



Huir del laberinto.

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REFERENCES

Esther Aliaga Rodrigo, *Huir del laberinto. Crecer en Irlanda del Norte. Una mirada literaria*, La Coruña, Netbiblo, 2009, 338 p., ISBN 978-84-9745-268-7

- 1 In *Huir del laberinto* Esther Aliaga offers an innovative view on the Northern Irish conflict as she engages with four contemporary novels written from the perspective of children and young adults. Analysing Robert McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle*, Frances Molloy's *No Mate for the Magpie*, Glenn Patterson's *Burning Your Own* and Julie Mitchell's *Sunday Afternoons*, she engages with a dimension of the so-called *Troubles novel* which has almost entirely been neglected by literary critics. Through her careful choice of novels, Aliaga manages to render a balanced picture of Northern Irish society. Whereas the male protagonist of *Ripley Bogle* belongs to the Catholic community, the central figure of *Burning Your Own* is a Protestant boy. In contrast to *No Mate for the Magpie*, where the action develops around the Catholic Ann McGlone, the main character of *Sunday Afternoons* Protestant is a girl. Exploring not only the literary voices of both communities but also of both genders, Aliaga avoids giving a one sided view of the Troubles. As the four novels are regarded by the author as *Bildungsroman*, she opens her study with an illuminating account of the literary genre's relevance to the Northern Irish conflict. Aliaga sees the popularity of the *Bildungsroman* in Northern Irish fiction as rooted in its thematic focus on the construction of identity. She argues that the protagonists' attempt to position themselves in the power structures of a divided society echoes Northern Ireland's quest for a national identity. The subsequent chapter is dedicated to an overview on Northern Irish *Troubles fiction* in which she convincingly outlines the development of the genre and its various subcategories, such as the *Love-across-the-barricades novel*, the *Troubles Thriller* and *Women's fiction*.
- 2 Creating a socio-political basis for the analysis of the four novels, Aliaga discusses themes central to the literary and political discourse of the Northern Irish conflict. In

particular, she points out the significance of space and territoriality in a Northern Irish context and takes Belfast and Derry as cases in point. She engages with different urban theories and underscores the central role of territorial boundary markers in the creation of a segregated society. Aliaga further touches on the importance of the family nucleus in the development of youngsters growing up in politically troubled Northern Ireland. In this context, she argues that from an early age on children in the region are manipulated through their social environment in their perception of their ethno-religious counterparts.

- 3 In her literary analysis, the author follows the thematic lines exposed in the first part of her book, which in each case receive a different colour. According to Aliaga, McLiam Wilson's *Ripley Bogle* stands out due to the subversive use of dark humour through which traumatising events are depicted in a comic way. While humour and irony are still important stylistic elements in *No Mate for the Magpie*, this particular novel strikes through the consistent use of vernacular language. Aliaga sees the salient feature of *Burning Your Own* in the parallel which Patterson creates between the development of the main character's private history and the history of Northern Ireland. In this way, Patterson establishes a link between the personal changes in the life of the protagonist and the political development of the region. Julie Mitchell's novel *Sunday Afternoons* receives a special position among the novels chosen through a particular focus on the role that religion plays in the construction of a personal identity within the context of the Northern Irish Troubles.
- 4 In her well written study, Aliaga manages to communicate the uniqueness of the four novels, which lies in their capacity to reflect the influence of political violence on the life of children and their development in a society marked by sectarianism and prejudice. Through the tale of stories taken out of every day life, the atrocities of political violence become exposed in a very clear light. This well written book can be seen not only as a valuable contribution to the study of Northern Irish prose but also as an illuminating sociological account of Northern Irish society, revealing aspects which too often have been ignored. The book also contains a useful glossary and a chronology of the Troubles, which are especially useful for those readers unfamiliar with the complexity of the Northern Irish situation. One hopes that the book will be translated into English so that it can reach the broad audience it deserves.