

Pilar Villar-Argáiz, ed. 2014. *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland. The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature*. Manchester: Manchester UP. 273 pp. ISBN: 978-07190-8928-2.

ALEJANDRA MORENO ÁLVAREZ

Universidad de Oviedo

morenoalejandra@uniovi.es

In Ireland years of emigration and exile have been supplanted by sustained immigration of a multiplicity of different groups including refugees, asylum seekers, job-seekers and returning Irish migrants, among others. This has altered the ethnic landscape of Irish society, since Ireland, traditionally a land of emigrants, has now been transformed by a new diaspora. The unprecedented arrival of people from different parts of the globe is caused mainly by two factors: Ireland entering the European Union in 1973 and the “Celtic Tiger” years, a term coined by Kevin Gardiner in 1994 to refer to the unprecedented financial boom of the country (in Kirby et al. 2002, 17). Reflecting on this new demographic phenomenon, there has been an important and much needed rise in the publication of research exploring inward migration and its consequences. Piaras Mac Éinrí and Allen White highlight how “[r]esearch on immigration into the state was, until the recent past, extremely limited, largely because immigration was itself extremely limited and greatly overshadowed by out-migration” (2008, 151). The politics and policies of integration have only recently begun to be addressed in Ireland and *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland. The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature*, edited by Pilar Villar-Argáiz, is an example of how, as immigration into Ireland has increased over the last decade, so too has the volume of published research work exploring this phenomenon. Villar-Argáiz’s work was much needed, as up until the turn of the century, researchers, teachers and students had to rely, when studying immigration to Ireland, on book chapters, occasional journal articles and “semi-public and ‘grey’ area—reports, commissioned research, policy statements, etc.—publications by the state, semi-state and NGO sectors” (Mac Éinrí and White 2008, 158).

It is in the introduction to the volume where Villar-Argáiz gives an account of the previous academic research on the topic, such as *Multi-Culturalism: The View from the Two Irelands* (Longley and Kiberd 2001), *Translocations. The Irish Migration, Race and Social Transformation Review* (Fanning and Munck 2007), *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change* (Meaney 2010) and *Facing the Other: Interdisciplinary Studies on Race, Gender, and Social*

*Justice in Ireland* (Faragó and Sullivan 2008). Villar-Árgaiz does not only trace the critical panorama but also provides the reader with an overview of the literary agenda within which multiculturalism is approached. Within drama, a genre which acts as one of the branches in this collection together with poetry and fiction, Ursula Rani Sarma and Bisi Adigun are two of the most representative authors. In fiction, writers who engage issues of nationhood and ethnicity are Hugo Hamilton, Roddy Doyle, Dermot Bolger, Colum McCann, Kate O'Riordan, Emer Martin and Éilís Ní Dhuibhne, among others, while in poetry, the collection engages with authors such as Colette Bryce, Mary O'Donnell and Michael O'Loughlin, to name a few. Villar-Argáiz reminds the reader that "not all Irish artists have responded so openly and rapidly to Ireland's multiethnic landscape" (4) since multiculturalism in Ireland is too recent a phenomenon to be completely understood. The compilation of essays gathered in this volume has two main points: to visualise the gradual move from themes of the past to Ireland's multicultural reality in the twenty-first century and to fill the research lacuna "by assessing the cultural effects of inward migration in relation to contemporary Irish literature" (5).

The volume is a dialogue between theatre, poetry and fiction throughout the four parts of the collection: (i) the (re)thinking of a new Ireland, (ii) how it positions itself within the idea of a postnationalist society, (iii) the coming to terms with the Irish past in the new Ireland, and (iv) an analysis of gender perspectives and power structures within this multicultural discourse. The seventeen chapters address the obstacles and challenges of a new multicultural arena by referring to the main contemporary Irish-born writers who incorporate a multicultural literary vision into their work. In the first part, entitled "Irish Multiculturalism: Obstacles and Challenges," Charlotte McIvor analyses the work produced by white Irish-born male playwrights, Donal O'Kelly, Declan Gorman and Charlie O'Neill, and questions whether these Irish writers are the most appropriate spokespersons for the new multicultural Ireland, underlying the problematic of their ethnicity in relation to immigrant minority communities. Amanda Tucker follows this line of research by analysing contemporary fiction by Irish-born writers (Doyle, Keegan, Donoghue and Madhavan) coming to the conclusion that either multiculturalism is represented as an obstacle to be overcome by Irish hospitality or as an unresolved process which leads to cultural anxiety (55). Villar-Argáiz interdialogues with these two chapters from the perspective of Irish poets (Olszewska, Bryce, O'Donnell and O'Loughlin). Margarita Estévez-Saá closes this first part of the volume by analysing the depictions of immigrants in Celtic Tiger and post-Celtic Tiger novels and discusses how writers such as Callaghan, Wassell, Haverty, Binchy, Cunningham and Hamilton, prior to the Celtic Tiger era, depict immigrants coexisting but not interacting actively while nowadays immigrants are given a voice of their own. Estévez-Saá insists that there is "an attempt from various Irish writers to represent not only the multicultural atmosphere of the country, but also the many intercultural relationships between natives and immigrants that characterise the country in the new millennium" (91).

Part two, entitled “Rethinking Ireland as a Postnationalist Community,” gathers four contributions, by Eva Roa White, Carmen Zamorano Llena, Anne Fogarty and Katarzyna Poloczek, which explore how immigration has challenged the significance of being Irish. These four scholars analyse the different ways in which contemporary Irish writers (i.e., Hamilton, O’Brian, Tóibín and Enright) *rethink* Irishness “by incorporating the reality of ‘postnational’ Others” (19). Part three gathers the work of five scholars, Paula Murphy, Michaela Schrage-Früh, Jason King, Katherine O’Donnell and Charles I. Armstrong. From the perspective of Ireland’s long history of emigration, these essays recover migrant memory at the same time as visualising hybridity and difference as convivial modes of acceptance by both native and non-native peoples. Part four closes the volume, this time from a gender perspective since, as Villar-Argáiz underlines, the volume “would be incomplete without acknowledging the importance of gender difference in shaping the power structures implicit in Ireland’s new migratory spaces” (22). This section is much needed since as Eavan Boland explains: “When I was younger Irish literature seemed to be drawn on a paradigm which was male and traditional. Woman’s poetry altered that and required the literature to make a new space, not without considerable resistance. Now immigrant voices require another new space” (Villar-Argáiz 2012, 119). González Arias, Morales Ladrón and Altuna García have also argued how, in recent decades, Irish writing has grown sensitive towards non-canonical modes of expressions and authorship, “especially since women writers have struggled to clear some space for their creativity” (2010, 160). This fourth part of the volume reflects the importance of gender in shaping contemporary immigration in Ireland. This is highlighted by authors through the “inclusion of voices of female migrants in empirical accounts of immigration as well as through exploring the importance of gender in developing theoretical understandings of Ireland’s immigration population” (Mac Éinrí and White 2008, 160). Maureen T. Reddy and Wanda Balzano offer, in chapters fifteen and sixteen respectively, a feminist reading of anti-racism in Clare Boylan’s *Black Baby* (1988) and Emer Martin’s *Baby Zero* (2007), showing how gender and race were pressing issues at the turn of the century in Ireland. Another recurrent topic is the changing cartography of the city due to migratory flows. This transformation of geographical spaces is also discussed in *Reading Transcultural Cities* (Carrera Suárez, Durán Almarza and Menéndez Tarrazo 2011), which focuses mainly on European and North Atlantic geographies, linked to geopolitical axes and neo-colonial routes or international displacements, and the contributions by Katherine O’Donnell and Luz Mar González Arias describe the transition from an “old Ireland” to a “modern” nation. Urban spaces are also the backdrop to the literary works discussed by Loredana Salis and David Clark in their respective chapters in *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland*; the latter analyses the rise of “homegrown” crime fiction while the former concludes by asserting that migration gives voice to a different Ireland, “self critical and willing to move on, whatever was, whatever may come” (252).

As the editor points out, not all the writers discussed in the volume challenge with the same efficiency the multicultural politics of assimilation or separation between immigrants and the Irish majority (12). Some Irish writers do distort the real experiences of immigration, by favouring the white native perspective (i.e., Claire Keegan, Roddy Doyle). On the contrary, Dermot Bolger, Michael O'Loughlin and Hugo Hamilton place immigrants at the centre of their work. I do consider however, that by giving voice to just white Irish-born writers—as happens in this volume—it becomes the weakest part in the collection. The editor is conscious of this fact and explains how “[a] book of this nature is likely to raise some critical controversy, given the many risks involved in looking at the immigrant solely from the ‘native’ perspective” (15). One of these risks is not listening to the Others and presenting them as “new Irish,” not for what they are or for what they themselves offer. This volume contributes to Hickman’s premise that “it is important to see Ireland as a hybrid nation, that has been integrated into the global economic system, and is based on a variety of political and cultural hierarchies and social and economic inequalities” (2007, 23). Villar-Argáiz highlights how a “collection of essays mixing natives’ and immigrants’ perspectives would divert attention from some of the issues which inevitably arise in the act of writing from the point of view of the centre rather than the periphery” (2014, 15). I would encourage Villar-Argáiz to continue this line of research by studying the perspective of the Others so as to have the basis for a more accurate and enriching multicultural study and agenda.

In the absence of theoretical debates about transnationalism, mobility or diasporas, there is a danger that research on immigration to Ireland will reproduce an “exceptionalist” view of this country—as unique and different—whereas in fact Ireland should be situated within globalised systems and movements of people and capital (Mac Éinrí and White 2008, 164). The editor of the present volume correctly sets all these issues as central key elements of debate and analysis in the literature of an Ireland that embraces the idea of a new multicultural society. It provides new critical views on multicultural Ireland in literature with an academic depth in much need of scholarly assessment.

#### WORKS CITED

- CARRERA SUÁREZ, Isabel, Emilia Durán Almarza and Alicia Menéndez Tarrazo, eds. 2011. *Reading Transcultural Cities*. Palma: Edicions U Illes Balears.
- CLARK, David and Rubén Jarazo Álvarez, eds. 2010. *In the Wake of the Tiger: Irish Studies in the Twentieth-First Century*. A Coruña: Netbiblo.
- FANNING, Bryan and Ronaldo Munck, eds. 2007. *Translocations. The Irish Migration, Race and Social Transformation Review* 2 (1). [Available online].
- FARAGÓ, Borbála and Moynagh Sullivan, eds. 2008. *Facing the Other: Interdisciplinary Studies on Race, Gender, and Social Justice in Ireland*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars.
- GONZÁLEZ ARIAS, Luz Mar, Marisol Morales Ladrón, and Asier Altuna García de Salazar. 2010. “The New Irish: Towards a Multicultural Literature in Ireland?” In

- In the Wake of the Tiger: Irish Studies in the Twentieth-First Century*, edited by David Clark and Rubén Jarazo Álvarez, 157-82. A Coruña: Netbiblo.
- HICKMAN, Mary J. 2007. "Immigration and Monocultural (Re)Imaginings in Ireland and Britain." *Translocations* 2 (1): 12-25.
- KIRBY, Peadar, Luke Gibbons and Michael Cronin, eds. 2002. *Reinventing Ireland: Culture, Society and the Global Economy*. London: Pluto.
- LONGLEY, Edna. 2001. "Multi-Culturalism and Northern Ireland: Making Differences fruitful." In *Multi-Culturalism: The View from the Two Irelands* edited by Edna Longley and Declan Kiberd, 1-44. Cork: Cork UP. In association with The Centre for Cross Border Studies, Armagh.
- LONGLEY, Edna and Declan Kiberd, eds. 2001. *Multi-Culturalism: The View from the Two Irelands*. Cork: Cork UP in association with The Centre for Cross Border Studies, Armagh.
- MAC ÉINRÍ, Piaras and Allen White. 2008. "Immigration into the Republic of Ireland: A Bibliography of Recent Research." *Irish Geography* 41 (2): 151-79.
- MEANEY, Gerardine. 2010. *Gender, Ireland, and Cultural Change: Race, Sex, and Nation*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- VILLAR-ARGÁIZ, Pilar. 2012. "Poetry as a 'Humane Enterprise': Interview with Eavan Boland on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of her Literary Career." *Estudios Irlandeses: Spanish Journal of Irish Studies* 7: 113-20.

Received 9 July 2014

Revised version accepted 26 October 2014

Alejandra Moreno Álvarez holds a PhD in Women's Studies from the University of Oviedo. Currently, she is a Lecturer at the English Department of the University of Oviedo. Her teaching and research focuses on Literatures in English Language and Feminist and Postcolonial Theory.

Address: Departamento de Filología Inglesa, Francesa y Alemana. Facultad de Filosofía y Letras. C/ Teniente Alfonso Martínez, s/n. 33011, Oviedo, Spain. Tel.: +34 985104580; Fax: +34 985104555.

