

## Nuala O'Connor's *Nora* and the Challenges of Biographical Fiction

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The biographical novel is a subgenre that lies at the intersection of history, biography, memoir and fiction, partially sharing the features of each, but not fully fulfilling any. Besides, the boundaries that separate the historical novel and biographical fiction from the tradition of life writing, (auto)biography, memoir or factional biography are indeterminate and further blurred by the filter of the author, who can be both subject and object of discourse. In the last three decades, Irish biographical fiction, if one can claim the existence of that category, has expanded its horizons to accommodate the “real” lives of forgotten and silenced figures from the past, including women, nobodies and marginal others. Colm Tóibín, Joseph O'Connor, Colm McCann, Roddy Doyle, alongside a flourishing group of women writers, such as Emma Donoghue, Anne Enright, Mary Morrissy, Evelyn Conlon, Martina Devlin or Nuala O'Connor have all had their share challenging master narratives that approached history as a linear succession of events and left conspicuous silences that spoke volumes. Intending to reshape the space occupied by the iconic figure of Nora Barnacle and to place her centre stage, Nuala O'Connor's most recent novel *Nora* (2021) comes to explore female individuality, with an authenticity that had been absent in authorized biographies of the Joyces. With two previous biographical novels on her account, *Miss Emily* (2015) and *Becoming Belle* (2018), O'Connor here subscribes Patricia Waugh's belief that both reality and history are provisional, “no longer a world of eternal verities but a series of constructions, artifices, impermanent structures”. Considering these ideas, the present proposal will delve into the subgenre of biofiction from an ethical and aesthetic perspective, intending to highlight its potential to render a female subjectivity that surfaces in the interstices of history.