

**Amador Moreno, Carolina P. *Hiberno-English in the Early Novels of Patrick MacGill. Bilingualism and Language Shift from Irish to English in County Donegal*. Wales, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006.**

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In her extremely well-argued and well-documented study of the type of Hiberno-English used by Patrick MacGill in his early novels, Carolina Amador Moreno achieves a double *tour de force* that will certainly not be without consequences for future research in the fields both of Irish linguistics and of Irish literature. Not only does the present study resuscitate the spectre of an otherwise largely forgotten author, Donegal-born Patrick McGill (1891-1963), it also – and, perhaps, more importantly – uses two of the latter’s early prose works to reassess the situation of bilingualism in his home county at the turn of the century.

Soon known as “the navy poet of Glenties” after the publication of his first collection of poems in the early 1910s, *Gleanings from a Navy’s Scrap Book*, the life of Patrick MacGill was, to say the least, most extraordinary. Born in Maas, MacGill was the eldest of eleven in a family where money was always an issue. At twelve, Patrick was sent to the hiring fair of Strabane where he was hired by a farmer from Co. Tyrone. Two years later, he left for Scotland as a seasonal labourer along with other men, women and children from his home land – seasonal migration to Scotland was par for the course for many people from Donegal at the time. After experiencing the hardships of absolute destitution in Scotland, he joined the hundreds of itinerant workers working as navvies, whose routines were made of toil, heavy drinking, gambling and fighting. It was in such a desperate atmosphere that Patrick MacGill started reading extensively – a somewhat unusual hobby for a navvy – and thus discovered the joys of Carlyle, Victor Hugo, Montaigne and Karl Marx amongst others. These authors urged his desire to produce his own collection of poetry, his *Gleanings from a Navy’s Scrap Book*, which gained the amazement and the praise of many literary critics of the time. From then on, MacGill’s social improvement was rapid and dramatic, and it was certainly boosted by Rev. J. N. Dalton’s offer to come and work for the Chapter Library in Windsor. In 1914 the “navvy poet” turned to prose and published *Children of the Dead End, the Autobiography of a Navvy*, which he presented as his own autobiography and, one year later, *The Rat Pit*, in which the same story was narrated but from the point of view of another character this time, Norah Ryan, who had already appeared in *Children of the Dead End*. Both novels were tremendous successes. Thus, Amador Moreno reminds us of MacGill’s now forgotten popularity by rightly pointing out that about 10,000 copies of his first novel were sold within its initial fortnight in England and in the USA, as compared to Joyce’s sale of 499 copies of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* in 1916.

Due to his exceptional life, one can wonder if Carolina Amador Moreno's choice of MacGill's works to study the type of English spoken in Donegal at the beginning of the twentieth century really is the most appropriate. It is true that MacGill had already left his native Donegal for quite a few years before writing *Children of the Dead End* and *The Rat Pit*, and so the English he spoke/wrote must therefore have been influenced, if not altered, by what he had heard in Scotland and in England. Could it, therefore, remain representative of the English spoken by his community? Carolina Amador Moreno's decision to study MacGill's early prose can, in fact, be easily justified in the frame of her linguistic study. Indeed, if MacGill's Donegal English had probably been altered by being in contact with the form of English spoken in Scotland, it made it but more representative of the English spoken by a whole population that was regularly forced to migrate to Scotland for economic reasons, thus bringing home new linguistic souvenirs every time they returned. Carolina Amador Moreno's analysis accordingly cleverly focuses on the various levels of Irish (Gaelic), Old English and Scottish English influences whose blend created the very special flavour of Donegal Hiberno-English that can be found in MacGill's early novels.

This is undoubtedly Amador Moreno's second *tour de force*. Her study manages to expose with an exceptional clarity that never gives in to oversimplification the whole complexity of the linguistic stakes at play during the bilingual, transitional phase from Irish to English in early twentieth-century Donegal. Warning her readers of all the necessary caveats applying to her analysis, Amador Moreno brilliantly reassesses through the navvy poet's writings the possible substratum and superstratum grammatical and lexical cross-fertilisations that can be found in MacGill's prose. Concerning grammar, for instance, her study methodologically identifies, exemplifies, explains and, eventually, reassesses the position of well-known Hiberno-English structures in relation to the kind of English spoken in Donegal. This is the case of, amongst others, the overuse of the definite article "the" and the emphatic use of the reflexive form ending in *-self/-selves*, both of which she finds to be mostly due to an Irish substratum influence. Similarly, the redundant use of "own" in sentences such as "[...] and I wrote home to my own mother" (example given on p. 80) can be explained by the direct translation of the Irish *cuid* structure and represents, therefore, "[...] an interesting feature from the point of view of the effects of bilingualism and transfer from the native language into the target language" (80). Concerning the verbal system, Amador Moreno's analysis scrutinises as thoroughly and as insightfully the progressive and habitual forms; the habitual aspect, the expression of the perfect aspect, the typically Irish "after + V-ing" and "have + object + V -ed" structures, the "extended now" perfect, the Be perfect and indefinite anterior. She then lingers on the use of cleft sentences in MacGill's writings, showing how, even though there is nothing unusual *per se* in the use of cleft sentences – seeing that cleft sentences are also to be found in standard English –, it is the high frequency with which they appear that makes them a truly Hiberno-English feature. Interestingly enough, cleft sentences can thus be considered to be both the result of a superstratum

and of a substratum influence, as their unusual frequency in Hiberno-English was probably caused by the need for language learners to find a similar structure in English to their native Irish “*Is*” structure. Furthermore, the substratum influence of Irish can also be found in MacGill’s prepositional constructions that reveal a tendency towards a post-position of the prepositional phrase followed by a pronoun, a construction that, according to Amador Moreno, echoes the Irish language’s traditional thematic organisation with the subject placed at the end of the clause or utterance. Concerning prepositions, the occurrence of archaic prepositional forms in the two novels, such as “atop of”, “afore”, “abed”, “afire” etc. illustrates what Amador Moreno calls the “retentionist process” from old English in Hiberno-English. Concerning grammar, she therefore concludes:

Many of the patterns examined are likely to derive from Irish, even though many of them could also be explained from the SLA [second language acquisition] perspective as the result of learners’ overgeneralisation or simplification of rules of the target language, which has often been found to be a common strategy of second language learners. In this regard, those terms which have fossilised in the English of the Irish-speaking community in general (for example, the use of the definite article) seem to be common to both the NHE [Northern Hiberno-English] and the SHE [Southern Hiberno-English] varieties. Others (such as the word order of a subordinate *-ing* clause discussed earlier) appear not to fossilise in general, but be the product of an individual interlanguage. However, other word order alterations, as has been seen, do fossilise and become a characteristic of the HE [Hiberno-English] variety of English. (173)

The same processes of superstratum and substratum cross-fertilisation, of Irish-speaking learners’ overgeneralisation and simplification of the rules of English, of retention and of fossilisation are to be found in the lexical analysis further provided by Amador Moreno. Her analysis demonstrates the extent to which the state of bilingualism that preceded the complete shift from Irish into English in Donegal at the beginning of the twentieth century allowed for a considerable amount of lexical borrowings from one language to another. Amador Moreno exemplifies her point by showing in great detail that the two novels are peppered with words resulting from this cross-fertilisation, and from the traditional contact with Scottish English. Thus, she gives the example of the occurrence *mits* (hands), which she believes could be the final result of the semantic metonymic extension from the English *mitten* that became *miotán* in Donegal Irish English (its meaning being changed from a glove to a hand). The suffix *-en*, which was seen as a way to form the plural in the Middle English period, would then, still according to Amador Moreno, have been replaced by the ending *-s* as an overgeneralisation of the rule of plural formation in English. On top of this example of metonymic extension and of overgeneralisation, Amador Moreno also gives *strand* (beach) as a perfect example, amongst others; of lexical retention in Hiberno-English of words from Medieval English. Concerning the direct substratum influence of Irish, she hints at the use of words such

as *brogues*, *mairteens* (from the Irish *máirtín*, soleless stockings) and the term of endearment *alannah* (sweetheart) which had, at that time, already made it into standard English, probably thanks to stage-Irish theatrical characters, and therefore did not need explaining to non-Irish readers. Other words such as *brattie* (from the Irish *brat*, an apron or a cloth), *spag* (from the Irish *spág*, a clumsy foot) and *máthair* (mother) are explained by MacGill, which certainly means that they were used by the speakers of his native community but not perceived as fully assimilated in their English. In MacGill's writings, one can also find Scottish English words which became yet another feature of Donegal's Hiberno-English such as *gallowses* (suspenders, braces), *oxter* (armpit) and *lassie* (girl). Complete with a most useful index of the words under scrutiny, Carolina Amador Moreno's thorough analysis of the lexicon used by MacGill in his early prose thus clearly illustrates the specificity of what she calls "[...] the curious mix of Irish, Scottish and English dialectal words [that] is called on by the author [...]. This mixture reflects not only the language contact situation in Ulster, but also the linguistic repercussions of the migratory movements to Scotland" (264). This is how, Amador Moreno convincingly argues, MacGill managed to render so truthfully the speaking voice of this community, a changing voice in a world that was no longer merely Irish-speaking, but had now become bilingual.

Thorough, extremely well-argued and comprehensive, Carolina Amador Moreno's study should raise the interest not only of linguists, but of every Irish studies scholar with an interest in the stakes of the world-shaking language shift that took place in the West of Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century. I would also strongly recommend it to anyone desirous to understand the particularities of Hiberno-English in general, as this book, which focuses on its Donegal variety, also represents an excellent review of all major studies thus far devoted to the question of the English spoken in Ireland.