



Journal of the Short Story in English

Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

63 | Autumn 2014

Special Issue: The 21st Century Irish Short Story

Country of the Grand by Gerard Donovan, or the Chronicle of a Collapse Foretold

Bertrand Cardin



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/1517>

ISSN: 1969-6108

Publisher

Presses universitaires de Rennes

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 December 2014

ISBN: 0294-0442

ISSN: 0294-04442

Electronic reference

Bertrand Cardin, « *Country of the Grand* by Gerard Donovan, or the Chronicle of a Collapse Foretold », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], 63 | Autumn 2014, Online since 01 December 2016, connection on 03 December 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/1517>

This text was automatically generated on 3 December 2020.

© All rights reserved

Country of the Grand by Gerard Donovan, or the Chronicle of a Collapse Foretold

Bertrand Cardin

Après avoir si souvent dénoncé chez les autres la
folie des grandeurs, comment, sans ridicule,
pourrais-je me croire encore l'homme inefficace
par excellence, le premier parmi les inutiles?
(Cioran 144)

- 1 At the end of the 15th century, in Switzerland, was published a long poem written in German by Sebastian Brant who warned his contemporaries against their vices in order to save them from damnation. According to him, the world was heading straight for its final sinking and the fools were so numerous that one ship could not hold them all, hence the title of his poem, *Das Narrenschiff*—*The Ship of Fools*. Inspired by this Renaissance text, the well-known Irish critic, Fintan O'Toole, wrote an essay in 2009 which is also entitled *Ship of Fools*. If this intellectual chose a title which echoes Brant's poem, it is precisely because he noticed the same transgressions as his predecessor, though in a very different time and context. In his study, O'Toole endeavours to show how Ireland lost its mind in the last two decades and he considers that the authorities missed a historic chance to use the available wealth and lay the basis of a renewed Irish society. Such an achievement would have been possible, according to O'Toole, if only the governments had displayed judgment and moral rectitude, which was not the case, as the complete title of his essay suggests: *Ship of Fools: How Stupidity and Corruption Sank the Celtic Tiger*. As long as it swept through the country, the wave of madness was lived and viewed as a festival, but a festival in the sense that Roger Caillois gives it in *Man and the Sacred*, that is an exceptional time of disorderly exuberance, an interlude when all excesses are allowed, when one loses control and gives oneself up to the most irrational impulses (129). Now the party is over. Feast and frenzy have been replaced by austerity and restraint. What's left after the ball? In retrospect, some observers notice today that the rare voices which rose to warn the Irish people of the insanity of the situation were

not really heard. As a matter of fact, it seems that they were not taken over by the media. What about fiction? Were calls for reason expressed? In an approach similar to that of Sebastian Brant in his days, did Irish writers of fiction incite their contemporaries to vigilance? To answer this question, we need to focus on recent publications whose plots are in close touch with the pulse of events and anchored in today's world. And yet, considering the necessary period of time between the conception and the publication of a book, we are not yet capable of gathering a varied amount of texts meeting this requirement. Nevertheless, among these few publications, a book of short stories seemed attractive because of its ironic title: *Country of the Grand*. Spontaneously, the reader would expect the book to focus on a rich superpower like the US. And yet, it is about Ireland¹. Although it refers to Ireland's boom, the title, by its grandiloquence, implies that the Celtic Tiger, as it is going to be dealt with in the text, will be treated with caution and skepticism. Indeed, right from the paratext,² the irony is obvious: the title that highlights strength, wealth and grandeur is directly followed by an epigraph which discloses the other side of the picture—"Frailty, thy name is man." This aphorism in inverted commas proves to be a parody—an ironic process—of a quotation from *Hamlet*: "Frailty, thy name is woman." This connection between the title and the epigraph introduces a symmetrical contrast, an inversion as if each element contained the seeds of its opposite. In this case, it condenses the replacement of strength by weakness, in other words, a possibility for this "country of the grand," endowed with great power, to be weakened and impoverished. Even if the text never explicitly states this, it suggests, particularly through the ironic process of changing from one position to the other in a recurrent movement of oscillation, that the Celtic Tiger might be only an idol with feet of clay. This critical distance can be justified in the way the writer, Gerard Donovan, observes his country of origin. As an Irishman living in the States, he takes a look at the situation from outside. And his look is probably more clear-sighted and objective than a native's. Irony is characteristic of Donovan's view and interpretation of the Celtic Tiger years. As it is a permanent feature in the book, irony is also the thread that runs through our analysis. We'll see first that irony is in league with the genre of the short story, that it is part of the paradox of the unexpected themes and motifs of the book. Then we'll focus on the writer's intentions and the reasons why he takes on the part of an ironist to depict the Irish society of his days. This progression will lead us to answer some questions which are specific to the very activity of writing: writing in what form? On what themes? For whom and why?

- 2 Thirteen stories make up *Country of the Grand* and eleven of them are set in Ireland.³ It is worth mentioning that it is the first time that Gerard Donovan has published a collection of stories and written about Ireland. Indeed, the plots of the three novels he wrote before were set in the US for two of them and in an unnamed, war-torn country, possibly in Eastern Europe, for the third one. According to Donovan, the stories in this collection were written over a period of fifteen years: most of them began life in the early 90s, were revised and re-worked many times; new stories were designed in the meantime; others were written just before publication. As a result, the writing period of the stories ranges from 1993 to 2008 and chronologically coincides with the Celtic Tiger years. And as Donovan writes as a witness of his own world, this period is at the heart of the collection that it anchors in an obvious realistic context. Furthermore, this amount of time provides the writer with the opportunity of taking an interest in a textbook case, of wondering about this society which is both his own insofar as it is his native country, but which, at the same time, has nothing to do anymore with the one

he lived in because of the unprecedented economic miracle that the nation was experiencing as he wrote the book.

- 3 It is most probably significant that this questioning is based on a set of different texts, in other words, that the author chose a collection of stories to share his numerous questions. Indeed a book of stories is an interesting literary option to depict a society because it establishes some kind of diversity within unity. Though it is composed of various narratives, the book conveys a single effect, a “unity of impression” (60) as Edgar Allan Poe puts it, which allows the writer to narrate the different destinies of his characters who are perceptible as samples of the Irish population. In this microcosm, individual destinies can easily be transposed to collective fate, the short story writer having the gift of making symbols from events and characters. He also manages to grasp what lies beneath the surface and make it tangible. This is one of the reasons why the implicit plays a major part in the genre. The short story incites the reader to interpret the clues which are left unsaid; it does not go too closely into the matter but touches upon it lightly and proceeds by hints and allusions, hence its close relationship with irony.
- 4 Furthermore, unlike the novel which develops the art of evolution, the short story is an art of immediate revelation, dotted with a high emotional, dramatic potential. As a result, is there a genre more adapted to depict a society which is prone to unexpected crises, a society which goes from the status of a developing country to a model of global economic success? Of course, these sudden changes can be welcome and lead to dramatic improvements as, on the other hand, they may cause terrible damage. It is also because the short story is focused on a crisis-point, a momentous peak that is both felt and feared, that Donovan chose the genre. The short story format is perfect in keeping with the depiction of a society threatened by a sudden setback.
- 5 These crucial points are common patterns in the book. In each story, Donovan focuses on a single character in a single episode at a particular moment. This moment is most often a personal crisis on which the whole narrative hinges. The character undergoes some decisive change in attitude or understanding. He or she even proves to be, at the end of the narrative, in a situation which is the complete reverse of what it was at the beginning. The protagonist’s universe is then turned upside down. This balance between two extremes is not only characteristic of the process of irony but also of the very genre of the short story as confirmed by numerous critics.
- 6 What are these stories about? A man in a changing room overhears two friends discussing his wife’s infidelity. A depressed solicitor comes back to the places of his childhood and tries to recover his youth. A girl is warned against the new immigrants by a friend of her father’s. A couple of archaeologists about to break up are working together under pressure from a construction foreman to finish a dig in an area that is going to be flattened over to make way for a motorway. A woman discovers that her recently deceased husband had another family with a child. A boy who stops speaking after his father’s death looks at his mother throwing herself into a desperate liaison with a good-for-nothing. The collection centers around crises of modern life, feelings of disconnection, fractured relationships, broken marriages, death, loss, betrayal and their inevitable effects that are pain, loneliness, indifference, anxiety and depression.
- 7 In the background we find the Celtic Tiger and the message expressed loud and clear that “things have never been better” (“Country of the Grand” 53), that “it’s so much better in Ireland now,” that “things are grand all the same” (“Country of the Grand” 55)

... The stark contrast between this displayed optimism and the characters' painful experiences raises a few questions: how can this paradox be interpreted? What message is the writer delivering?

- 8 According to Donovan's definition, a short story is something we enter after it has begun and leave before it has finished (qtd. in Cullinane). As a result, the motifs of the book—loneliness, anxiety, depression, all of these personal crises that are subsequent to separations and deaths, imply by the irony of reversals that the characters were in the opposite situation before the beginning of the story and maybe they will recover comfort, serenity and optimism after the end of it. According to the same symmetry of antitheses, it is predictable that Ireland's boom, the background of the plots, changes into a severe recession in the post-diegetic period, hence this impending disaster that is constantly hanging over the fictive universe of the narratives. When the young archaeologist asks her friend: "Why do we always see the past as down?" ("Archaeologists" 102), the other replies: "That's where it's preserved." Logically, if the past is "down," underground, the present is on the surface of the earth and the future, "up," in the sky. And the sky is described in the story as full of dark and threatening clouds that cover the stars and let rain fall in torrents. Throughout the book, such clues hint at a dreadful event. And this is because there hangs the threat over the stories of a sudden change which did not fail to happen, this time not in fiction but in reality and, ironically, at the same time as the book was published, that *Country of the Grand* can be considered as the chronicle of a collapse foretold.
- 9 Indeed, irony characterizes not only the short story and the characters' destinies but also, as confirmed reality, the Irish economic circumstances. With the return of economic difficulties, the decline of competitiveness, the rise of unemployment and the resumption of mass emigration, isn't the nation comparable with Cinderella who, after the ball, finds herself back in the ashes, from rags to riches and back to rags, or with this girl whose body has been hidden in turf for millennia until it is dug up from the ground by archaeologists who finally bury it in long, dark warehouses?
- 10 Many stories exemplify an extension of the individual to the collective. For example, in the title story, the protagonist, Frank, a well-to-do solicitor who, at the end of his day's work and after one too many whiskeys, suddenly makes up his mind to join an eight-kilometer race, where he is dressed in his business suit, is possibly reminiscent of the Irish nation. Ill-prepared for such an event, Frank, in a sudden burst of energy, though he endeavors to get some extra speed, accelerates his pace, opens his mouth wide to gasp his way to more oxygen, but suffocates, slows down, gets a stitch in his side, stumbles and hits the ground, knees first, before falling flat on his face. Too sustained a pace is the cause of many evils and there are quite a number of falls in the book. The ill-considered sprint becomes an understated metaphor for an Ireland which was not adapted to the frantic pace of development it experienced for several years. Why run a long distance when you still have the memory of learning to walk and being in need of someone else's help to stand on your feet? "As he left the house that morning, Frank Delaney remembered being so young that he was not able to walk, struggling from his father to his mother, going soft at the knees and collapsing into her hands" ("Country of the Grand" 50). The allegory here is obviously ironic, as the protagonist who overestimates his strength must endure humiliation, in the literal sense of the word, since he bites the dust. Furthermore, his race in space goes together with a run in time. The vague memory of his first steps incites him to reconnect with the past. This is why

he changes his usual route to see the house in which he spent his childhood. And yet the house is no longer the same: the lawn is now a concrete parking space. The contrast between what the place used to be and what it has become arouses his feeling of displacement and his yearning for the past: he bursts into tears when he realizes his failure: “He was tired of the sudden obsession with his past disappearing while he wasn’t paying attention” (“Country of the Grand” 62). Many stories in the book are moving indictments of so-called progress and the decreasing importance of the past in modern life, both personal and historical. Similarly, on the construction site of a parking area and a filling station, a trench produces Neolithic stone (“Archaeologists”). The works stop to leave the place to archaeologists who excavate treasures that require a couple of months’ work. But, as time is getting short, they are forced to finish their digs with a pickaxe at the risk of destroying everything because they are urged by the developer who laments over the money he wasted.

- 11 Celtic Tiger Ireland is depicted as mean, venal, caught up in a system of a crazy pace and many characters are irresistibly carried away by the wheels of this terrible chain. The motif of the trap is recurrent in the book, whether it is the cubicle of a changing-room, a wheelchair, crystallized ice or rabbit-cage houses. The trap is the metaphor of the characters’ incapacity to escape their destinies, as they are living in a universe that does not suit their identities and desires.
- 12 The whole work is dominated by a crisis of values which, according to Donovan, is characteristic of Celtic Tiger Ireland. The staff of a restaurant refuses access to arriving guests who will not be given food because the place has been closed for two minutes. The Irish tradition of welcome and hospitality is reduced to nothing. Throughout the book, there is a sense of having come too far, of something precious being lost.
- 13 In the story entitled “The Summer of Birds,” the immigrants are always impersonally referred to as “they” or “the shadows” and are the subject of an eloquent comparison by Tommy who says: “That reminds me of a film, a famous film, you know, a man called Hitchcock. *The Birds*, there’s more and more of them (...). The place gets full of them and they attack you. People’s faces torn up and bloody” (“The Summer of Birds” 158). The speaker of these xenophobic remarks is a friend of the narrator’s father—the narrator being a girl who wonders why that man is progressively taking her mother’s place in the house. As a matter of fact, the true invasion is not the one he exposes but the way he himself viciously intrudes into the house and tries to manipulate the girl’s mind by instilling in her his hatred for the other and his obsession with money and security.
- 14 These are the effects of the so-called prosperity according to Donovan for whom material enrichment comes with a mutilation of the Irish soul and an upheaval of old traditions. Most of the characters belong to this upward class of *nouveau riche* whose major concern is the accumulation of wealth—an air-conditioned car, a house in Spain, a few days’ shopping in New York... Their only values are money, consumption and material power. They and their assets are as one. They are so interested in short-term benefits and self-centered to such an extent that they would have been defined as *bourgeois* by Flaubert because their thoughts and behaviours are despicable.
- 15 Some characters, just like many Irish people, however, really do not have the feeling of experiencing a festive period during all those years, as a young boy’s narrative puts it:
 I lay under a woollen blanket (...). We were saving oil. The cold made my feet feel like blocks. I had taken off my trousers and draped them around my head for warmth. As I tried to sleep I saw the snowflakes twisting under the street lamp and

over a deep frost serrated across the window. After an hour lying in bed I was still shivering. ("Glass" 118)

- 16 What is the use of the boom if it is not fairly shared, if the vast majority of the population does not take advantage of it, but is still exploited and rejected? The country may be grand but the gulfs between its inhabitants seem not only to remain but to be growing wider and wider. Here again, the traditions of solidarity and fair distribution definitely belong to the past.
- 17 By the same token, the legendary warm and friendly relations established between people are also given a hard time in the book. Once more, the irony is that, although characters are equipped with brand new cell phones, computers and other devices which are supposed to facilitate the connection between people, communication is a failure. The protagonists essentially get in touch with one another by e-mail and are caught up in such a frantic spiral that they do not take time to read, and all the more so to answer each other ("Country of the Grand"). And when there is an exchange, it is necessarily fake as characters keep on cheating, lying and deceiving one another. In "How Long Until," the man imagines his wife's lies and gets to the point of decoding her fallacious explanations to provide them with their genuine meanings: "I'm going to the shop. Translation: I want some privacy so I can phone my new friend. I'm going for a few drinks after work. Translation: We're driving to his place" ("How Long Until" 25). This is why characters want to find a simple language that they can share, that can allow them to understand one another, to quench their thirst for authenticity and truth. Once she is a widow, when she hears about her husband's secret life, Mary is looking for truth and needs to see "what had been true in their lives" ("Another Life" 149). When Jim inadvertently eavesdrops on his friends talking about his wife's infidelity, he can visualize her:

He saw images of Denise, not with another man, not of her naked body, but of her not telling the truth. He watched her in the kitchen not telling the truth, in the garden not telling the truth, watching television not telling the truth. The images slid back in time, and in a few seconds she was not telling the truth ever, all the way back to when they first met. Even then, when he brought her to a film on a rainy Friday after classes and she was still doing her degree, she was not telling him the truth. ("Morning Swimmers" 15)
- 18 Silenced for a long time, the truth finally comes out violently from *his* mouth: the scorned husband rushes out of his changing room and proclaims his truth to the ones he no longer considers as his friends and will never see again.
- 19 What do the good years mean? Obviously, the boom of national economy does not exempt individuals from suffering loss, mourning and deception. The few couples who are still together are not for a long time because the two members no longer trust each other; genuine love and sexual relationships within the couple are seriously threatened by sex on the phone, escort services or pornography, as many illusions and lies that lead the one they live with on a wrong track. And when there are too many tracks, characters lose their bearings: "The more the builders filled the countryside with roads, the more lost he felt" ("Archaeologists" 89). Images of maps and cartography occur frequently in Donovan's writing. In this Ireland of suburbs, the road network keeps on developing but traffic is not moving more freely as cars are stuck in congestions and progress in small jerks even on motorways. Although cars are supposed to favour links and connections, they are only metal boxes in which each driver is isolated. They are not only the setting for many important scenes in the

collection but also the reflection of the paralysis and social separation of their occupants.

- 20 By highlighting the paradoxes of our contemporary societies, Gerard Donovan belies the *idées reçues* which could let us believe that the thriving business of a country necessarily brings about its population's happiness. He aims to attract his readers' attention, to appeal to their common sense. He establishes a direct form of communication with them, particularly his Irish readers to whom he primarily appeals with the intention of opening their eyes. He incites them to awake and consider carefully that the exceptional phenomenon they are experiencing is not what it seems to be or what they are told it is: the Celtic Tiger is just apparently strong but this strength conceals a genuine weakness. This calling out is aroused by the contrast that can be noticed between the motifs and the background of the plots. Just like Sebastian Brant in his days, Gerard Donovan appeals to his readers' reason. He sets himself the task of warning them of the potential deterioration of Irish identity and above all, of the necessity to redefine their choices and values. With a view to clarifying reality, he writes first to free his contemporaries of their subjection to dignitaries, to warn them against the authorities' manipulative power. He belongs to these writers who enlighten us on the world, these artists whose function is, according to Bergson, to see and make us see what we do not naturally make out. Their art aims to show us things that had not explicitly struck our senses and awareness (Bergson 149). The writer has the power to disclose a latent, potential truth. He is not a visionary for all that but a clear-sighted artist. He incites us to reconsider our conventional ways of thinking, the ready-made general beliefs, the dominant ideology, what Samuel Johnson called the *cant* when he advised his fellow countrymen to "clear their minds of cant" (qtd. in Bloom 200). Donovan's book of short stories informs us of something different from what we can read in the media. It sheds another light on the contemporary situation, on human behaviours and motivations. It calls for caution, but it is also endowed with great power, the liberating power of knocking down idols and changing the world. And as the text aims to change the world, it can be considered as being in line with committed literature. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, the *écrivain engagé* shows the world as it is so that men can face up to their own responsibilities in front of the naked truth of the exposed object (29).
- 21 A genuine commitment is meaningful only if the writer is interested in his present time. Unlike a great number of contemporary Irish writers who choose to set their plots in the past, Donovan has an interest in his present world. In this respect, one can legitimately wonder if the writers of the diaspora are not more attached to describing today's Ireland than the ones who live in the country, as Michael Collins or Colum McCann would tend to prove it. Nevertheless, whatever Ireland is described, whether it is the past or present one, Donovan's questioning is similar to that of most contemporary intellectuals. All of them meet up in a common preoccupation and try to give their personal answers to a crucial question: how can the nation keep its uniqueness in a European, globalized context and all the more so when it is in the grip of serious, unexpected upheavals? And after all, if so many writers take an interest in the past of their nation, is it not precisely to maintain and prolong all the elements that contributed to create what Ireland has become today? Whether their fiction is retrospective or not, writers all show a common interest in Irish identity, even if their commitment is likely to be stronger when they write about contemporary society.

- 22 In this particular case, Donovan obviously refuses to write tepid exercises for the purpose of sheer entertainment. On the contrary, he considers his books as spaces of expression which allow him to confront the major issues of his time and take a stand on them. He is well aware that his writing can engage his reader only if he himself engages first as a writer. This is why he criticizes the world he lives in, particularly by disclosing the worrying possibilities of his epoch. He perceives his function as a means to raise public consciousness. To do so, his writing gets to the pulse of the apparent wounds of the present and makes sense of what is yet to come. He is able to restore the lives which have been devalued by others, to restore the possibility of decency for the ordinary Irish men and women neglected by the authorities and despised by the *nouveau riche*.
- 23 Such committed writers are essential today; without them, literature may be restricted to sentimental books. The readers we are feel the need for writers in opposition who are able to express their disagreement, buck against power and write against decision-makers. The artists' original roles in society are to instruct and entertain, but this is not enough: taking stands and confronting the present issues also matter. To do so, they need a little rage, a capacity for indignation and, as Zola puts it, *le courage de vivre tout haut*—"the fearlessness to live out loud" (108). If writers freely express their opinions, they have to be prepared to put themselves in danger not only with authorities but also with their own readerships.
- 24 Indeed, with his remarks and his commitment, Donovan takes a chance on making himself unpopular and disliked by many readers. He is in a critical position: the mirror of the society he presents is uncompromising and does not at all reflect an image of flattery and complicity. The communication he establishes with his readers may give rise to a conflict and break off their relations. But even if the writer is a voice in the wilderness, even if his voice does not carry—like that of the silent child in the book ("Glass")—he will have established a concrete, genuine and direct relationship with his contemporaries. He will have acted as a free interpreter, as a mediator and this mediation itself is already a form of commitment. Ironically, denouncing the uncertainties, complexities, paradoxes of his time is an efficient way to incite his contemporaries to think them over because, as Jankelevitch explains, "irony is progress: in the places it has gone through, there is more truth, there is more light (58, my translation)."⁴ Donovan's text is a subtle invitation to perceptiveness. It gives no conclusion but remains open and subjected to the judgment of readers who are implicitly incited to give their own answers to the questions raised. As a result, the writer makes of his readers the producers of the text and the text, in its infinite wealth, clearly becomes food for thought.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bergson, Henri. *La Pensée et le mouvant*. 1934. Paris: PUF, collection Quadrige, 2004. Print.

Bloom, Harold. *How to Read and Why?* New York: Scribner, 2000. Print.

- Brant, Sebastian. *The Ship of Fools*. 1494. London: Folio Society, 1971. Print.
- Cailliois, Roger. *Man and the Sacred*. 1939. Trans. Meyer Barash. Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001. Print.
- Cullinane, Majella. Review of Gerard Donovan's *Young Irelanders*. *The Short Review*. Web. November 2014.
- Cioran, E. M. *Syllogismes de l'amertume*. 1952. Paris: Gallimard, 1980. Print.
- Donovan, Gerard. *Country of the Grand*. London: Faber & Faber, 2008. Print.
- Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts. Thresholds of Interpretation*. Trans. Richard Macksey. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. Print.
- Jankelevitch, Vladimir. *L'Ironie*. Paris: Flammarion, 1964. Print.
- O'Toole, Fintan. *Ship of Fools: How Stupidity and Corruption Sank the Celtic Tiger*. London: Faber & Faber, 2009. Print.
- Poe, Edgar Allan. Review of *Twice Told Tales*. *The New Short Story Theories*. Ed. Charles May. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994. 59-64. Print.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. "What is Literature?" and *Other Essays*. 1948. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1988. Print.
- Zola, Emile. *Le Roman expérimental*. 1880. Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2008. Print.

NOTES

1. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that in the US the book was entitled *Young Irelanders*.
2. Paratexts are extra-texts, the "framings" of the text or, as Gérard Genette puts it, "the thresholds of textuality" (8). Examples of these are titles, epigraphs, headings, dedications, prefaces...
3. The plots of the two other stories are set in the US.
4. "L'ironie est un progrès... là où elle est passée, il y a plus de vérité et de lumière" (58).

ABSTRACTS

Un recueil intitulé *Pays de Cocagne* (*Country of the Grand*) laisse à penser que l'objet du livre est une riche superpuissance, comme les Etats-Unis. Or, l'intrigue de la quasi-totalité des nouvelles atteste que ce pays n'est autre que l'Irlande, sur laquelle l'auteur, Gerard Donovan, né à Dublin, écrit pour la première fois. Ce titre, délibérément grandiloquent, fait allusion à la période de prospérité sans précédent vécue par l'Irlande à la fin du vingtième siècle et implique que celle-ci sera abordée avec précaution et scepticisme. Bien qu'il ne le stipule pas clairement, le texte suggère, par de nombreux indices, que le Tigre celtique pourrait bien n'être qu'un colosse au pied d'argile. L'ironie caractérise la vision de Donovan et son interprétation de ces années fastes. Dans la mesure où elle est en permanence repérable dans le recueil, elle est le fil rouge de notre analyse. Cet article rappelle d'abord à quel point l'ironie a partie liée avec le genre même de la

nouvelle. Il examine ensuite la manière dont elle s'inscrit dans les thèmes de l'ouvrage et s'intéresse enfin aux intentions de l'auteur, aux raisons pour lesquelles Donovan se fait ironiste pour dépeindre la société irlandaise de son temps. Cette progression invite à répondre à des questions propres à toute production littéraire : écrire sous quelle forme ? Sur quels thèmes ? Pourquoi et pour qui ?

AUTHORS

BERTRAND CARDIN

Bertrand Cardin, Professor of English at the *Université de Caen Basse-Normandie* (France), is the author of a book combining six textual analyses with theoretically informed readings of a single short story by John McGahern "Korea," *Lectures d'un texte étoilé* (L'Harmattan, Paris, 2009). He also wrote a book on father-son relationships in the contemporary Irish novel, entitled *Miroirs de la filiation. Parcours dans huit romans irlandais contemporains* (Presses Universitaires de Caen, 2005) and co-edited, with Professor Claude Fierobe, *Irlande, Écritures et réécritures de la Famine* (Presses Universitaires de Caen, 2007) and, with Professor Sylvie Mikowski, *Écrivaines irlandaises/Irish Women Writers* (Presses Universitaires de Caen, 2013). He has also published many articles about contemporary Irish novelists and short story writers.