

**JAMES CLARENCE MANGAN, EDWARD WALSH
AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY IRISH LITERATURE IN ENGLISH**

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In recent decades there has been a notable interest in a literature that emerged in nineteenth-century Ireland, written in the English language by native Catholic authors. Important contributors such as Patrick Rafroidi, Anthony Cronin, Michael Cronin or Norman Jeffares have paid attention to it in detail in their numerous studies on the subject. Nevertheless there still remain two important figures that have not been given the status they deserve: I refer to Edward Walsh and James Clarence Mangan. As a general rule, critical studies on Irish literature in English have passed them over rather lightly. Moreover, where other writers have gained general critical attention, they still continue to be marginal figures in the Irish literary canon. Anne MacCarthy, an expert in Irish writing in English, claims a place for both writers in the tradition of this literature. In her book *James Clarence Mangan, Edward Walsh and Nineteenth-Century Irish Literature in English* she offers a rigorous appraisal of these writers from a new, fresh angle. By drawing on Itamar Even-Zohar's polysystem theory and on André Lefevere's ideas on the canon and translation she discusses Walsh's and Mangan's literary identities and their place in the tradition of Irish literature in English and offers a new valuation of their literary reputation. The book is a lucid and cogent study and it reveals the importance that both writers had for the development of an independent literary tradition and the creation of a new literary identity.

The opening chapter of the book is a useful introduction that helps to clarify aspects relevant to the subsequent analysis of both authors. In it MacCarthy presents the factors that in one way or another affect the formation of a canon and the literary reputations of writers. Thus, using Even-Zohar's polysystem theory she shows how literature is not an isolated discipline but is instead integrated in the rest of human activities. At this point she stresses the connection between literature and society, a particularly relevant connection in the case of Ireland. So, an examination of important concepts in the literary system, such as "institution", "repertoire", "product", "consumer", illustrates with clarity that not only purely aesthetic concerns are taken into account when establishing a literary canon.

Central to her arguments are also Lefevere's ideas on translation, since the authors she discusses wrote many translations from Irish and, in the case of Mangan, from many other languages. Like Lefevere, MacCarthy sees translation as being much more positive than the second-rate activity, equated with imitation and reproduction, that is how it has been regarded since Aristotle. Lefevere (1992: vii) stresses that translation "helps in the evolution of a literature and a society" and this is particularly the case in Ireland, where translation has played a vital role in establishing a tradition instrumental in maintaining the native culture and also in creating something new. This MacCarthy (2000: 86) acknowledges when she writes: "Translation in Irish writing in English not only meant the rediscovery of a native literature, it was also the creation of something new and identifiable Irish".

The chapters that follow set out the central and distinctive features of both writers, emphasising the part played by criticism in determining their literary reputation. Thus, the second and third chapters are devoted to Edward Walsh, while the next three focus on James Clarence Mangan. By providing innovative judgement on their work, these chapters contribute to a critical insight into these writers.

After defining what MacCarthy understands as Irish writing in English, she goes on to explore the consequences resulting from the loss of the Irish language (the disappearance of models to follow and the absence of a literary identity) and to show the significance of translation, and particularly Walsh's and Mangan's translations, for Irish writing in English. By translating from Irish into English these authors helped to prevent Irish culture from falling into oblivion, to recover and revitalise the heroes, legends and folklore of ancient Ireland for present and future generations. Moreover, they helped to establish a "repertoire" (according to Even-Zohar's meaning of that word) and thus to create models for future writers.

Although Walsh is generally studied as a scholarly translator, MacCarthy's perceptive analysis of the poet illustrates how he can be considered a creative artist as well. When translating he systematically takes certain liberties with the text that make him into a good example of a creative translator, "the translator who sees

himself as a creative artist” (2000: 37). And it is this aspect of his writing that MacCarthy underlines, raising the issue of creative composition in translation. Influenced by his ideology as a nationalist, Walsh decided to translate the native poems, recognising the cultural power of the past and the important effects that reviving the Gaelic spirit would bring to the nation. But his faithfulness to the original text did not prevent him from including patriotic sentiments in the text, absent in the original, that give the composition a new meaning. Thus, the two different features that Susan Bassnett spoke of with regard to nineteenth-century translation are identified in Walsh’s works: faithfulness and creativity.

As a creative translator, Mangan is even more important than Walsh. His compositions are loose versions of the source texts, whether they be from German, Persian or Irish. Having a more imaginative attitude to translation than mere textual reproduction, his presence is significantly felt in the text, giving it a more personal air. But, most importantly, through these translations Mangan opened the frontiers of the Irish literature to others and he also imported models from literatures other than the British, thus making Irish writing in English more independent and universal.

Having defined Walsh and Mangan as Irish writers in English, MacCarthy moves on to analyse critical views of both authors to reveal how these have determined their literary reputation and their marginalisation within the canon. A challenging look at different opinions on Walsh in nineteenth and twentieth-century scholarship demonstrates how closely ideology and poetics are related to the literary fame of a writer. Thus, MacCarthy acknowledges three main reasons for Walsh’s marginalisation: one of them is his dedication to translation, too frequently considered a secondary activity. Another is that his reputation has been predicated on nationalism. When nationalism was in vogue and became an important factor for the establishment of the canon, Walsh enjoyed a moment of fame. However, once nationalism was not so relevant, he fell into oblivion. Thirdly, he translated popular literature in a popular idiom and this has led to his being regarded as an inferior writer. Nevertheless, as MacCarthy’s exposition clarifies, critics failed to notice an important fact: Walsh’s contribution a new way of writing.

MacCarthy also submits critical work on Mangan to a close scrutiny to demonstrate how critical responses to his work have misjudged his art and how this has conditioned the reception of his writing. Critical evaluations of the poet have generally regarded him as a pathetic figure, enigmatic and elusive, difficult to understand. However, MacCarthy remarks that criticism has been narrow in its focus, applying rigid notions and fixed one-sided views, which ultimately demonstrates that the complexity of Mangan’s work has not been understood. In any case, this study goes beyond those simplistic views and reads Mangan as an

important figure for Irish writing in English. Whereas many readings of the poet have regarded him as a minor figure, MacCarthy insists on his literary value, seeing him as a complex writer in his use of humour and his capacity to hide behind multiple masks. As a way of illustrating this, she takes a close look at the different manifestations of Mangan's identity and organises them into two main groups: Mangan the Romantic and Mangan the Augustan. Mangan the Romantic, the eccentric writer whose life is reflected in his work, fits nicely into the Romantic tradition. But problems arise when Mangan the Augustan, who proposes classical virtues such as clarity or self-restraint, subverts Romanticism. It seems that only when the writer adopts a Romantic identity is he considered of literary worth. However, as MacCarthy endeavours to highlight, not having a fixed literary identity does not necessarily lead to a mediocre literary output. On the contrary, it is a good example of an author's way of controlling his craft.

In this carefully-structured and well-argued book, MacCarthy offers a new and revealing study of the poets Edward Walsh and James Clarence Mangan. No single critic has so far examined their joint significance for Irish literature in English. Hence, the need for this full-length critical study. Written with elegance and great scholarship, the book is a painstaking account of two important figures who, in their own unique way of understanding translation, contributed to the creation of a new literary tradition. By rethinking the criteria for the establishment of a literary canon, an issue of major concern to critics today, MacCarthy hopes to open up the canon of Irish writing in English to new voices who have been rendered mute for so many years. And one of the book's greatest strengths is precisely this new treatment of the two writers. Certainly, the volume deserves to be read not only by students of Irish literature in English but also by those interested in translation. Irish literary studies will surely be enriched by such an impressive contribution.

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Works Cited

LEFEVERE, André. 1992. *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. London and New York: Routledge.