

**Reading Ethically: The Contemporary Irish historical novel and Henrietta  
McKervey's *What Becomes of Us***

Marisol Morales Ladrón  
Universidad de Alcalá

Timely published, when the centenary celebrations of the Easter Rising 1916 were fast approaching, Henrietta McKervey published her debut novel *What Becomes of Us* (2015). The narrative delves into the return of Maria Mills and her six-year-old daughter from London to the Dublin of the 1960s, when the city was preparing for the fiftieth anniversary of the historical landmark. Relying on accounts passed on by word of mouth, journals and paper clippings, McKervey crafts a plot that unveils stories of women who fought alongside the suffragettes, were members of the *Cumann na mBan* or active revolutionaries yet lived anonymous lives who never found a space in mainstream records. In the novel, the interplay of the different timeframes—the Easter Rising of 1916, the celebrations for the golden jubilee in 1966 and the present realm of the reader, preparing for the centenary in 2016—allows the political agendas of the fictional and real commemorations to overlap resolving into a critique of how history is constructed and revealing how gender politics were prerogatives of 1916 and 1966, as much as they remain nowadays. Considering these circumstances, the present discussion will look at *What Becomes of Us*, a novel that has not received enough critical attention, alongside other contemporary historical novels of the kind written by women. These would include Mary Morrissy's *The Rising of Bella Casey* (2013), Lia Mills' *Fallen* (2014) and Marita Colon-McKenna's *Rebel Sisters* (2016), authors who have resurrected the lives of so many devoiced female figures. I will argue that the blossoming of a neo historical narrative in the last two decades should be addressed as a turn to ethics, to the need to reassess the value of literature reading as a responsible and informative exercise for the interpretation of—the gaps of—history.