
Agnès Maillot, *Rebels in Government: Is Sinn Féin Ready for Power?*

Anne-Sophie Brian



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This collection of articles is a landmark achievement in the field of Irish ecocriticism, which can henceforth be said to be running abreast of its counterparts in other cultural areas. It was especially delicate and important to pull out Irish literary criticism from the political-historical grooves of Irish exceptionalism in which it had tended to get stuck until the late 1990s. Despite ecocriticism being a powerful tool to effectively rethink Ireland's place in this endangered world, the risk of falling back upon unquestioned frameworks of Irish national identity remains, as the editors show in their introduction when they fail to distinguish between the local and the national, thus naturalising the complex process of national identity-building ("Literary studies moored in national frameworks seem increasingly inadequate in the face of a planetary catastrophe. [...] But a globalized perspective can only be launched from a local foothold", p. 4). This unfortunately leads to an essentialisation, after James McElroy, of the "Irish historic attachment to nature, woodland and the earth as metaphors and symbols" (p. 5). Besides the fact that one fails to see what factors would have led the Irish to have a closer symbolic relationship to nature than other cultures (say, the Achuar), falling back upon cultural exceptionalism tends to weaken the stimulating theoretical framework laid out in the rest of the volume. This minor reserve should not be seen as disparagement of the considerable achievement of the authors and editors of a volume that will be a valuable addition to the shelves of researchers well beyond its assigned field, but as a sign that Irish ecocriticism still has many years of exciting developments ahead.

Catherine CONAN

Université de Bretagne occidentale

Agnès Maillot, *Rebels in Government: Is Sinn Féin Ready for Power?*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2022, 192 p.

The 2020 Irish general election marked a major shift regarding Irish politics. After decades of political strategy, Sinn Féin eventually earned a majority of first preference vote and foresaw for the first time a real chance at governing the Republic, henceforth threatening the two-party dominance of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael and raising two fundamental issues: Irish unity and the past connection between Sinn Féin and the IRA.

Agnès Maillot provides a concise, yet precise, analysis of Sinn Féin's current political strategy in a context of crisis, as the British Isles are destabilised by Brexit and the COVID-19 crisis. She adopts both a short-term and long-term approach of the party's evolution to make sense of its recent success, putting under scrutiny its historical evolution as well as current events, going back and forth between past and present to shed light on some of the most controversial aspects of the party.

The book is divided into three parts, each focusing on the three main aspects of Sinn Féin's political identity. The first section explores how Sinn Féin has established itself as the united Ireland party through a long republican tradition. Reunification has not always been on top of Sinn Féin's agenda, despite its core place within the party's identity. Maillot highlights two recent chiasms in Sinn Féin's history: the elaboration of a political agenda to promote reunification in 1970, and the Brexit referendum. The latter leads to the first main contribution of Maillot's work as she dissects the impact of Brexit on Sinn Féin from three different angles: Sinn Féin's political strategy, the unionist reaction, and an overall view of shifting opinions in Northern Ireland throughout the Brexit crisis. This provides the reader with an account of what was at stake during the 2020 Irish election.

The second section of the book focuses on the relationship between Sinn Féin and the IRA. Despite being two different organisations, Sinn Féin and the IRA have been closely connected. First, Maillot focuses on how the narrative built around the armed struggle, the constant dilemma faced by Sinn Féin's leadership and eventually the change of leadership, impacted the republicans' political discourse. This shift raises the question of reconciliation in Northern Ireland since it has a different meaning for unionists and republicans. The book lays out the respective republican and unionist perspectives on what reconciliation means, underlining the points of contention between the two communities. On the one hand, unionists demand a clear cut from the IRA and the armed struggle to move forward with the reconciliation process; on the other hand, Sinn Féin needs to avoid alienating its traditional electoral grassroots.

The third section tackles Sinn Féin's radical left-wing ideology and represents the second main contribution of this book. Sinn Féin gained the largest share of first preference votes during the 2020 general election and became the second largest party in the Dáil. Different factors led to that political breakthrough: the political context, Sinn Féin's ideological shift, and the republicans' political strategy. The 2008 financial crisis allowed the emergence of radical left voices in Ireland, including Sinn Féin's, which became the main radical left-wing party in Ireland. In addition, Maillot uses case studies such as the Marriage Equality Referendum, the Repeal the 9th Referendum and the 2020 electoral campaign to illustrate this ideological shift and what mechanisms reshaped the republican ideology into a feminist, anti-imperialist, and ecologist ideology.

Overall, this book offers a complete assessment of Sinn Féin's current political state. Republicans still stir some controversies because of their troublesome past; yet they managed to challenge the Irish bipartisan system. Maillot tackles the issue through different angles using interviews, polls study, and discourse analysis to propose a clear and complete overview of Sinn Féin's history, as well as of the strategies republicans implemented to overcome past and future challenges.

Anne-Sophie BRIAN

Université de Bourgogne