

**TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS** delivered by: **PROFESSOR J. BROWNE**, National University of Ireland, Galway on 29 June, 2002, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa*, on **ROSA GONZÁLEZ CASADEMONT**

A Sheansailéir, agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile,

The development of Irish Studies as an exciting, multi-disciplinary academic programme with a strong international dimension is hugely indebted to its promotion worldwide by scholars outside of Ireland. Professor Rosa González Casademont is an outstanding example of such a scholar.

Born in the town of Figueras in Catalonia, also the home town of the painter Salvador Dalí, Dr. Rosa Gonzalez completed a BA in English at the University of Barcelona. In her MA thesis, completed in 1976, she showed an early interest in popular culture, when she completed a study of the lyrics of Bob Dylan. Her PhD thesis was based on a study of the writings of that neglected writer of fantasy Mervyn Peake. Dr. Gonzalez's work on the merging of painting and literature, and the correspondence between the art of the novelist and that of the painter as revealed in the work of Peake, was an early indication of her interest in the intersection of the visual and literary arts; in more recent times this has resulted in an analysis of the work of Irish filmmakers and their attempts to bring to the screen the novels of writers such as Patrick McCabe and J.B. Keane.

As Professor of English at the University of Barcelona, Rosa González has worked tirelessly for almost 20 years as an advocate and teacher of Irish Studies. She is the author of dozens of articles on different aspects of contemporary Irish writing and film, the editor and co-editor of numerous collections of essays on Irish culture and history, and she is the co-author of the invaluable *Diccionario Cultural y Histórico de Irlanda* (Dictionary of Irish Culture and History) which was published in Spanish in Barcelona in 1996. More recently, in May 2001, Professor González was a key figure in the inauguration and establishment of the Spanish Association of Irish Studies.

To Irish academics, journalists, film makers and writers - from the late Michael Hartnett to Séamus Heaney - the name Rosa González is well known: as the organizer of numerous conferences, lectures and poetry readings, as an industrious scholar and as a warm, enthusiastic and generous host. Her energy, scholarly productivity and organizational dynamism are characteristic features. Indeed, there are few people in Spain today who have done so much to promote an interest and appreciation of Irish Studies.

It is a special pleasure also to record Professor González's longstanding connection with NUI, Galway. Since the late 1980s, she was one of the key organizers of the Erasmus and Socrates exchange programme between Barcelona and Galway. As part of this scheme, she has hosted numerous visiting lectures by NUI, Galway academics. The recent establishment of the Spanish Association of Irish Studies and Professor González's current role as co-director of the MA Programme on Postcolonial Cultures at the University of Barcelona offer further opportunities for the continuation of this welcome and important collegial link.

Her own scholarly work is concentrated in the field of contemporary British and Irish fiction and Cultural Studies. She has written insightful articles on novelists such as JRR Tolkien, Mervyn Peake, Sheridan Le Fanu, Brian Moore and Jennifer Johnson. She has published interviews with writers such as D. M. Thomas, Ian McEwan, James Plunkett, Bernard MacLaverty and John McGahern.

In more recent years Rosa González has written extensively on cinema and film making in Ireland. Her interest in this stems from her preoccupation with ideas of culture and

representation: the notion that our understanding of particular places, people and events is increasingly shaped by what is constructed on the silver screen and that film is the main provider of Irish images abroad. She points out that with the development of an indigenous cinema in Ireland have come serious questions for the Irish filmmaker. As Dr. González argues the greatest problem for filmmakers dealing with Ireland is how to overcome the image of Ireland as 'modernity's other'. I quote:

"The differing receptions accorded to Irish and Irish-themed film by audiences at home and abroad provides interesting insights into the way Ireland and the Irish are perceived. There is a great difficulty for current Irish cinema to transcend the mainstream cinematic image of Ireland as a repository of tradition, Whereas Irish audiences are coming to terms with the country's changing identity and role in the world, outside Ireland there is a distinct unwillingness to sympathize with any representation that clashes with a view of Ireland as modernity's other."

In the field of literature, Dr. González points to the flagrant disparity between the international reception of Frank McCourt's 'Angela's Ashes' and Pat McCabe's 'The Butcher Boy' and explains it by a resistance to recognising or sympathising with any image of Ireland which challenges stereotypical discourses. Her study and analysis of the emerging situation in Ireland, North and South, is characterized by an acute awareness of cultural complexity and pluralism. Informed as it is by her own life experience in Catalonia and sympathy with the Catalan language of which she is a fluent speaker, by a deep understanding of the nature of cultural identity, and the movement away from the notion of a 'fixed' to a 'fluid' and indeed a 'hybrid' identity, particularly of the changing nature of Irishness and Britishness, her analysis is both insightful and penetrating.

She argues persuasively that the Good Friday agreement has introduced a new way of thinking into the Northern Ireland political and cultural landscape. Nationality is a matter of choice, not of inescapable destiny. I quote " The whole way of thinking which came out of 19th century nationalism, in which the nation has sacred claims on its people, has been reversed. .... Now it is the people who have claims on the nation..., the right to belong clearly contains a right not to belong."

What we see here in these brief extracts is not simply scholarly perceptiveness. The approach of Rosa Gonzalez to Irish Studies is that of a friendly but nevertheless deeply objective analyst. Her published papers on aspects of Ireland, its people, their history, political and economic structures and culture as expressed through literary and cinema artifacts are worthy of study precisely because they are insightful and honest while fundamentally sympathetic to their subject.

Séamus Heaney has said there is an Irish tendency to live in two places at the same time and that is what Dr. Rosa Gonzalez Casademont does: to live (simply because she has to work) far away from Ireland but never to be entirely absent from it.

*PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:*

*Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totaeque Academiae*