WHAT IS IRISH STUDIES?

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Resumen: Este artículo pretende ofrecer una visión panorámica de los llamados *Irish Studies* o Estudios Irlandeses, una disciplina nueva que surge a raíz del interés mundial por las transformaciones acaecidas en Irlanda en las últimas décadas del siglo XX y principios del XXI. Los *Irish Studies* basan su análisis cultural en los aspectos más relevantes que han marcado la historia de Irlanda. Estos, consecuentemente, han modelado la imagen del país y han afectado de forma significativa la manera en la que Irlanda se contempla a sí misma, así como también la forma en la que el mundo la interpreta. No es de extrañar pues, que los objetos de estudio de los *Irish Studies* estén tan conectados, de una forma o de otra, a la literatura irlandesa. Por ello, las próximas páginas de este artículo dedicarán su atención a este campo de investigación.

Palabras Clave: estudios irlandeses – Iglesia católica – hambruna – emigración – situación postcolonial o estudios postcoloniales – división del país.

Abstract: This article pretends to offer a panoramic view of the so-called Irish Studies, a new discipline that arises as a consequence of those profound transformations that took place in Ireland during the last decades of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st century. Irish Studies base their cultural analysis in the most relevant aspects that have marked the history of this country. These factors have shaped Ireland´s perception of itself and the way the rest of the world looks at the Irish, so they are always present in Irish literature and that is why they will be treated in depth in this article.

Keywords: Irish Studies – The Catholic Church – The Great Famine – emigration – postcolonialism or postcolonial studies – partition.

Philologica Urcitana

Revista Semestral de Iniciación a la Investigación en Filología
Vol. 12 (Marzo 2015) 1-12
Departamento de Filología – Universidad de Almería (ISSN: 1989-6778)

The field of study called Irish Studies, «an integrated, multi-disciplinary, programme of learning» (Bartlett et al. 1988: 1) is an academic discipline which deals with Ireland in its widest sense. Traditionally, the study of the Irish Culture was included in the popular discipline of English Studies; nevertheless, «the prolific and important work of scholars […] for over a century» made possible «the evolution of Irish Studies towards a separate and respectable discipline» (Gregor 2002: VII). The connection with English Studies achieves significance due to Ireland's former condition as one of the colonies of the British Empire. During centuries, Ireland was associated with its powerful neighbour, so that it never existed, until very recently, an academic discipline dedicated exclusively to the investigation of the country's culture. Apart from the developments in the academic world, there are other internal and external catalysts that contributed to the emergence of this field of study that are going to be explained.

During the last decades of the 20th century things have changed in Ireland. Factors like the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland, the incorporation of the country to the European Community, the improvement of standards of living, economic prosperity, the reduction of the rates of emigration, the clash produced between the traditional values of society and the modern attitudes and the «mass culture phenomena such as Irish cinema, Irish Music or Irish pubs (all neatly packaged and carefully marketed for consumers both at home and abroad) have simulated an interest in the Emeral Isle» (Gregor 2002: VII) offering at the same time a decisive impulse to the emergence of Irish Studies.

On one hand, a great number of specialized associations were founded in Europe in order to promote the study of Ireland. The *British Association for Irish Studies* (1985), the *Spanish Association for Irish Studies* (AEDEI in 2000), the *European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies* (EFACIS in 2013), and, in Ireland itself, the *International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures* (IASIL in 1969),[1] are the most relevant examples. «Moreover, Summer Schools devoted to Irish Studies and directed primarily at the North American students are held in almost every university in Ireland; and in several Irish universities graduate programmes in Irish Studies are available» (Bartlett et al. 1988: 1).

On the other hand, departments of Irish Studies were created in European and American universities and new courses responsible for analysing the most marked aspects of Irish culture were imparted; so, as a result, new researches and relevant contributions establishing the base for this field of knowledge were published. The interest for Irish Studies «has been particularly noteworthy in the United States where the increase in the number of institutions offering courses in Irish Studies has been remarkable» (Bartlett et al. 1988: 1). This spread interest

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[1] This last one changed its name to the *International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures* in the year 1998.

can be attributed to the missionary endeavours of the American Committee for Irish Studies which has sought, over a period of more than twenty years, to promote all branches of Irish Studies in the United States. Growth in Canada has been more modest, but steady, while in Australia, there has been a recent awakening of interest in Irish (or, more properly, Irish-Australian) studies. (Bartlett et al. 1988: 1)

Other reasons that stand behind this concern for Irish culture can be related to the history and traditions of countries like Canada, Australia, Great Britain or America, territories that in the past were receivers of Irish immigrants. Outside Ireland, this concern for what was Irish and could be defined as Irish, was nothing but a search for roots of those descendants «with a sense of being Irish (even in a hyphened way) […] anxious to have a more precise understanding of what this mean or has meant in the past in terms of personality and nationality, whether national or individual» (Bartlett et al. 1988: 1). Even if this search for definition was also present in the other places and exposed similar motivations, in the America of the later 1960s for example, this was mirrored in the preoccupation of the new generations of Irish-Americans for Irish cultural manifestations like music, dance or the literature of writers as James Joyce, Seán O'Casey, John Millington Synge, Samuel Beckett, Seamus Heaney or W.B. Yeats and linguistic manifestations like the Irish language.

 Irish Studies base their cultural analysis on the most relevant aspects that have marked the history of Ireland. The influence of the Catholic Church, the constant struggle between Protestants and Catholics, the Potato Famine, the massive emigration, the traumatic partition, or the complex relationship between Ireland and England and the derived postcolonial situation of Ireland after achieving independence from the metropolis, are all historical circumstances that are recurrent for the understanding of the emergence of this academic discipline, for the comprehension of Irish history and the country's current situation. These factors shaped Ireland's perception of itself and the way the rest of the world looked at the Irish, so they are always present in contemporary Irish literature and they will be treated in depth in the following pages.

The complex links of Ireland and Great Britain are sometimes considered as being the «only one theme in Irish history […] the central theme of all Irish history, […] the struggle of Ireland against England» (Bartlett 1988: 44). It is even affirmed «by those who know their history through inspiration rather than through study» that «in its most politically charged form, […] the struggle for national independence has provided the dynamic of Irish history» (Bartlett 1988:44). The connection between both countries is more than problematic and Ireland´s categorization as a former colony or as an ally of the British Empire is still being a subject discussed within the framework of Postcolonial studies.

Recent academic contributions such as *Anomalous States* (1993) by David Lloyd, Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* (1995), and works of prominent names like Colin

Graham or Edward Said defended the uniqueness of the Irish case providing for it geographical, cultural and social reasons, as Marisol Morales Ladrón states:

> Irlanda fue la primera colonia Británica, la más cercana y la única en sufrir un proceso de colonización temprano y tardío, quizás haya sido la cercanía geográfica del Imperio, la pequeña dimensión de la isla y la asimilación casi completa de la lengua, cultura y raza lo que ha situado la peculiaridad del caso irlandés en torno a un debate que aúna opiniones divergentes hasta llegar a considerarlo un estado «diferente», «anómalo», o cuanto menos «atípico» (Morales Ladrón 2007: VIII).

Centering our attention on Kiberd and Lloyd's contribution we have to say that both works, *Anomalous States* and *Inventing Ireland,* apart from exemplifying the cultural and historical differences that conditioned the peculiar type of colonization undergone by Ireland, tried to provide common characteristics shared by the country with other territories located in continents like Africa, America or Asia that were also part of the British Empire. Naturally, this was a response to the publication of *The Empire Writes Back*[2] that passed over «the Irish case very swiftly, perhaps, because the authors find these white Europeans too strange to justify their sustained attention» (Kiberd 1995: 5) and Ireland an «anomalous state» (Lloyd 1993) difficult to be classified. Declan Kiberd goes even further affirming that probably «the introduction of the Irish case to the debate will complicate, extend and in some cases expose the limits of current models of postcoloniality» (Kiberd 1995: 5). Kiberd associates the almost superficial treatment of the Irish situation with Ireland's «'mixed' nature of the experience of Irish people, as both exponents and victims of British imperialism, which makes them so representative of the underlying process» (Kiberd 1995: 5). Precisely this double position of the Irish experience represents a starting point for those theories of the historical revisionists who reject colonialism when dealing with the Irish case. Some important authors that do not accept the Irish colonial experience are Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, Liam Kennedy, Glenn Hooper, Stephen Howe, etc.

> Los llamados «revisionistas» históricos rechazan el paradigma colonial para el análisis de la Irlanda contemporánea, argumentando el fin de la colonización en 1921, y justificando la Partición por la insistencia de los Unionistas norirlandeses, visión que convierte la violencia norirlandesa en una lucha interna, no anticolonial. (Carrera Suárez 2007: 6)

The term «colony» in Ireland's case is not always rejected. In fact, the majority of historians accept it to refer to determined periods when the small island was invaded by

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[2] *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989), written by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, is one of the most important works dealing with post-colonial texts and culture.

different people coming from the British territory like the Anglo-Norman adventurers, in the late twelfth century, or was disseminated (through the system of 'plantations') with Scottish people that appropriated the Irish land confiscated by the English Crown. Not only do they recognize the importance of these invasions and subsequent periods of colonization but also their effects. For example, Kiberd affirms in the introduction of his *Inventing Ireland* «that the English helped to invent Ireland, in much the same way as Germans contributed to the naming and identification of France» (Kiberd 1995: 1). Nevertheless he portrays Ireland «as a foil to set off English virtues, as a laboratory in which to conduct experiments, and as a fantasyland in which to meet fairies and monsters» (Kiberd 1995: 2). Even if the countries represent opposite sides, Kilberd considers this relationship between England and Ireland as being of a mutual and fundamental necessity «if England had never existed, the Irish would have been rather lonely. Each nation badly needed the other, for the purpose of defining itself» (Kiberd 1995: 2).

According to Joe Clearly, the colonization of the English people propitiated «the emergence of 'modern Ireland'» (Cleary 2005: 3) because

> modernity is a gift of colonial or religious conquest mediated primarily through an expanding British state […] rather than through any efforts by the pre-existing Gaelic society to modernise itself by its own exertions and its own terms. Modernisation in such accounts is conterminous with the Anglicisation of the island: Gaelic culture by that same move is aligned with the medieval, with the pre-modern, the archaic and the maladapted; with all those things whose inevitable fate it was to be vanquished by modernity. (Cleary 2005: 3)

Actually, the early modernity is born here, in the clash of the two cultures, in the «perennial complexities of assimilation/alienation and integration/rejection involved in all colonial relationships» (Bartlett 1988: 46). Nevertheless, 'later modernity', according to Cleary, was provoked by

> the American and French Revolutions of the development of the Irish republicanism; the impact of the British industrial revolution on Irish economic subordination and underdevelopment; the emergence of the 'second', eastward-looking British Empire, and the technological dominance of the Anglo-American industrial world with its gravitational effects on Irish migration and diaspora from the nineteenth century onwards; the ideological 'wars' between clerical and secular forces that raged across the European continent throughout the nineteenth century even as in Ireland the Catholic church, after two centuries of suppression, established a moral monopoly over Irish society designed to shelter the island from the icy blasts of continental secularism. (Cleary 2005: 3)

What Cleary mentions as forces that triggered the development of modernity are, as a matter of fact, fundamental aspects of the history of Ireland. The descendants of those

Irish immigrants, Presbyterians but also Catholics, that settled in America during the 18th century, played an active role in the achievement of the American Independence. Inspired by the American War (1776-1783) and the French Revolution (1789-1799), the Irish borrowed for their vocabulary words like «'representation', 'democracy', 'consent' and 'freedom'» (Bartlett 1988: 46). As a consequence, Ireland struggled against the metropolis in the United Irish Rebellion (1789) and became after the Act of Union (1801) «a self-governing (but still dependent) colony a province of metropolitan Britain» (Bartlett 1988: 47). Even after these political changes, the Irish people inevitably still felt linked to the «attributes of inferiority and subordination» while «both, Irish lawyers and politicians argued vehemently that Ireland was a separate kingdom» (Bartlett 1988: 47). These feelings and the love-hate relationship between the two nations can be observed in the child/mother metaphor, in which England is symbolically representing the mother-country, while Ireland becomes the child to look after. For George Russell, the woman represents metaphorically the Irish national spirit because she «cannot or will not reveal itself wholly while a coarse presence is near, an unwelcome stranger in possession of the home» (Pierce 2002: 13). The image of womanhood is even richer and varied:

> The Gaelic poets usually imagined their monarch wedded to the land, which was emblematized by a beautiful woman: if she was happy and fertile, his rule was righteous, but if she grew sad and sorrowful, that must have been because of some unworthiness in the ruler. (Kiberd 1995: 18)

As it has already been mentioned, «we encounter massive problems of definition» (Bartlett 1988: 47) when the colonial experience is to be applied to the Irish case. For Bartlett (1988: 46) and other writers that support his vision, Ireland bears the scars of its colonial experience in the continuous attempts of the British Crown to control the Irish trade and manufacturing, in the humiliation and limitations of the Irish Parliament and in the almost unlimited power of the Anglo-Irish ascendancy. However, the complicity and participation of the Irish people in the administration and the army of the British Empire, together with the high levels of emigration, if «we consider the many hundreds of thousands who departed these shores between 1700 and 1859 to seek opportunity in Canada, Australia, Britain and especially America» (Bartlett 1988: 47) complicate even more the debate. Bartlett ends his chapter asking rhetorically if these factors would not convert Ireland in a «mother-country in her own right» (Bartlett 1988: 47), adopting a similar position as Isabel Carrera Suárez: «La emigración masiva—aunque forzada—desde Irlanda hacia otras partes del imperio o a los Estados Unidos convierte a Irlanda en una 'madre patria' [cuya experiencia resulta ser] poco concordante con la situación de otras colonias» (Carrera Suárez 2007: 5-6).

Emigration is another element to be considered in the definition of Irish Studies: «Irish migration in the nineteenth century is one of the most significant movements of

population in modern European history, in terms of the total number of people involved and the proportion migrating.» (Hickman 2005: 117). The dimensions of this event were colossal, so «commentators have speculated that the Irish society was, in effect, in danger of haemorrhaging to death» (Curtin et al. 1988: 60). Since the Act of Union celebrated in 1801 until 1921, when the imperial rule ceased in twenty-six Irish counties, it is estimated that approximately 8 million people left Ireland. This «massive exodus which followed the famines of the 1840s left hundreds of thousands of Irish men and women in the major cities of Britain, North America and Australia dreaming of a homeland» (Kiberd 1995: 2). Emigration also continued in the twentieth century «marked by two periods of very heavy out-migration, the 1950s and the second half of the 1980s» (Hickman 2005: 117) when «the several economic crises which had shaken the Irish economy since 1973 (the oil crises of 1973 and 1979, exacerbated by inappropriate domestic responses in Ireland) has seen emigration figures rise significantly» (Curtin et al. 1988: 60). It is not surprising then that emigration was permeating the Irish consciousness and that authors like Mary J. Hickman considered that «emigration was a life event as 'normal' as leaving school or getting married» (Hickman 2005: 117). Fintan O'Toole offers in *The Lie of the Land* a new vision of the consequences that these migratory movements entailed:

> In a country like Ireland, whose modern history is shaped by the personal journeys of the emigrant, any accurate map of the land must be a map, not of an island, but of a shoreline seen from the water, a set of contours shaped, not by geography but by voyages. The shape of the island is the shape of all the journeys around it that a history of emigration has set in motion. […] Subjectively, using the small scale to measure the inlets and outflows of human life, the coastline expands to breaking point, scattering the inhabitants of the island half way around the globe. Emigration means, quite simply, that the people and the land are no longer co-terminous. In this sense, the map of Ireland is a lie. The lie of the land is that there is a place called 'Ireland' inhabited by the Irish people, a place with a history, a culture a society (O'Toole 1999:3-5)

Even nowadays «emigration is still widely perceived in Ireland as a vote of no confidence in the capacity of the Irish state-and Irish society- to provide a decent living for its own people at home» (Curtin et al. 1988:60-61) and this achieves significance if we take into account «that emigration has been a central part of the Irish experience (arguably the single most important and constant fact of Irish social history)» (Curtin et al. 1988: 61). That is why emigration «is also a major theme of Irish literature, not only in the works of the major writers but also in the vast repertoire of songs, ballads and stories which compromise the rich store of Irish popular literature and folklore.» (Curtin et al. 1988: 61).

Emigration, as it was mentioned before, was a direct consequence of the Great Famine (1845-1852) that drew the Irish population into despair and produced a critical

and unprecedented situation. «The Famine disproportionately impacted on the 3 million potato dependent people» (Whelan 2005: 135), therefore «almost a million people died from starvation and associated disease» (Kiberd 1995:21). The Irish-speaking zones, occupied by the poor peasantry from western Ireland, were the most affected arias. Only a quarter of the population spoke Gaelic after 1851, so «the Ireland which emerged from the Famine trauma […] was in every respect a more anglicised society» (Ó'Tuathaigh 1988: 126), a society that «witnessed the creation of a series of radical responses to the Famine legacy, of which the Irish Literary Revival[3] is one. Many other examples were […] the Land League[4] in 1879, […] the Gaelic Athletic Association[5] in 1884» (Whelan 2005: 135) or the Gaelic League[6] in 1893.

If someone was to be blamed for this critical situation created by the Famine those were the British. According to the Irish public opinion,

> England's selfish commercial policies and vindictive legislation had systematically beggared Ireland. Ireland's poverty, in short, was a product of English rapacity. […] The tragedy of the Great Famine and the mass emigration of the nineteenth century were only the culmination of a centuries-old policy designed to keep Ireland poor. (Bartlett 1988: 56-57)

Apparently, even during the starvation the British continued to transport grain from Ireland, so it is not surprisingly then that frequently the Irish peasantry affirmed that «God sent the potato blight but the English caused the Famine» (Kiberd 1995: 21). Actually, even if the British were considered guilty for the catastrophe, this seemed to be the result of a juncture of several factors like the poor commercial links of the country with North America, the effects of the Irish Penal Laws and the rate of population growth during the eighteenth century, among others.

Another important consequence of the Famine is that it «accelerated the transformation of the Catholic church in Ireland» (Whelan 2005: 138) and secured its success. «Catholicism invaded the vacated cultural space and solved an identity crisis by offering a powerful surrogate language of symbolic identity in which Irishness and

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[3] Literary movement that aroused at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century due to a revival of interest in Ireland's Gaelic literary and cultural heritage. The Irish Literary Revival, the Irish Literary Renaissance or the Celtic Twilight were closely related to the emerging political nationalism.

[4] The Irish Land League was an agrarian organization founded in the 19th century that struggled for the abolition of landlordism in Ireland.

[5] The Gaelic Athletic Association was founded in order to promote typical and traditional Irish sports like Gaelic football, handball, hurling, camogie etc. but also cultural manifestations as for example the Irish music, dance and language.

[6] The Gaelic League is a non-governmental organisation founded in 1893 in order to promote the Irish language in Ireland and everywhere around the globe.

'Catholicism' were seen as reciprocal and congruent» (Whelan 2005: 138). During the nineteenth century and the Post-Famine period, the power of the Catholic church was solidified thanks to its control over the educational and medical systems. They built churches, convents, orphanages and hospitals, «taught the peasant Irish not merely what to believe but how to behave […], 'civilized' the Wild Irish [… and] provided the trappings of a State where there was no state». (O'Toole 1998:67) Here, at this point «the emerging ethnic nationalism» was associating itself with «the Catholic dispossessed majority» (Pierce 2002: 10). David Pierce's reference to the deprived life of the Catholics connects with what happened approximately from 1690, even 1660, to 1829, during «the era of the Protestant nation» (Bartlett 1988:49), or that of the Protestant Ascendancy, a hard and difficult time for being a Catholic.

According to historians the ascendancy of Protestantism, an instrument through which England could control the island «was necessarily founded on the destruction of the Catholic power, the confiscation of Catholic land and the eclipse of that religion» (Bartlett 1988: 48), a process which developed especially due to the Cromwellian punitive policies. These Anglo-Irish considered themselves the chosen, governing, elite class and constructed their image in strongly opposition to the values that were supposed to represent the Irish population: «excessive drinking, lavish (and ruinous) hospitality, a propensity for violence, a love of gambling, and excessive (and unjustified) pride» (Bartlett 1988: 46). The year 1760 brought «changes within the Irish political structure, within the Catholic community and within English politics and society [that] allowed something called the Catholic Question, i.e. the issue of equal civil and religious rights for Catholics to emerge» (Bartlett 1988: 50). The Catholic Question had so much relevance that «by the late eighteenth century the Catholic Question was the Irish Question», so in 1829 the Catholics obtained the abolition of the Penal Laws thanks to a «mass pressure in a campaign led by Daniel O'Connell» (Bartlett 1988: 50), «perhaps the first mass-democratic politician of modern Europe […] and one of the inventors of the modern Irish nation» (Kiberd 1995: 20-21). The power of the Catholic Church started to recover and by the year 1916 with the Easter Monday Rising, the birth of the Irish Republic, it crystalized, having melted itself previously with the dreamt ideals of freedom and liberty of the new emerging state. According to Fintan O'Toole «the founding act of the modern Irish State—the 1916 Rising—is a religious as much as a political act, and conceived by its leader, Patrick Pearse, as such» (O'Toole 1999: 66). Everything seemed to be perfectly prepared for this fusion:

the colour was appropriately green, the place a non-military building in the centre of Dublin[7], […] and the time was the most important feast in the Church calendar. «Surrection!» […] a combination of insurrection and resurrection (Pierce 2002: 11).

The symbolic dimension of this event is highly relevant because as O'Toole mentions «the conscious imagery of blood sacrifice and redemption, shaped a specifically Catholic political consciousness that belied the secular republican aims of many of the revolutionaries» (O'Toole 1999:66). This imagery of Catholicism remained connected to the Home Rule after this success and it was going to be the model for the new Irish Free State after 1922 and for most of the past century. Against this tie, decades before 1922, an anti-Home Rule or Unionist sentiment among the high classes of society was emerging. This was not considered relevant from an electoral point of view, but things looked different in Ulster. The 'Ulster problem' requires here more attention precisely for being one of the reasons that stand at the base of the partition of Ireland, (reinforced in 1922 when Southern Ireland was declared a free state meanwhile the Northern territory was declared officially part of the United Kingdom), but also at the origins of the bloody conflict known as The Troubles, that took place in Northern Ireland from 1968 until 1994:

> The 'Ulster problem' […] was not simply that Ulster as a whole was uniformly (or even overwhelmingly) electorally Unionist, while the other three provinces were overwhelmingly Nationalist. It is rather that Ulster was evenly divided between Home Rule and Unionist voters. [Ó'Tuathaigh 1988: 144]

Definitely this last division provoked the chaos in Northern Ireland:

> The most powerful and pervasive element of this Ulster Unionist *mentalité* was its hostility to Roman Catholicism […]. This sense of Protestant righteousness, combined with planter historical consciousness, undoubtedly made for resolute political conviction s. But it also encouraged attitudes of superiority and mastery which were less attractive and which ultimately, were less useful politically as community assets (Ó'Tuathaigh 1988: 145)

This conducted to the Troubles, a bloody conflict that dragged in it almost civilians who did not want part in it. 3.500 people died and around 40.000 were wounded in the war between the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Catholic and radical IRA. The confrontation arrived to an end in 1998 with the Good Friday Agreement.

Partition is the last of the themes treated on this article. As we have seen, topics such as the complicated links between Ireland and England, the massive emigration that was a direct consequence of the Potato Famine, the conflicts that appeared between Protestants and Catholics and the almost unlimited power of the Catholic Church are

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[7] It makes reference to Dublin's General Post Office.

important for the definition of Irish Studies and they are certainly fundamental for the comprehension of Ireland's actual and past situation. The utility of this field of studies is even wider if we take into account that a closer introspection of the Irish Studies seems

> to promise that, in part by looking back to earlier moments of crisis and experiment, cultural studies or theory could help to produce new ways of thinking about the ongoing problems of conflict in Northern Ireland and of political and economic stagnation in the republic. (Cronin and Nolan 2013: 6)

The mentioned economic crisis, which Ireland was and is still facing, arrived after a period of economic prosperity known as the Celtic Tiger. The economic growth started in 1995 and it lasted until 2007. When the crisis started the Irish had to face unemployment, public debt, high inflation and high crime levels. Now, in this context, cultural diversity or multiculturalism, immigration, racism, marginalisation, poverty or class struggle become the dominant themes and preoccupations for the Irish writers. Those are also the new concerns of Irish Studies, discipline that fights to maintain a contemporary appearance while dealing with the «swirling abundance of themes and trends», and the «rapidly changing nature of Irish society […] the perpetually fluctuating map of contemporary Irish fiction which has to be constantly re-drawn» (Cahill 2013: 4). Taking this into account, it is not surprisingly then that even if «Irish Studies in the 21st Century is without doubt thriving, […] at the same time, it is in need of direction, inspiration and strategies for the future» (Kelleher 2013: 60). It seems that even if there are permanent and significant contributions coming from scholars and professional organizations interested in Irish Studies, «a disciplinary breadth for Irish Studies is still not fully achieved especially within Ireland itself» (Kelleher 2013: 63). Maybe is just a question of time for the Irish Studies to cope, at the same time as literature, with the new reality of Ireland, and of course that of the world.

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