



Villar-Argáiz, Pilar, ed. *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland: The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2014. 273 pp.

Considering that Irish people have always migrated to other countries in order to find better working and living conditions, this fact changed during the period when Ireland, due to its rapid economic growth, was branded as a “Celtic Tiger.” It is now possible to analyse literary works representing contemporary immigrants in the island and this is particularly well achieved in *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland: The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature*.

According to Pilar Villar-Argáiz in her introduction to *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland*, “one of the immediate consequences of the economic success of the country was the reversal of emigration, from outward to inward migration” (1). In this way, Ireland became a multicultural country during this period and, according to Declan Kiberd in his foreword to the same work, “you might expect the emergence of new and complex forms of narrative to capture these hybridities and complications” (xiv). That is exactly what this collection does: it presents essays by eighteen different authors in order to analyze the representation of the so-called “New Irish” (the immigrants who migrated to Ireland from the 1990s onwards) in contemporary literature.

The collection is divided into four parts: “Irish Multiculturalisms: obstacles and challenges”; “Rethinking Ireland as a post nationalist community”; “The return of the repressed: ‘performing’ Irishness through intercultural encounters”; and “Gender and the city.”

In Part One, chapter two, Charlotte McIvor analyses the works of Donal O’Kelly, Declan Gorman and Charlie O’Neill, situating their careers as playwrights in terms of the community arts movement’s commitment to achieving more equal access to art creation. Amanda Tucker suggests that the works of Claire Keegan and Roddy Doyle “depict a non-threatening, non-challenging multicultural Ireland that attempts to solve the challenges of diversity through Irish hospitality and good will” (55) in opposition to the works of Emma Donoghue and Cauvery Madhavan which “point to persistent and perhaps insolvable questions about both individual and collective identity” (61). In Chapter Four, Pilar Villar-Argáiz “challenges this idealisation of Irish multiculturalism by revealing the various ways in which newcomers are marginalised in present-day Ireland” (64) through the analysis of poems by Colette Bryce, Mary O’Donnell and Michael O’Loughlin. In the following chapter, Margarita Estévez-Saá points out that “only when the Celtic Tiger began to collapse, and these communities of immigrants became redundant, did the Irish writers turn their gaze more attentively towards these members of the community” (85) and she analyses the reflection of this gaze in the novels of Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, Anne Haverty, Chris Binchy, Peter Cunningham and Hugo Hamilton.

Eva Roa White's essay opens Part Two, Chapter Six, arguing that Roddy Doyle, in his works, proposes a "larger definition of Irishness that encompasses hybridisation and its resulting hyphenated identities" (95), or, in other words, identities that are formed by more than one nationality. In Chapter Seven, Carmen Zamorano Llena discusses Hugo Hamilton's works in the context of looking at "the changes that the host society undergoes under the influence of migration" (114). In the following chapter, Anne Fogarty aims at exposing how immigrants are depicted in contemporary short stories by Edna O'Brien, Colm Tóibín, Mary O'Donnell, Colum McCann, Anne Enright and Éilís Ní Dhuibhne. In Chapter Nine, Katarzyna Poloczec expresses agreement with the suggestion of Irish poet Justin Quinn that "engagements and collisions between the old and the new Irish will create new subjects and new perspectives in the contemporary Irish poetic landscape" (133). She then analyses these new perspectives through the poetry of Sinéad Morrissey, Leontia Flynn, Mary O'Malley and Michael Hayes.

"The return of the repressed: 'performing' Irishness through intercultural encounters", Part Three, starts with Paula Murphy analysing the second play in Dermot Bolger's *The Ballymun Trilogy, The Townlands of Brazil*. In this work, the first act is set in the 1960s and revolves around a group of Irish characters, while the second act takes place in the 2000s and is played by the same actors but now as immigrant characters. According to Murphy, "Bolger encourages the audience to view the present multiculturalism of Ireland through the long history of Irish emigration" (151). In Chapter Twelve, Michaela Schrage-Früh examines transculturality and Otherness in poems by Mary O'Malley, David Wheatley and other poets included in Dermot Bolger's collection named *Night and Day*. This essay is followed by Jason King who delves into the works of Hugo Hamilton and considers that the author represents "the moment of self-acceptance of cultural difference in Ireland as the climactic occurrence of a multicultural epiphany" (185). Katherine O'Donnell, in Chapter Thirteen, firstly deconstructs the history of Irish empathy for black people; she says that "[i]t is in the turning of the twenty-first century, with immigration occurring for the first time in hundreds of years of Irish history, that we saw this empathetic identification encountering actual dark-skinned people" (189). O'Donnell goes on to analyse *The Parts* by Keith Ridgway and highlights what Declan Kiberd has said about this novel: "The very title, *The Parts*, he says, points to the inevitability of an incomplete and partial assessment of the cultural impact of diverse groups of immigrants as they arrive in large numbers to Ireland." (190). Charles I. Armstrong ends Part Three focusing poems by Derek Mahon, Sinéad Morrissey, Mary O'Donnell and Seamus Heaney, who deal with tourist visits to Ireland, bearing in mind the Irish identity.

The last Part of the collection, "Gender and the city" has, as a recurrent theme, the issue of the 2004 Citizenship Referendum, which approved that "people born in the island of Ireland would not have a constitutional right to be Irish citizens, unless, at the time of their birth, one of their parents was an Irish citizen or was entitled to be an Irish citizen"<sup>1</sup>. In Chapter Fifteen, Maureen T. Reddy analyses *Black Baby* by Clare Boylan. Although published in 1989 (before the Celtic Tiger economic boom and the 2004 Referendum), the anti-racist form of Irish feminism presented in the novel is highly relevant to the debate concerning immigration as it "centralises Irishwomen's not only double,

but multiple, and the need for strategies to understand those interlocked systems of oppression” (217). Following the same trend, Wanda Balzano considers Emer Martin’s *Baby Zero* and “the need to reevaluate women’s individual lives and stories against the backdrop of a variety of multicultural issues of race, language, religion and culture” (231).

In Chapter Seventeen, Loredana Salis investigates “the kind of images of the city that emerge, the tales we hear, who conveys and who receives them, and the depiction of the non-native Other” (243) in the works of Paul Mercier, Sebastian Barry and Dermot Bolger. Finally, in Chapter Eighteen, David Clark examines the rise of crime fiction in Ireland and, in particular, how this genre “has most accurately and most successfully mirrored the profusion of transformations which have taken place in Ireland” (255).

Throughout these eighteen chapters, a significant number of Irish writers are presented and analyzed. All of them focus on how their literary works represent the multicultural Ireland that emerged during the Celtic Tiger period. Irish authors have demonstrated throughout the first decade of the 2000s that they are highly aware of these transformations as experienced by Irish society.

In *The Irish Writer and The World*, Kiberd attributes the delayed representation of multiculturalism in Ireland to the many changes the country has passed through. He says:

The country has gone through in the past century and a half the sort and scale of changes which took four or five hundred years in other parts of Europe. No wonder that people have looked in the rear-window mirror and felt a kind of motion-sickness, or have sought to conceal the underlying modernity of their lives by giving them the surface appearance of the ancient. (280)

In this way, Kiberd suggests that, instead of looking at contemporary society, Irish writers have preferred to look back in order to try to conceal the present; however, over time, *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland: The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature* shows that writers and artists have become more confident to confront the present and have felt the need to represent it. On the other hand, we wait for the “New Irish” to start writing about themselves. According to Villar-Argáiz, that would be the subject of another collection of essays.

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## Note

- 1 Extracted from the website Referendum Commission (<http://www.refcom.ie/en/past-referendums/irish-citizenship>) accessed on September 19, 2014.

## Works Cited

Kiberd, Declan. *The Irish Writer and the World*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.