a structure leads inevitably to a reflection upon issues that may be inferred from the deployment of satirical rhetoric. Moran's and Deegan's particular view of marriage, family relations and religion, can, it is apparent, be viewed in alternative and critical ways. In McGahern's novel, verbal and dramatic irony is directed at ironising Moran's values, and explaining his children's rejection of Catholicism and the rural life. The effect is to question "Ireland's conceit of itself as a healthy, family-centred society" (Carruthers 2007:115). Nevertheless, as Moran's daughters experience some powerful sense of fulfilment when they are back in the family context, McGahern seems also to point the relevance of women's conciliatory role in marriage and family relations, and imply that this is a strength in Irish society.

In "The Forester's Daughter," Keegan goes a step further by developing a critique of marriage, family relationships and religion in rural Ireland. Keegan satirises conservative Catholic ethical codes and laws, and duplicitous religious practices. At the same time, she recognises that the Catholic Church has a tendency to construct women as single people who have to be devoted to others, yet Martha rejects this. This is why the narrative focuses upon Martha's unfaithfulness to her husband, her emotional distance from him and her children, her dislike of housework and, finally, her desperate need to run away from the household and

leave her world behind. The negative effect of Irish life and institutions upon women will be explored in the next section.

## WOMEN'S LIVES

Does Keegan show a greater determination than McGahern in examining women's lives, particularly in such matters as the mother-daughter relationship, female emigration, and female sexuality? Each creates two strong women figures that cope and bring up a group of unconfident and uncomprehending children. Moran's oppressive sexism becomes most apparent when he objects to his daughter Maggie's wish to achieve independence by working as a nurse in Dublin and his verbal assault on his wife for supporting her. He says:

'Why in the name of the Saviour do you have to put your ignorance on full display,' he [Moran] turned on her [Rose] 'You don't know the first thing about the business, woman.' [...] 'What do you know about it? What in hell do you know about anything?' [...] She stood stunned. He had never spoken to her like that before. [...] She had chosen Moran, had married him against convention and her family. All her vanity was in question. (McGahern 1990:52-53)

After this, Rose's expectation of affection from Moran is disrupted completely. She becomes plaintive and experiences an inner change: "The violence Moran had turned on her she chose to ignore, to let her own resentment drop and to join the girls as they stole about so that their presences would never challenge his" (McGahern 1990:53). Thus, she decides to use "camouflage [...] for safekeeping" (*ibid.*:68) and turns obedient. Nonetheless, this process of recognition that Rose undergoes has its most positive outcome for Moran's daughters. Rose now not only resists their marginalization at home, but tries to instil a certain doggedness.

Rose's coming to the house had smoothed their lives and allowed them to concentrate everything on school, which, above all, they saw as a way out of the house and into a life of their own. [...] Much could be won, a great deal could be lost, and there was always England. (McGahern 1990:67-73)

Rose is very much concerned about the girls' freedom and well-being. At the same time, she tries to ensure that they will achieve self-sufficiency and self-confidence through study, and eventually by emigration to the city. This concern becomes a source of domestic conflict, but she eventually learns to control the complex situations that arise:

Rose scolded and managed to shepherd both men [Moran and his son Michael] to their rooms without further trouble. [...] These visits of his daughters from London and Dublin were to flow like relief through the house. They brought distraction, something to look forward to, something to mull over after they had gone. Above all they brought them bracing breath of the outside, an outside Moran refused to accept unless it came from the family. (McGahern 1990:93)

The narrator's deployment of irony to portray Moran's attitude towards his offspring and Rose's tactful management of relationships within the family, constitute two revealing examples of McGahern's art of dissimulation. As Moran's authority is undermined, and the women clam a position in Irish society, it becomes apparent that McGahern's novel constitutes not only a literary defence of women, but is also an assertion of their right to have a voice of their own and a place of their own, together with a satisfying adolescence and a fulfilled maturity. The alternative might have been feelings of loss and forced renunciation. In this regard, McGahern's structuring of the link between stepmother and daughters is crucial.

As regards female emigration and female sexuality in *Amongst Women*, McGahern's story recounts how Moran's three daughters mature and age, showing "the political, economic, social and sexual transformation of Ireland from the 1920s to the 1970s" (Wall 1999:305). Sheila is described as a girl of brains whose main goals are to achieve personal and economic independence and fulfilment in work. This liberal woman chooses her partner Sean and has extramarital sex with him. The narrator's detached description of Sheila's boyfriend visiting the family household, and of their making love inside it without Moran's consent, while the entire family is constrained following Moran's instruction for saving the hay, constitute two illuminating instances of Sheila's disregard of "the inviolability of the house, its true virginity"<sup>10</sup> (McGahern 1990:166). Just as Moran staked out his position when he was young, Sheila does it within the family now: "She would belong to the family but not on any terms. She knew instinctively that she could not live without it: she would need it, she would use it, but she would not be used by it except in the way she wanted" (*ibid.*:167). This explains why Sheila is determined to encourage her children to seek new freedoms in the city.

They were clever and confident. She did not want that confidence damaged in the way she felt her own had been. She knew that her loyalty was probably ambiguous, that the deepest part of herself was bound to her sisters, this man and house. That could not be changed; but she wanted no part of it for her children: doors would be open to them that had been locked to her, their lives would be different. (McGahern 1990:170)

---

<sup>10</sup> As Cronin (1991:173) suggests, "the newly-wed's first love-making is refracted for us only through the tension felt by the other sleepers in the house".

Behaving in this resolved manner, Sheila illuminates the dramas and confusions that marked Irish women's lives from Independence to pre-Celtic Tiger.

Keegan similarly presents a mother-daughter link in her short story: the one between Martha and Victoria. Like Sheila in *Amongst Women*, Victoria has "the brains" (Keegan 2007:56) in the family. As such, she seems to be very much aware of her father's extreme concern for the land and of her mother's lack of personal fulfilment. It does not strike as bizarre that Victoria is far more attached to her dog Judge than to her parents; this relationship is satirically depicted through the use of two further strategies, detachment and animal imagery. According to Elices Agudo (2005:95), these two factors are "mutually dependent, in the sense that a means of achieving detachment is through fantasy and fantasy is conditioned by the grade of detachment satirists are capable of endowing their texts with." By attributing human features like reasoning to Judge, Keegan may demythologise "the insofar unquestioned superiority of the human race" and so, present "a grotesque image of our most accepted values and codes" (*ibid.*:96). At the same time, this rhetorical strategy, which is "tightly connected with questions such as irony and indirection", is projected as a "subliminal" device "whose aim is to hide the attack behind a veil of apparent incongruity" (*ibid.*:96). As the text relates:

That she is a strange child can't be doubted. Martha's youngest holds funerals for dead butterflies, eats the roses and collects tadpoles from the cattle tracks, sets them free to grow legs in the pond. [...]  
 'Don't get too fond of him [Judge]'  
 'What?'  
 'Well, what if somebody wants him back?'  
 'What are you talking about, Mammy?' [...]  
 Judge lies in his new bed [...] *This is a different sort of house but Deegan will sell him as soon as he finds the opportunity. The woman he understands: she is just the protective bitch minding her pup. [...] In sleep he dreams again of finding milk on the second teat. His mother was champion retriever [...] She used to lick him clean, carry him through streams, proud that he was hers.* (Keegan 2007:61-63; my emphasis)

The deployment of animal functions in reality and dream within this excerpt enables Keegan not only to question the mistakes made and the pettiness shown by Deegan and Martha towards their daughter Victoria, but also to "gain indirection in detriment of explicitness and direct confrontation" (Elices Agudo 2005:97). Contrary to the conciliatory relationship between Rose and Moran's daughters, that between Victoria and her mother is emotionally impaired: "At least Daddy bought me a dog. You bought me nothing" (Keegan 2007:63). This may explain and perhaps justify why Victoria acts morosely and why her attitude towards her mother is as offensive and as problematic as Sheila's towards her father in *Amongst Women*. However, an accurate critique of the dénouement of the mother-daughter

relationship between Martha and Victoria requires some further explanation of how Keegan tackles female sexuality and female emigration in her story.

As the passage below illustrates, the narrator describes in a very measured manner how, contrary to Rose in *Amongst Women*, the futility of married life and domesticity cause Martha weariness. One day, receives the visit of the traveller selling roses, with whom she has pleasurable sex, and his child, without the impotent Deegan knowing of it. From this moment onwards, Martha's daily routine in Aghowle becomes unbearable.

That summer *her roses bloomed scarlet* but long before the wind could blow their heads asunder, Martha realised she had made a mistake. All she had was a husband who hardly spoke now that he'd married her, an empty house and no income of her own. She had married a man she did not love. What had she expected? She had expected it would grow and deepen into love. And now she craved intimacy and the type of conversation that would surpass misunderstanding. She thought about finding a job but it was too late: a child was near ready for the cradle. (Keegan 2007:55)

She would have liked Deegan to seduce her, to talk to her, to ask her how she felt, to care for their children and to make love to her as softly and as pleasantly as the seller of roses did. However, dramatic irony plays an important role in undermining her goals in the story: "With bills, school uniforms and a wife's unspoken desire to leave another year begins" (Keegan 2007:71). And in questioning why Martha's life has "revolved around things that never happened" (*ibid.*:76). Within this defective marital context, it is not bizarre that dreaming becomes the closest thing to having someone to talk to. In fact, Victoria's brother, the simpleton, is the first one to wonder and become intrigued by the properties of fire. As the next passage shows, the son burns down Aghowle furtively.

Martha holds on to her daughter's hand. She thinks of her money, the salesman and all those obsolete red roses. The girl has never known such happiness; Judge is back, that's all she cares, for now. It hasn't yet occurred to her that she is the one who taught her brother how to light a fire. The guilt of that will suffice later. Deegan is numb and yet he feels lighter than before. The drudgery of the past is gone and the new work has not yet started. [...] Deegan grasps at thoughts: of having work, that it's just a house, that they are alive. It is hardest for the boy whose farm is gone. All his work, through his own fault, is wasted. Nonetheless, he is intrigued. [...] At the foot of the lane the neighbours are gathering, coming on slowly towards them. [...], offering beds for the night. 'Who cares?' he keeps whispering as he goes along. 'Who cares?' (Keegan 2007:90)

The setting on fire of this family reveals the devastating implications of interpersonal dysfunction. Martha's holds on to Victoria's hand, but not as a sign of protection, or comfort between mother and daughter; she feels gutted, yet she is



only concerned about her money, Victoria's real father, the salesman, and all those old red roses he sold her. As regards Victoria, she cares about nothing, except her dog, Judge. The fire destroys Deegan's most precious possession –the house–, and yet he becomes renewed by this loss, and develops into a more genuine person, one who wishes to enjoy a future with his family.

It is as if all the characters, except Martha achieve some kind of self-recognition after the fire. The narrator's irony is directed to the mother figure only at the end of the story, because she remains submissive and makes do with "walking the blue fields" instead. To put this slightly differently, Martha is the object of the narrator's irony because she camouflages her emotions in her husband-wife attachment, becomes erratic in her relation with the relationship with her daughter, and remains tied to her past and consequently to a life of disappointment and frustration. By contrast, Deegan does not hold on to the past; he looks forward to committing himself to his children from then onwards. Keegan demonstrates a strong determination to put the mother-daughter link at the centre of her work; first, in order to question it; second, to hint that the father-daughter relationship is also relevant; and finally to present Victoria as the epitome of a new generation of young women who will be important in the creation of an invigorated Irish state.

In sum, Martha embodies the reality of many modern women in rural Ireland who remain privately and sexually unfulfilled, yet struggle and survive, though not always admirably. Martha "is subversive, rebellious, even something of a feminist" (Ní Dhuibhne 2008), whereas McGahern's female characters seem to accept a situation of ongoing, but camouflaged subjugation. Like Sheila, Martha decides to give up enduring passively, yet she fails in the end. Sheila is determined to study a degree, but her father Moran decides to favour his son Michael financially instead. Despite Sheila's scornful quarrelling with Moran for deterring her from pursuing a career and her interest in instilling a determined attitude towards life into her children's mind, the end of the novel reveals that Sheila and her sisters find themselves most fulfilled when they are back in the land: "He'll never leave us now" (Keegan 2007:183). In this regard, Sheila's final comment in the novel on men: "Will you look at the men. They're more like a crowd of women," Sheila said, [...] 'The way Michael, the skit, is getting Sean and Mark to laugh you'd think they were coming from a dance.'" (*ibid.*:184) shows not only Moran's bossy manners, which she has learned deep inside, but also that there are not so many differences between males and females.

Keegan's satirical representation of the dynamics of domestic power in Deegan's patriarchal home is a denial that men can adequately perpetuate that type of household. As the story evolves, Deegan becomes aware of Martha's absence of commitment towards him and their children, her rejection of traditional women's



roles within the family household and her growing uncertainty about the benefits of complying with these roles.

Martha takes her tea out to the yard where things always seem a fraction easier. [...] She strides back in to make the breakfast, feeling treacherous. She often feels treacherous in the mornings. She wishes her husband and her children were gone for the day. Always a part of her craves the solitude that will let her mind calm down and her memory surface. (Keegan 2007:63)

Martha has been brought up in a Catholic rural environment to see marriage as her ultimate goal and ambition. She pretends to accept the role of self-sacrificing housewife and mother, while privately rejecting it. She remains bewildered, yet one day she makes up her mind to abandon her daily routine and duties, and emigrate to the city. At this point her pregnancy prevents her achieving liberation from her Catholic upbringing. The narrator's use of detachment, irony and contingency enable Keegan to both recreate the ambivalent attitude of this modern Irish countrywoman and to reveal traditional gender role non-compliance. Keegan proves that she is capable of writing equally sympathetically about current males' and females' insecurities, and about the different nature of their concern for marriage, family bonds and children. Just as McGahern created the figures of Rose and Sheila two decades earlier in order to show the need to acknowledge women's humanity and their social requirements, Keegan takes on McGahern's challenge creating two further female characters as well. Martha's and Victoria's dilemmas allow the author to explore the dynamics of a mother-daughter relationship, the possibilities offered by a renewed sexuality, and the ultimate option, emigration.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study agrees with Kiberd (2003:206) that McGahern and Keegan "seldom argue, judge or assign motives, leaving such things to be inferred." Rather, it is their uncommitted and ironic stance that allows them to conceal their real intentions behind a veil of indirection, and to lead their readers slowly towards fresh perceptions rather than provide moral instruction.

*Amongst Women* renders a view of marriage in "the depressing reality of the early years of the Irish Free State" (Maher 2005:60). The text, by addressing its verbal and dramatic irony towards Moran, the last vestige of a disappearing Ireland, establishes his crucial role in maintaining the difficulties in women's lives. McGahern then establishes a female counter-force, in which the figure of Rose

proves to be crucial, with the outcome that Moran's daughters can achieve the self-confidence, self-sufficiency and happiness that arise from a sense of identity achieved through work, personal relationships, religion and politics. The close relationship that exists between women at end of the novel also points to the relevance of preserving traditional family links as they were in a past previous to the War of Independence. It is not tears, but tragic laughter, that achieves the feminization of an oppressive Irish tradition in *Amongst Women*.

In "The Forester's Daughter" Martha and Deegan are the target of the story's irony. This short story shows as much determination as does McGahern's novel in exploring the negative consequences of family relations. Like McGahern, Keegan treats the old sexist patriarchy veiled irony, but extends her critique to present-day Catholic non-conformism. Deegan's post-fire epiphany is doubly literary, in that we may recall Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) or Daphne Du Maurier's *Rebecca* (1938), in which large country houses –Thornfield Hall and Manderley respectively– are destroyed by fire. The ironic difference between these events and the destruction of an Irish farmhouse is very evident. There is a further difference in that whilst dramatic fires abruptly conclude the narratives of these earlier works, "The Forester's Daughter" continues, and allows Deegan his epiphany. This realization on his part will necessarily remind readers of the epiphanies that occur in James Joyce's short stories *Dubliners* (1914), which is a necessary and unavoidable point of reference for many Irish writers. Deegan's epiphany results in a sanguine fatherly commitment to his children's future well-being, and occurs in a domestic context not unlike the settings of Joyce's stories; but Joyce is unrelentingly urban, whereas both McGahern and Keegan are asserting the continued significance of Irish rural experience.

Keegan's irony is carefully poised; her fiction is neither for the Irish past nor for the present, neither for men nor for women, but for both and neither at the same time. Just as McGahern's short stories resist explanation, so does Keegan's "The Forester's Daughter." In the same way that Maher (2005:70) views McGahern as "the bard of a rural Ireland that is on the verge of extinction," I maintain that Keegan's story constitutes, in effect, a sequel to his work, but one reborn in a newer form, in which Irish folklore, the storytelling tradition and the surreal are crucial elements. Here, the idea of revival works effectively, but again ironically.<sup>11</sup> Keegan's achieved distance reveals that there is more to life than marriage and security in today's Ireland. Keegan's dialogue with McGahern's work not only shares in his world, but also pays tribute to his dissident spirit. In "The Forester's

---

<sup>11</sup> For further reference to this notion of "revival," see Garratt (2005:134).

Daughter,” Keegan takes up the ironic challenge implicit in McGahern’s novel and makes it her own.

## REFERENCES

- Carruthers, Gerard. “The Novel in Ireland and Scotland.” *A Companion to the British and the Irish Novel 1945-2000*. Ed. Brian W. Shaffer. Oxford: Blackwell, 2005.
- Cronin, John. “John McGahern’s *Amongst Women*: Retrenchment and Renewal.” *Irish University Review* 22.1 (1991): 168-176.
- Dane, Joseph A. *The Critical Mythology of Irony*. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1991.
- Enright, Anne. “Walk the Blue Fields.” *The Guardian*. 25/08/2007.
- Elices Agudo, Juan F. *Historical and Theoretical Approaches to English Satire*. LINCOM Europa: Munchen, 2005.
- Garratt, Robert F. “John McGahern’s *Amongst Women*: Representation, Memory, and Trauma.” *Irish University Review* 35.1. *Special Issue: John McGahern* (2005): 121-135.
- González Arias, Luz M. *Otra Irlanda: La estética post-nacionalista de poetas y artistas irlandesas contemporáneas*. Oviedo: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Oviedo, 2000.
- Hadley, Tessa. “Walk the Blue Fields.” *London Review Bookshop* 24/01/2008. URL: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n02/tesa-hadley/red-flowers-at-a-wedding>. 24/06/2010.
- Harte, Liam. “Critical Acclaim that was not Misplaced.” *The Irish Times* “Weekend” 12/05/ 2007. URL: [http://www.ricorso.net/rx/az-data/authors/k/Keegan\\_C/life.htm](http://www.ricorso.net/rx/az-data/authors/k/Keegan_C/life.htm). 21/01/2009.
- Ingman, Heather. *A History of the Irish Short Story*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Keegan, Claire. *Walk the Blue Fields*. New York: Black Cat, 2007.
- Kiberd, Declan. “John McGahern’s *Amongst Women*.” *Language and Tradition in Ireland: Continuities and Displacements*. Eds. Maria Tymoczko and Colin Ireland. Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003: 195-213.
- Maher, Eamon. “The Irish Novel in Crisis? The Example of John McGahern.” *Irish University Review* 35.1 (2005): 58-71.
- McGahern, John. *Amongst Women*. New York: Penguin, 1990.
- Meade, Declan. *The Stinging Fly*. 2000/2001. Vol. 1. URL: <http://www.stingingfly.org/issue8/keegan.html>. 1/11/2008.
- Meiller, Valeria. “Algo que permanece inexplicable.” *Eterna Cadencia Editora en la prensa*. 2010. URL: [http://blog.etermacadencia.com.ar/?category\\_name=prensa](http://blog.etermacadencia.com.ar/?category_name=prensa). 20/10/2011.
- Mercier, Vivian. *The Irish Comic Tradition*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962.
- ES. Revista de Filología Inglesa* 33 (2012): 321-339

- Ní Dhuibhne, Éilís. "Give a Thing and Take it Back." *Dublin Review of Books* 5, 2008. URL: [http://www.dr.b.ie/more\\_details/08-09-25/give\\_a\\_thing\\_and\\_take\\_it\\_back.aspx](http://www.dr.b.ie/more_details/08-09-25/give_a_thing_and_take_it_back.aspx). 21/01/2009.
- Nolan, Val. "Walk the Blue Fields." *The Stinging Fly Magazine* 2.7 (2007): 97-100.
- O'Connor, John. "Reading John McGahern." *The UCD Aesthetic: Celebrating 150 Years of UCD Writers*. Ed. Anthony Roche. Dublin: New Island, 2005: 44-46.
- Patten, Eve. "Contemporary Irish fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to the Irish Novel*. Ed. J. Wilson Foster. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006: 259-275.
- Ryan, James. "Acknowledging a Debt to the Master." *John McGahern Yearbook*. Ed. John Kenny. Galway: National University of Ireland Galway (NUI Galway), 2009: 110-114.
- Spain, John. "Antarctica." *The Irish Independent*. 14/12/2007. URL: <http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/books/book-14-antarctica-by-claire-keegan-1246345.html?service=Print>. 24/06/2010.
- Wall, Eamonn. "The Living Stream: John McGahern's *Amongst Women* and Irish Writing in the 1990s'." *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 88 (1999): 305-314.
- Wood, Daniel. "The Quiet Achiever of Irish Literature: Claire Keegan's *Foster*." *Kill Your Darlings Journal*. 01/03/2011. URL: <http://www.killyourdarlingsjournal.com/2011/03/the-quiet-achiever-of-irish-literature-claire-keegans-foster>. 23/10/2011

*How to cite this article:*

Terrazas Gallego, Melania. "Dialogue and Women's Lives in John McGahern's *Amongst Women* and Claire Keegan's 'The Forester's Daughter'." *ES. Revista de Filología Inglesa* 33 (2012): 321-339.

*Author's contact:* melania.terrazas@unirioja.es



**BOOK REVIEW**

**MARGARITA RIGAL  
ARAGÓN ED.**

***LOS LEGADOS DE POE***

**MADRID: EDITORIAL  
SÍNTESIS, 2011**

*Patricia San José Rico  
University of Valladolid*

Who would you associate the image of a raven with? If we were to conduct a street survey, most of the people would probably answer this question with one of two possible responses: Hitchcock or Edgar Allan Poe. If to the raven we add a dark and macabre mansion, a pretty dead lady and a black cat, Poe would most probably be the incontestable winner. Indeed, the presence of the American writer, both through his works and through his image as a peculiar or “tormented” character, is part of the modern day popular culture to the point that he could even be considered a “pop icon.” And yet, this popularity is almost exclusively linked to either a fictional account of his biography or to a limited part of his literary production. This biased view of Poe as the macabre and tormented author of equally macabre and tormented works is not only significantly far from the truth but also incredibly unfair to the mastery shown in the rest of his literary production. *Los Legados de Poe* intends to rectify these wrongs by providing a well-structured, rigorous piece of work that, without recurring to the endless list of biased clichés and stereotypes often applied to Poe, would make accessible the figure of this genius and his work to Spanish-Speaking students and researchers.

This volume joins the long list of re-editions, critical volumes and articles in specialized magazines that, coinciding with the bicentennial of his birth two years ago, have been published of late both in Spain and abroad. Besides Moreno and Rigal’s Volume published in 2010, we can find several re-editions of Poe’s works like the published in *Páginas de Espuma* (Iwasaki & Volpi 2010) or even a collection of graphic novel adaptations of Poe’s short stories (Whitehead 2008).

Originally intended for Spanish students and young researchers, the book is written entirely in Spanish and divided in two parts. The first one, consisting on nine articles written by different Spanish researchers and University professors specialised in the fields of comparative and/or American Literature, is followed by four appendixes that provide the necessary additional information for any student that wishes to pursue further research on the figure and works of Edgar Allan Poe. The second part, thus, perfectly complements the first, for it facilitates, in a neat and orderly manner, all the information necessary for anyone pursuing a deeper understanding of Poe's life and works that, for lack of space, could not be included in the main body of the text.

Following Margarita Rigal's introduction to the matter, purpose and organization of the book, the volume opens with three chapters dedicated to the most distinguished and acclaimed aspects of Poe's literary legacy: what we call the grotesque and the arabesque, the genre of detective fiction, and that of science fiction respectively. Thus, in the first chapter "Lo gótico y lo cómico (o lo arabesco y lo grotesco)" Rigal offers a highly interesting and thorough overview of the two main genres into which the majority of Poe's short story production has been traditionally divided: the grotesque and the arabesque or, more simply, the comic and the gothic. The author sets out to blur the initially straightforward distinctions between "arabesque" (or serious) and "grotesque" (or humorous) and punctuates the "mixed" characteristics of several stories in which both gothic and comic aspects coalesce. Moreover, Rigal draws attention to those works traditionally considered humorous that have been generally overlooked by critics and strives to restore to them some of the merit of which they have been deprived. It is to the editor's credit to open with this particular article a volume especially designed for a readership interested but perhaps not as yet fully dedicated to the study of Poe and therefore potentially unaware of this aspect. If, as Rigal claims, the purpose of this book is to make the work of Poe more accessible to Spanish non-specialised students, it is of vital importance that one of the most spread clichés about the figure of Poe and his work –namely, that he was merely a gothic writer– should be righted from the start.

The following two chapters –written by Margarita Rigal and Francisco Javier Castillo Martín respectively– deal with the other two genres in which Poe has been most influential: detective and science fiction. As regards the former, Rigal shows how the genre of detective fiction evolved not only from Poe's highly renowned Dupin cycle, but also from a variety of other tales in which traces of Dupin's distinguishing analytical mind and method of observation are applied to either criminal or detective characters. Francisco Javier Castillo Martín, however, does not exactly deal with Poe's legacy for future science fiction writers, but with the ways in which Poe's works reflected the scientific discoveries and technical advances that



were highly abundant in his time. The significance of the article lies in the fact that Castillo –through the analysis of “The Conversation of Eros and Charmion,” “The Colloquy of Monos and Una” and “The Power of Words”– argues that Poe did not share the awe towards technological and scientific advances that pervaded American society during the first half of the nineteenth century but actually regarded them with a great amount of scepticism. This might surprise the uninformed reader of Poe who, misled by the abundant appearance of technological devices and developments in some of Poe’s better known works, might overlook the true value that Poe conferred to them, hidden in these three less known tales.

The next five chapters in the volume are dedicated to the different approaches to the figure of Poe and his literary productions within the fields of popular culture, graphic arts, Spanish and French literature and translation studies. It is in this part that the book presents its most notably academic contributions for, without forgetting the restricted knowledge of the field that its intended readership may have, the authors in this section demonstrate not only their deep understanding of Poe and his production, but also their knowledge of the other related fields already mentioned. Chapter number four, written by Ricardo Marín Ruiz, gives a detailed account of the introduction of the figure of Poe in popular culture through poetry, fictional biographies of the author, fantastic literature, illustrations, comics, films and television, theatre, music and the internet, and points at the reasons for his persistent presence in them. Those reasons revolve, Marín argues, around the creation of a dark legend surrounding the author that awoke much more interest towards his figure and life than toward his literary production. And yet, this legend was more the mixture of his –by itself fascinating– biography with the darkest and more grotesque elements of some of his most famous tales than an accurate historical account. By unearthing many of the mythical and untruthful elements that evolve around Poe’s mythic figure, this article contributes wonderfully to the volume’s main aim of becoming a rigorous study that departs from the generally spread clichés about the Bostonian author.

The next article in this section, by Fernando González Moreno, offers a new and innovative approach to the study of Poe and his literary production from the perspective of visual narratology, which might specially appeal to those young scholars and researchers that the volume addresses. This seductive line of work is left open in the article, for it does not cover the more contemporaneous methods of graphically representing Poe such as comics and graphic designs that are nowadays much in vogue and that might interest a younger readership. However, it is regrettable that only six illustrations should be included in a total of nearly forty pages. Although the reasons for this lie most probably on space or even economic restrictions, the reader is left at times longing for more examples to provide a visual

backup to the otherwise vivid and artfully written descriptions of paintings, lithographies and engravings offered. On the other hand, this understandable lack is compensated by an inclusion of a list with all the illustrated editions of Poe's works which will be of special value to anyone interested in the graphic representation of Poe's works.

Chapter number six by Santiago Rodríguez Guerrero-Strachan deals with Poe's reception in Spain, the channels through which he reached the country, and the various responses gathered. Moreover, it also hints at but leaves open the topic of his influence upon Spanish writers. Through a very thorough account of the various responses to the figure and works of Poe in Spain –obviously part of a much broader research project– the author shows how the conception and appreciation of Poe and his works has evolved during the last two centuries. The word “thorough” cannot be emphasized enough, for, although restricted to the usual amount of pages allotted to each chapter in the volume, the author manages to fit in an analysis of the reception of Poe in our country as shown in the most important prologues, articles and books written about Poe from his first appearance in Spain until the present time. By exposing the different representations of Poe offered by Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, Rafael María de Labra, Miguel de Unamuno, Juan Ramón Jiménez, Pedro Salinas and Ramón Gomez de la Serna among many others, the author sets out to defend Poe from the (unjust) accusations that some of the aforementioned authors spilled on him, product of the prevailing mythicized image of the writer. Overall, Santiago Rodríguez succeeds in offering a detailed image of Poe as presented to the Spanish readership while explicitly suggesting a variety of as yet untrodden research paths within this field that would undoubtedly be very well received among this volume's target readers.

The next two chapters deal with the topic of translation, though in different ways. The first, by Juan Bravo Castillo, tackles what the author considers “uno de los acontecimientos literarios más apasionantes y dignos de estudio del siglo XIX” (176), that is, Baudelaire's passion and identification with Edgar Allan Poe. It should not be forgotten that it was through the publication of Baudelaire's translation of Poe's writings, that the popularity of the writer began to spread in Europe, a fact perhaps not broadly known by the common public, thus the appropriateness of the inclusion of this article in the volume. The second, chapter number eight, focuses on two Spanish translations of Poe's works: *Narraciones extraordinarias*, by J. Farrán y Mayoral and *Poesía Completa*, by María Cándor and Gustavo Falquera. Molina comments on the weak and strong points of both translations in turn and concludes by highlighting the difficulties that translating any literary work may pose, namely the differences in metric, phonology and even culture and ideology. Although she praises the former more than the latter, she understands the added difficulties that translating verse entails and does not wholly

discredit Córdor and Falquera's decision to provide a translation in prose despite its sacrificing naturality for the sake of loyalty.

The volume closes by challenging future researchers to analyze the as yet unexplored poetics of revenge in Poe's narrative. This last chapter, written by Félix Martín Gutiérrez, suggests several open research paths into Poe's body of works dealing with revenge, literary imposture, plagiarism, the disjunctive between creativity and production and the destruction of the literary double symbolising the author's wish for self-annihilation. In his accustomed poetic and subtle way of writing, Félix Martín plays around with a variety of philosophical topics and literary metaphors found in some of Poe's works and manages to provide a beautifully wrought overview of Poe's deeper anxieties concerning the state of art, the responsibility of the author/narrator, the power of words or his internal struggle between the wish for celebrity and his disdain towards populist literature. Through a profound analysis of several of Poe's works, the author points at the possibility of reading into some of Poe's characters/narrators an allegorical double of the writer as well as to several nuanced clues present throughout his various works that might indicate the presence of these inner conflicts in the mind of the writer. And yet, although Félix Martín artfully hints at these clues and plausible inferences, he does not read into them a resolution of the aforementioned conflicts, leaving that matter open for further discussion. Undoubtedly, anyone interested in further research around the figure of Poe and his production will welcome the suggestions offered in this chapter with great enthusiasm.

The second part of the volume, dedicated to appendixes, is eminently practical and highly useful and also merits detailed commentary. To be used as a complement to the previous part or as a quick reference guide, these appendixes will be of great use to any student or researcher interested in deepening his/her knowledge of Poe and his works. This way, the first appendix presents in a visually very accessible way, a chart that compiles in chronological order not only the major events in Poe's biography, but also the year of publication of his works, together with other historical and literary events of the time. Of great clarity, it is highly useful for anyone interested in further research because, by highlighting simultaneous facts through its formal presentation, it provides a better understanding of the historical, literary and personal events that might have influenced the writer's production. In a less visually attractive but equally clear way, the second appendix compiles the whole production of Poe divided in poems, tales, essays, letters and literary criticism, long narrative and drama. Within those sub-sections, each work is presented chronologically together with a brief commentary on the possible literary influences and intentionality of each, of indubitable help for future research within the field of comparative literature. The greatest assets of this appendix are, on the one hand, the inclusion of Poe's dramatic

production, generally unknown to the public –together with, one might say, his longer narratives– and the fact that it provides each work’s title in English along with the Spanish translation. This is of special relevance if we take into account that the volume, written in Spanish, consistently provides only the Spanish title of each of the works mentioned in the previous chapters, which, although understandable to some point, might become a little confusing to those readers who have previously approached Poe’s production only from English and might fail to recognize the Spanish translation of some titles. Although this appendix provides a convenient solution to this minor problem it would probably have been more helpful to the reader if the English title had been provided as well in the body of the work, either in footnotes or parenthetical information. In relation to this, it is also noteworthy that the appendix also provides, when available, the subsequent reprints of the works. As anyone familiarized with the publication industry during Poe’s times<sup>1</sup> will know, much of the literature of the time was published through newspapers or magazines, and reprints of the most popular pieces were frequent. Sometimes, those reprints entailed some minor or drastic changes to both the pieces and their titles and the same –or a very similar– piece might be referred to differently. This appendix solves this problem, making the researcher’s labour much easier. Following with the helpful spirit of the volume, the third appendix is equally accommodating, for it is a clearly presented bibliography that includes not only the references of the different editions of Poe’s works, but also of several of his biographies and numerous academic pieces both in English and Spanish. Besides, it includes a list of –trustworthy– internet sites with academic and literary content.

Overall, this is a well-structured, updated and thought-provoking volume that will undoubtedly encourage readers to acquire a more profound knowledge of the real character of Poe and of the entirety of his works. Banished are the preconceived ideas about Poe’s character and literary merits; the readers of this volume will find a collection of praiseworthy essays that work perfectly together to provide a well-researched and –most importantly–truer to fact overview of the true talent and genius of the Bostonian writer.

---

<sup>1</sup> See Whalen (2001) and Hayes (2000).

## REFERENCES

- González Moreno, Beatriz and Margarita Rigal Aragón. *A Descent into Edgar Allan Poe and his Works: The Bicentennial*. Berna: Peter Lang, 2010.
- Hayes, Kevin J. *Poe and the Printed Word*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Iwasaki, Fernando and Jorge Volpi, eds. *Cuentos Completos. Edición Comentada*. Madrid: Páginas de Espuma, 2010.
- Rigal Aragón, Margarita, ed. *Los Legados de Poe*. Madrid: Síntesis, 2011.
- Whalen, Terence. "Poe and the American Publishing Industry." *A Historical Guide to Edgar Allan Poe*. Ed. J. Gerald Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Whitehead, Dan. *Nevermore: A Graphical Adaptation of Edgar Allan Poe's Short Stories*. New York: Sterling, 2008.

*How to cite this article:*

San José Rico, Patricia. Review of Margarita Rigal Aragón, ed. *Los Legados de Poe*. Madrid: Editorial Síntesis, 2011. Published in *ES. Revista de Filología Inglesa* 33 (2012): 341-347.

*Author's contact:* patriciasanjose@fyl.uva.es