

Hannah Lynch and Spain

Collected Journalism of an Irish New Woman, 1892-1903

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Preface

Reflecting on the fate of the woman writer in 1906, Frances H. Low compared the lives of two authors who had died “within a couple of years of one another” (1906, 319). She observes that Mrs. Craigie, writing under the pseudonym of John Oliver Hobbes, enjoyed the life of a literary celebrity. Fêted by the critics and free from financial constraints, the Anglo-American author had successfully published plays and novels. Low further notes that upon her death, Craigie was awarded “almost royal homage” (319). By contrast, Hannah Lynch, a writer of a variety of guises and who had devoted her energies to political activism, appears to have been subject to no small degree of hardship. Lynch never married, sought to earn her living by her pen and resided outside Ireland for well-nigh half of her short life. Her death in Paris was announced in the press on both sides of the Atlantic and obituary articles followed. Nonetheless, her passing was largely ignored by the literary mainstream despite an original and substantial contribution to journalism, criticism, fiction and travel writing.

Lynch’s contemporary, Katharine Tynan, records that at a party given by Lady Jane Wilde, the latter introduced the burgeoning writer in the following manner: “This is Miss Hannah Lynch, Oscar: a young Irish genius”. Her son replied in characteristically flamboyant manner: “Are not young Irish geniuses as plentiful as blackberries?” (1913, 129). In the article of 1906, Low also refers to Lynch’s own, often less entertaining style together with the controversial content of her writing on home affairs: “Her outspoken criticism upon Irish matters and especially upon Irish politicians, coupled with her scathing wit, had made her enemies almost from her childhood” (1906, 319). More than a century on from Lynch’s exposure to Wildean wit-cum-patriarchal condescension, her literary output is now in the throes of recovery. Thanks to the British Library’s Historical Collection and digitisation, some of her novels are accessible but none of her major works are currently available in modern editions and neither her articles nor her reviews or translations are currently in print. Notwithstanding these difficulties, her contribution to Irish literature in English has been vindicated by a number of scholars over the last decade, among whom Faith Binckes and Kathryn Laing deserve special mention. The current volume seeks to contribute to the ongoing recovery of writings by this “young Irish genius”, particularly focusing on nineteen articles pertinent to Spain, the greater number of which belong to the genre of travel. Together with Lynch’s other

journalism on France, Italy, Greece and Switzerland, the Spanish articles provide a wider lens for assessing the literary, cultural and political activity of this cosmopolitan author and traveller, who transgressed the boundaries of race, class, gender and nation in her time.

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