

Marisol Morales-Ladrón, ed. 2016. *Family and Dysfunction in Contemporary Irish Narrative and Film*. Bern: Peter Lang. 352 pp. ISBN: 978-3-0343-2219-5.

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Despite the preeminence of the family in the socio-political construction of modern contemporary Ireland and the recurrent presence of family-related tropes in the artistic production of the island, very few full-length studies of this subject have been published in recent years. *Family and Dysfunction in Contemporary Irish Narrative and Film*, edited by Marisol Morales-Ladrón, not only fills that notable gap, but it also covers a reasonable variety of topics, genres and approaches that comprehensively delineate for the reader “the multifarious faces of contemporary Ireland” (2). In fact, the notion of diversity sustains the collection, both formally and conceptually. As is made clear in the “Introduction,” a broad spectrum of Irish authors and critics have demonstrated that the concept of the ideal, nuclear family defended by the early proponents of the Irish Free State gradually proved both insufficient and imperfect (O’Toole 1994; Richards 1998; Hanafin 2000). Instead, and particularly in the last four decades, cultural products have portrayed non-traditional family patterns and experiences whose “dysfunction” correlates with the complex and increasingly heterogeneous identity of the country. Thus, the texts discussed in the book bear witness to how that unconventionality becomes “a symptom of the gap that existed between the rhetoric of the nation and its social reality” (8). Similarly, one of the guiding principles of the volume is related to the role that the recent waves of modernisation, immigration, globalisation and capitalisation have had on the (re)articulation of the family. The original incorporation of these factors in the analysis of the various contributors turns the collection into an appealing and stimulating piece of academic work that maps out the evolution of this institution throughout recent Irish history.

*Family and Dysfunction in Contemporary Irish Narrative and Film* is organised into two different but complementary parts that include, firstly, five chapters by well-known scholars in Irish studies in Spain, and secondly, three interviews with acclaimed artists from the contemporary literary and filmic panorama of the island. Part one concentrates on how narrative and film have depicted nonconforming families, spanning a fine range of accounts whose particular form, content and tone add significantly to the

many challenges to family codes taking place in Ireland since the early 1980s. Quite appropriately, the field of gender studies inaugurates this part, which bears out the relevance of this prism for the analysis of Ireland's socio-cultural practices. Indeed, in the first chapter—"Portraits of Dysfunction in Contemporary Irish Women's Narratives: Confined to the Cell, Lost to Memory"—Morales-Ladrón thoroughly examines eight novels by Irish women writers whose protagonists are troubled by past, distressful family experiences, such as incest, neglect or domestic violence. The narration of these formerly silenced events, she claims, liberates the characters from the many impositions of the social order, while ostensibly the literary discourse allows women authors—Julia O'Faolain, Mary O'Donnell and Anne Enright, among others—to "engage into the denouncement of outdated patriarchal tenets" (33). The following chapter, "Home Revisited: Family (Re)Constructions in Contemporary Irish Autobiographical Writing," by Inés Praga-Terente, also concentrates on the intersection of past and memory, especially in relation to the life writings and memoirs of eminent Irish novelists like Patrick McCabe, John McGahern, Edna O'Brien and John Banville. In her view, the confessional component of this type of text reveals the grip that the notion of home has had for individuals coming from "affectively unstable families" (131), and for whom literature has served as a precious healing mechanism.

Turning to more up-to-date narrative expressions of "dysfunction," Asier Altuna García de Salazar offers in "Family and Dysfunction in Ireland Represented in Fiction Through the Multicultural and Intercultural Prisms" a thought-provoking analysis of how the many changes produced in Ireland by the phenomena of multiculturalism and transculturalism have informed the productions of both native and immigrant authors like Hugo Hamilton, Cauvery Madhavan, Margaret McCarthy and Roddy Doyle. While their stories, he argues, are "the product of a global Ireland immersed in a rapid transformation into modernity" (144), they also contribute to the large-scale critical questioning of the hegemonic codes of cultural configuration, where the family has traditionally occupied a central position. Next, Juan Francisco Elices tackles in "Familiar Dysfunctionalities in Contemporary Irish Satirical Literature" the way in which unorthodox family experiences have been inscribed in the satirical work of Anne Haverty, Mark Macauley and Justin Quinn. The peculiarities of this narrative genre converts it into an interesting artifact with which to criticise the socio-cultural paradigm, as evidenced in a number of novels that, in Elices's words, "offer more critical and biting views through the construction of very peculiar family realms" (202).

And finally, the chapter "Representation of Family Tropes and Discourses in Contemporary Irish-Themed Cinema," by Rosa González Casademont, which given its length and the wide corpus of analysed texts could have become a whole new section of the book, provides a comprehensive study of films on the subject. Her pertinent argument that "mainstream feature films rarely act as an arena where the discursive construction of the Irish family is constantly teased out or problematised" (290) is validated through her detailed exploration of productions where, unlike in the case

of independent cinema, non-traditional family forms and episodes are documented rather than critiqued or transcended so as to encourage the audience to take action.

Many of the ideas explored in the chapters are later echoed in the second part of the volume, in which a writer—Emer Martin—and two film directors—Jim Sheridan and Kirsten Sheridan—are interviewed by two of the contributors. The discussion of their personal experiences along with the terms in which family and “dysfunction” are predicated in their productions offer alternative ways of understanding the current negotiations of these topics carried out through artistic discourse. Sharing similar visions of the causes and consequences of the changing social landscape of the island, they also agree on the necessity of distrusting family clichés by presenting, instead, more plural experiences of home, cultural background and wider social relationships. Thus, this final section reaffirms the lines of analysis that the contributors follow consistently in the first part, though while also offering new discussions of Ireland’s transformation as triggered by the artists’ incorporation of global elements to the family debate.

On the whole, *Family and Dysfunction in Contemporary Irish Narrative and Film* provides appropriate conceptual spaces to think about the (re)definition of the Irish social milieu. Individually, the chapters offer valuable critical insights into the ongoing significance of the family for identity formation; collectively, the volume contributes to a better understanding of the complex dynamics of this institution on the island and the many questions it continues to raise. It is also worthy of note that the study appeals to experts in Irish studies as well as non-specialist readers, and it is more than probable that it will become a referent in this field. Indeed, the editor has paved the way for the introduction of the concept of “dysfunction” in the analysis of the prevailing conflicts between ideology and cultural practice in Ireland, which is also tackled in *Ireland and Dysfunction: Critical Explorations in Irish Literature and Film* (2017), edited by Asier Altuna García de Salazar. Comparatively, the former collection concentrates on the more particular intersection of the term with the notions of family and home, whereas the latter explores “dysfunction” from broader critical approaches, covering more varied genres and disciplines. Arguably, both are much appreciated studies that significantly add to the international, academic examination of Ireland’s texts and contexts.

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