

**THE (RE)WRITING OF THE
FEMALE FIGURE AND
IRISH-AMERICAN HISTORY
IN NUALA O’CONNOR’S *MISS
EMILY***

*A REESCRITA DA FIGURA
FEMININA E DA HISTÓRIA
IRLANDESA-AMERICANA EM
MISS EMILY, DE NUALA
O’CONNOR*

**Camila Franco Batista¹
(USP)**

ABSTRACT: This article analyses the (re)writing of the female figure in the historical novel *Miss Emily* (2015), by the Irish writer Nuala O’Connor (b. 1970). It considers how the historical figure

¹ Doutoranda em Estudos Linguísticos e Literários em Inglês na Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas da Universidade de São Paulo - USP, São Paulo, Brasil. E-mail: camila@camilabatista.com

of the North-American poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) is fictionally recreated to explore issues, such as sexuality, sexual violence, and gender roles. This work also aims to investigate the rewriting of Irish-American relations in the novel by means of the fictional Irish maid Ada Concannon and the issue of migration and racial discrimination. This article focuses on the way the female figure, historical or not, is reinserted in contemporary historical fiction by women to provide visibility and to restore the female figure as a protagonist of history.

KEYWORDS: the female figure; contemporary historical novel; Irish-American history; Nuala O'Connor; Emily Dickinson

RESUMO: Este artigo analisa a (re)escritura da figura feminina no romance histórico *Miss Emily* (2015), da escritora irlandesa Nuala O'Connor (1970-). Considera-se como a figura histórica da poeta norte-americana Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) é recriada ficcionalmente a fim de explorar questões como sexualidade, violência sexual e papéis de gênero. Este trabalho também investiga a reescrita das relações entre Irlanda e Estados Unidos no romance por meio da personagem ficcional da empregada irlandesa Ada Concannon, a questão da migração e da discriminação racial. O artigo centra-se na maneira em que a figura feminina, histórica ou não, é reinserida na ficção histórica contemporânea escrita por mulheres a fim de dar mais visibilidade à figura feminina e restaurá-la como protagonista da história.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: a figura feminina; romance histórico contemporâneo; relações entre Irlanda e Estados Unidos; Nuala O'Connor; Emily Dickinson

*“The Irish put great store in spinning
a narrative around every small thing, and although I may
view life New Englandly, I think I must be somewhat Irish
at my core, for I love to do the same”*

(O'CONNOR, 2015, p. 27).

Introduction

The female figure has become more evident in historical fiction recently. Previously undermined or even hidden as historical agents, the number of women characters with distinguished roles have risen, especially in contemporary historical fiction. Katherine Cooper and Emma Short (2012, p. 3) contend that recent historical novels are “fictional reimaginings”, or “a feminist intervention – a way of restoring female figures to their place in history”. The authors suggest that the rewriting of the female figure in contemporary historical fiction is an important achievement after decades of focus on male historical figures and male characters. This emphasis on male historical action in the historical novel is, according to Cooper and Short, a consequence of György Lukács’ establishment of Walter Scott (1771-1832) as the founder of historical fiction. In *The Historical Novel* (2012), Lukács states that Scott’s innovation rests in his portrayal of the singularity of an epoch, revealing the sources of historical crises and their corresponding development. For Lukács, Scott creates a middle-class hero with no impressive talents who happens to play a decisive role in historical events. Cooper and Short posit that the establishment of Scott as the benchmark of historical fiction has led to a critical focus on male writers and protagonists (COOPER and SHORT, 2012, p. 2). In the author’s view, novels with a historical background by male authors have been praised for their historical accuracy and for the depiction of typical masculine themes, such as politics, wars and conflicts. In their analysis, Cooper and Short identify in Scott’s and his followers’ novels protagonists who are most often men, depicted as explorers and heroes. Women, if present at all in classic historical fiction, are usually portrayed as romantic and fragile.

Such tendency of undermining the female figure in fiction has been criticized by many theorists since the emergence of feminist criticism. In a speech addressed in 1972, the North-American poet

Adrienne Rich contended that in literature women are most often represented as beauties, muses, cooks and nurses; and these roles have kept women from their own selves, without their own language and style of representation. Judith Butler is another scholar that examines the exclusion of the female figure, contending that the feminine is “the unrepresentable absence effected by (masculine) denial that grounds the signifying economy through exclusion” (BUTLER, 1990, p. 37). Butler comments that important feminist theorists, like Luce Irigaray (1930-), find that Western conventional modes of representation fail to depict women as they are (BUTLER, 1990, p. 25). For Adrienne Rich, though, hers was a time of awakening for women – the seventies presented a possibility of change for women as well as for men. Rich calls it a time of “re-vision”,

the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. And this drive to self-knowledge, for woman, is more than a search for identity: it is part of her refusal of the self-destructiveness of male-dominated society (RICH, 1972, p. 18).

Rich defends that writing is “re-naming” (23); it is breaking the hold of tradition over women. She urges women not to be reduced to muses and mothers, but to engage in the search of a language of representation. Since the nineteenth century, many developments in fiction by women have been achieved, and one of them is the recovery of the female figure in historical fiction. Jerome de Groot (2010) comments that historical fiction by women writers does not idealize the past, but shows the difficult times women used to face before. Diane Wallace (2005, p. 3), as cited by Groot (2010), state that the historical novel “has offered women readers the imaginative versions of ‘history’, which are accessible or appealing to them in various ways” (GROOT, 2010, Kindle Edition). In recent



historical novels, such as Tony Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Margaret Atwood's *Alias Grace* (1996), not only are women authors, but protagonists. Wallace also argues that, for women, the historical novel is a genre for the expression of multiple and complex identities, and the novel itself is a site of possibilities (GROOT, 2010, Kindle Edition).

This is the case of the subject of this analysis, *Miss Emily* (2015), by the Irish writer Nuala O'Connor (b. 1970). The author, also known as Nuala Ni Conchuir, is a member of a generation of Irish writers who have engaged with feminism and explored the literary representation of the female figure². Her third novel *Miss Emily* (2015) recreates the life of the poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) in Amherst, Massachusetts, and introduces a fictional Irish maid named Ada Concannon. This article aims to investigate the representation of female figures in the novel and how historical fiction allows the writer to retell an alternative version of Emily Dickinson's life. I intend to show that O'Connor gives voice to her female characters, allowing them to use their own language and to manifest their own identity. By examining the relation between the main character and her Irish maid, I also draw on the relation between Irish history and North-American history in the eyes of Nuala O'Connor.

Rewriting history and the historical figure: *Miss Emily*

In O'Connor's work, the fictional poet Emily borrows many aspects from the historical Emily Dickinson. The historical poet was the second daughter of the squire Edward Dickinson (1803-1874) and his wife Emily Norcross (1804-1882). Likewise, the fictional Emily is also the second child of the squire Edward and his wife Emily, and, similarly to the historical poet, the protagonist of Nuala O'Connor's novel is an unmarried woman whose passions are seclusion, writing and baking.

Little is known about the historical Emily; many biographers have speculated about her life and family, the reasons for her seclusion and even the cause of her death. All the mystery surrounding Emily Dickinson allowed Nuala O'Connor to draw on Dickinson's life and to fill the gaps with literary creation. In O'Connor's words,

Emily Dickinson's life is a life of gaps – a frustration for fans and Dickinson scholars alike, but a joy for the writer who wants to fill those gaps imaginatively. In my research into Dickinson (conducted for the most part via her poetry and letters, as well as biographies and scholarly works) I discovered a gap that suited my purposes: in 1866 the Dickinson household in Amherst, Massachusetts did not have a maid. ... You need to be haunted by characters in order to write them, but when you are dealing with an historical figure, the question arises: who owns this person's history? And, further, who has the right to re-tell it fictionally? It certainly felt bold to me to take on Dickinson and give her a flesh-and-blood treatment. But because I loved and respected her and her poetry, I also felt I could be responsible to Dickinson's life and true to her spirit. (O'CONNOR, 2015a).

In the novel, Emily Dickinson is a passionate and caring young woman, who dares to live according to her own mind and refuses traditional social morals. Miss Emily (as we shall call the character hereon to differentiate her from her historical version) is a feminist figure in the nineteenth-century Puritan Massachusetts who finds her voice in the life she chooses to live.

Likewise, the fictional Irish maid Ada Concannon is a powerful feminine figure who is juxtaposed to Miss Emily to empower both characters. Ada is a young Irish immigrant who wishes to live in the promising North-American lands. However, being a woman in a misogynist society is tough, and Ada finds support on her friendship with Miss Emily.

The book is also about the historical relationship between Ireland and the United States. It associates the lives of Irish



immigrants who went to the United States during and after the Great Famine³ in the nineteenth century looking for work and better life standards. Many women found work as maids-of-all-work in North-American houses; the Dickinsons themselves hired at least two Irish maids in two different occasions (GORDON, 2010). As well as writing about a famous poet, Nuala O'Connor engages with Irish history, following a trend in contemporary Irish literature: although apparently writing about transnational or even foreign themes, Irish writers still explore Irish life and history.

Miss Emily: recreating the historical female figure

“I stare at Mother. I do not wish to be regularised. Or regular. My desire is to be free to pursue the things that please me” (O'CONNOR, 2015, p. 1). Miss Emily wishes to live by her pen, but housework is too demanding and time-consuming. She desires to do what she pleases, and leading a household is not included in her desires. Nuala O'Connor creates an Emily Dickinson that refuses to become what was expected from a nineteenth-century American woman. Miss Emily feels that she cannot develop her writing if she is restrained by domestic duties, thus she demands the hiring of a new maid.

In the novel, Miss Emily challenges the nineteenth-century view of a woman's place: she is a radical for not marrying, and the people in town regard her as a “spinster” and a weird woman, who rarely sees daylight. She is gossiped about, which bothers her family, but she pays no heed: “I opt not to whistle or startle the parasol women and they walk on unawares, leaving me free of their glances, their disapproval” (O'CONNOR, 2015, p. 9). According to Julia Kristeva (1981), when one thinks about women, one tends to think more of “*space*” than of “*time*” – women's position as generators of life. In her words, Freud linked female hysteria to place, and psychiatry used to treat women by moving them from home to a different place,

usually a psychiatric facility. Also, women are said to belong to a certain place in society: as mothers and wives (KRISTEVA, pp. 15-16, author's italics). Kristeva also writes that women's time is related to biological cycles, mainly gestation – "*repetition and eternity*" (p. 17, author's italics). In the novel, Miss Emily refuses to fulfill her supposed biological duties in relation to motherhood: she does not wish to become a mother and a housewife because she desires to marry her writing and to have poetry as her child:

It is a very real possibility that I will remain always and forever under my father's roof. I am, of course, happiest in my home circle – this is where I bloom – but something in me also longs for the peace of a place of my own, somewhere to withdraw to completely. I do not wish for travel or brave lands, only a house surrounded by a sprawling orchard that holds orioles and bluebirds that trill for my ears alone; a cozy home with a kitchen uncluttered by others. I do not desire a man or babes; a husband would demand too much, I fear, of my very self. And there is no doubt that I would make an opinionated, quarrelsome wife (O'CONNOR, 2015, p. 24).

The historical Emily Dickinson might have said similar words; her biographers did notice her revolutionary ideas explored in letters and poetry; but what is more impressive about Miss Emily is that she has a voice: she states her reasons; there is no room for speculation regarding her motivations for not marrying or not going out. Like her historical version, Miss Emily decides to wear only white, which has nothing to do with health or eccentricity as it is often speculated about the historical poet — it is an act of commitment to her office as a writer:

This decision – to wear white – sings poetry to me: it will speak of my obedience to words; my dedication. It may signify that to me only, perhaps, but to whom else do I need to show my allegiance? ... From now on I shall be candle-white. Dove-, bread-, swan-, shroud-, ice-



extraordinary-white. I shall be blanched, bleached and bloodless to look at; my very whiteness will be my mark. But inside, of course, I will roar and soar and flash with colour (O'CONNOR, 2015, p. 120).

White, the color of purity and holiness, the color of bridal dresses, is chosen by Miss Emily as the representation of her pact with art; instead of becoming “the angel in the house”, she embraces her role as the writer in the house, and the white color as her symbol and personal mark. O'Connor seems to emulate Dickinson's writing when choosing the equivalent white symbols “Dove-, bread-, swan-, shroud-”, once more engaging not only with the historical poet's life, but also with her writing.

There is much speculation about the historical Emily Dickinson's love life. It is alleged that she was in love with her male preceptors, men who would advise her on poetry. However, in the novel there is no space for those men: Miss Emily does not love any of her male friends, and there is a suggestion that there are feelings between the protagonist and her sister-in-law, Susie. “Sue” is a faithful reader of Miss Emily's writings; but, in fact, Emily's sister-in-law is regarded in a much more special way: she is her “Sweet Sue, [her] own Dollie” (O'CONNOR, 2015, p. 9). Theirs is a quasi-erotic relationship: Miss Emily idolizes Sue, setting her in a pedestal of love and perfection. The novel implies that Miss Emily is in love with her sister-in-law, but their love is never consummated. In a beautiful scene, Emily and Susan share an intimate experience:

I lift her sweet, soft hand into my own and rest my head on her lap. I love you from a distance because I have no choice. But in pen and ink my heart keeps on. Dear Sue. My own Dollie.
She rests her hand on the back of my neck and though it is cool it burns my skin. I place my hand over hers.
‘Rise now, Emily. The maid might see us. Or Austin.’
I stand quickly and press my lips to hers before she can object. She laughs and pushes me away and I sit opposite her (O'CONNOR, 2015, pp. 134-5).

Cooper and Short see the sexualization of women in the past in historical novels as a tool of female empowerment (COOPER and SHORT, 2012, p. 10). This is a feature of contemporary historical fiction that projects its own ideas of sexuality, gender and female agency onto historical female figures. By doing so, writers challenge the gender politics of the past as well as of the present, distancing themselves from the present to represent the models of sexual behavior they aim to explore. A lesbian Miss Emily may cause strangeness, and perhaps that is the intention of the writer, who wishes to examine what Judith Butler calls “gender policing”, a “way of securing heterosexuality” (BUTLER, 1990, p. xii). Hence, by creating possibilities of a lesbian Miss Emily, Nuala O’Connor provides a way of questioning commonly accepted assumptions about gender and female sexual desire.

The novel discussed here challenges authority on the historical Emily Dickinson, facing the difficulty of portraying famous female figures and the hegemonic social and cultural points of view, which are often biased. As well as interrogating common sense perspectives about Emily Dickinson, *Miss Emily* is allowed to speak about issues of gender and sexuality, which frees the fictional character from social constraints.

Rewriting Irish-American relations: The Irish maid Ada

As it was already mentioned earlier in this article, the historical Dickinson family had at least two Irish maids. Lyndall Gordon (2010) mentions that Emily Dickinson gave instructions about her funeral, requesting that the Irish employees of the family should carry her coffin (GORDON, 2010, p. 22). This was probably the gap that Nuala O’Connor used to introduce her fictional maid Ada Concannon, an eighteen-year old girl from Tigoora, County Dublin, fresh from the boat in Amherst.



Ada is another example of a strong female character in the novel. Despite her humble origins, Ada knows that she does not belong to the scullery of a big house in Ireland; her destiny has better things coming for her: “You know what I’m like – restless as a pup” (O’CONNOR, 2015, p. 6). She aims to show society that she will be big: “I’ll show them, I think – Cook and Mrs. Rathcliffe and Daddy and them all; they’ll see that I was made for more than the scullery. I’ll do something that will shake the lot of them and though I have no idea yet what it might be, it will be big” (O’CONNOR, 2015, p. 6).

The big thing she does is moving to America. Many Irish boys and girls emigrated from Ireland in the nineteenth century during and after the Great Hunger. The Irish diaspora meant that, by 1890, around 40% of the Irish were living abroad, mainly in Great Britain, America, Argentina, Canada and Australia. Emigration was not a fancy decision, but a necessity; Ada Concannon chooses emigration as a way of escaping hard work for an English baron in Ireland.

Although life in the United States seemed to be better, the Irish constantly faced bias and discrimination. In the novel, Austin Dickinson, Emily’s brother, treats the Irish with disdain and even jokes about the painful memories of the Famine. He calls Ada “a famine survivor”, which makes her indignant: “It’s an insult to those who did not come through the famine. Who could not” (O’CONNOR, 2015, p. 35).

Despite the difficulties of being an immigrant, Ada finds work in the Dickinson house. The Dickinsons are churchgoers, and they follow a strict set of moral values. The first thing that Ada learns is that she must comply with those rules, and she is given a book to read: *The Frugal Housewife*, by Mrs. Lydia Child, an 1829 best-seller cookbook whose main goal was to teach women about prudence and economy. In Puritan Massachusetts, a young girl was supposed to live a sober life, respect her superiors and avoid sin. That is the lesson Ada will understand painfully.

The United States is also a place of discovery for Ada. She learns to see herself as a woman with desires. She falls in love with a young Irish man, Daniel Byrne, and their relationship teaches Ada that she is a woman inside. She describes kissing Daniel as an experience of self-discovery:

I feel his soft tongue pressing between my lips and I open my mouth wider to let him in. We sit and kiss and all sorts of feelings come over me. Between my legs swells and I want to mould every part of myself into every part of Daniel. I put my fingers to his face to feel the working of his jaw and to hold his mouth even closer to my own. His tongue is so soft, so fragrant, that I would happily have him swallow me whole. Every move of his mouth only makes me want to kiss him more (O'CONNOR, 2015, p. 110).

Unfortunately, Ada is forced to acknowledge that being a woman can be painful as well. She resists the harassments of another Irish man, the brute and constantly drunk Patrick Cohan, but he does not accept a woman's refusal. One night, he storms into her bedroom at the Dickinson's, proceeding to beat and rape her. With a hurt face and body, Ada tries to make sense of what happened to her the night before, but she finds no appropriate words to describe her experience; only her senses and Patrick Cohan's smell of almonds remain.

Linda Martín Alcoff claims that survivors of sexual violation must deal with the issue of articulating rape (ALCOFF, 2014, p.445). She states that, like other experiences, sexual violation requires an articulation that one might not have. How to describe rape? In her view, defining what sexual violation is can be an interpretive process, and the variability of interpretations of rape leads to different attitudes (ALCOFF, 2014, p. 449). Survivors usually face questioning about whether they have really suffered violence; they sometimes feel ashamed and even question their own experience. In the novel, Ada does not know how to describe the violence she has suffered,



so she lies about it, claiming the bruises on her face are the results of falling down the stairs. Later, when confronted by Miss Emily, Ada admits that Crohan had hurt her, but does not reveal the real extent of her injuries. According to Mieke Bal, rape

itself cannot be visualized, because rape makes the victim invisible. It does that literally first – the perpetrator “covers” her – and then figuratively – the rape destroys her self-image, her subjectivity, which is temporarily narcotized, definitely changed and often destroyed. Finally, rape cannot be visualized because the experience is physically, as well as psychologically, inner. Rape takes place inside (BAL, 1994, p. 81).

Ada is invisible as a victim of sexual violence, although her wounds are visible to all. She is also invisible as a woman and an immigrant servant. She is ashamed and confused; she is afraid to be considered guilty of the crime she had suffered. The trauma related to the violence she suffered disturbs her, and the possibility of bearing a child from the man that violated her is real. Austin Dickinson gives her a medicine to abort the child, and she discovers she has gonorrhoea. Patrick Crohan destroys Ada and leaves her with a stain that is more than metaphorical. Ada suffers from Austin’s judgement, who thinks she is a fallen woman, unworthy of the Dickinson household. Her description of the rape is discredited as though she had asked for it.

Here is where women solidarity takes place. Miss Emily supports Ada in everything and even defends her, calling the servant a “friend.” Miss Emily goes against the morals of her time and refuses to blame the victim for the violence she has suffered. In the middle of an argument with her brother Austin, Miss Emily defends Ada’s morals and innocence:

‘For shame, Austin. There is nothing wrong with Ada’s morals. She is eighteen years old, far from home and bereaved, besides. Have you

forgotten that her aunt is so recently committed to the soil?' [...] I do not think that she would make a gifted liar. She is good, she prays a lot and sings hymns. She is devout' (O'CONNOR, 2015, p. 174; 175).

Such a speech of defense is not enough, though. To Austin, Ada is not trustable because she is a woman, and, besides, she comes from Ireland. Miss Emily is forced to hear her brother's xenophobic comments on the character of the Irish people:

'She [Ada] is from Ireland and one sure thing about the Irish is that they disdain the truth. They have two, nay, *three* faces apiece. Do not be fooled by her mellifluousness – all Irish people lie.' ... 'You have to understand that there is a certain island madness about the Irish, Emily, they are unhinged and vicious. Oddly, one could say that they display generosity and viciousness in equal measure. But a cataract of lies is all you can expect from them. Truly' (O'CONNOR, 2015, p. 175).

Hence, Ada does not only have to face shame for the assault she has suffered but also discrimination because of her origins. She is lowered to the lowest levels of society for being a woman and an Irish immigrant, something that many of her fellow country people suffered – according to the Irish writer Roddy Doyle in *The Commitments* (1987): “The Irish are the niggers of Europe,” meaning that the Irish have been considered in many occasions a lower race among European people.

Sabine Sielke (2002) writes that rape in post-modernist novels is a sign of preoccupation with “the cultural effects of the established rhetoric of rape, with the ways in which the rhetoric of sexual violence informs and structures our perspectives on real rape, and with how ‘rape myths’ and rape as a social fact have been inseparably intertwined” (SIELKE, 2002, p. 10). Rape in *Miss Emily* is not only about power of men over women in the past, but also about gender inequality in contemporaneity. It is a juxtaposition of temporalities



that display that, although things have changed for women over the centuries, the reality of sexual violence against women is too real to be absent from fiction.

By revealing sexual and racial violence in her book, Nuala O'Connor is by no means implying that Irish-American history is only about these issues. She is, on the contrary, working on aspects of the two nations that must be considered. The relations of the two countries are very intricate, and the issue of migration and xenophobia are relevant nowadays more than ever.

Conclusion

In this article, I have shown how the female figure is rewritten in the historical novel *Miss Emily*. I have demonstrated how the gaps in Emily Dickinson's life allowed Nuala O'Connor to create a fictional version of the poet and dwell upon issues of women's position in society, sexuality and fraternity. By structuring her novel in chapters with first-person narration from Miss Emily and Ada Concannon, O'Connor values the voice of both characters, not implying a hierarchy between the two. Therefore, the author suggests that women have an important place in society as well as literature and history, engaging both with the urge for the rewriting of the female figure in literature and the trends in contemporary historical fiction, restoring women to a position of historical protagonism. Finally, O'Connor fictionally recreates the historical bonds between Ireland and the United States, elaborating on the importance of the Irish diaspora in the formation and development of other countries, mainly the United States. Contemporary historical fiction by women reveals itself as a prolific field of study, and further research on contemporary Irish historical fiction by women may help the understanding of how the female figure is being rewritten back to Irish history and the issues explored in such novels.

References

- ALCOFF, L. M. "Sexual Violations and the Question of Experience." In: **New Literary History**, Vol. 45, No. 3. Project MUSE, Johns Hopkins UP, 2014. P. 445-62. Disponível em: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/558878/pdf>. Acesso em 16 June 2016.
- BAL, M. *The Rape of Lucrece* and The Story of Women. **Reclamations of Shakespeare**. Ed. A. J. Hoenselaars. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994. P. 75-104.
- BUTLER, J. **Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity**. New York: Routledge, 1990.
- COOPER K., SHORT, E. (eds.) **The Female Figure in Contemporary Historical Fiction**. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- DOYLE, R. **The Commitments**. New York: Vintage, 1987.
- GORDON, L. **Lives Like Loaded Guns: Emily Dickinson and Her Family's Feuds**. New York: Viking, 2010.
- KRISTEVA, J. Women's Time. In: **Signs**. Tradução. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake. 1st ed. Vol. 7, 1981. P. 13-15. Disponível em: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173503>. Acesso em 20 de junho de 2016.
- LUKÁCS, G. **O romance histórico**. Tradução. Rubens Enderle. São Paulo: Boitempo, 2012[1955].
- O'CONNOR, N. **Miss Emily**. Dingwall: Sandstone, 2015.
- _____. On Writing Miss Emily by Nuala O'Connor. In: **The Irish Times**. Dublin, 20 ago. 2015. Disponível em: <http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/on-writing-miss-emily-by-nuala-o-connor-1.2322834>. Acesso em 26 de abril de 2016.
- RICH, A. When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision. In: **College English**, Vol. 34, No. 1, Women, Writing and Teaching. National Council of Teachers of English, 1972. P. 18-30. Disponível em: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/375215>. Acesso em 23 junho de 2016.
- SIELKE, S. **Reading Rape: The Rhetoric of Sexual Violence in American Literature and Culture, 1790-1990**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2002.

WALLACE, D. **The Women's Historical Novel**. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. P. 2-3.

Notes

² Other names of Irish literature that explore the representation of the female figure are Kate O'Brien (1897-1974), Edna O'Brien (b. 1930), Anne Enright (b. 1962), and Claire Keegan (b. 1968), to mention only a few.

³ The Great Famine was a natural as well as a humanitarian catastrophe that happened in Ireland between the years of 1845 and 1849. The cause of famine was a potato disease known as potato blight, which attacked the crops and destroyed the main source of nourishment of most Irish people. It is estimated that one million people died and another million emigrated to run away from starvation and poverty.