

## Recensioni / Reviews

Irene De Angelis, *The Japanese Effect in Contemporary Irish Poetry*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. xvi+193. ISBN 978-0-230-24895-3.

Irene De Angelis, Research Fellow at the University of Turin, is not new to the topic of ‘Hiberno-Japanese’ relations. Back in 2007, with Joseph Woods she co-edited *Our Shared Japan: An Anthology of Contemporary Irish Poetry* which shows the strong and rather peculiar bond between these two distant islands. A bond that, as we can read in her new book *The Japanese Effect in Contemporary Irish Poetry* (2012), has significantly deepened in the course of the twentieth century.

For centuries Japan has been “absent from Western culture, except as a distant reverie” (3), a place of imagination and of legendary accounts. Its isolation, caused as much by an inconvenient geographical position as by the resolutions of myopic rulers, has contributed to its aura of mystery, and ultimately to its charm. Even in the time of globalisation Japan still appears baffling and enigmatic in the eyes of most Westerners, and thus extremely fascinating. Probably, in the West we are not thoroughly aware of the fact that Japanese aesthetics has influenced European and North American taste to a significant degree. This is why De Angelis’ book is important. It testifies to the weight that Japanese culture has had in the shaping of much Western poetry.

As De Angelis clarifies in the “Introduction” to her book, this Western interest in Japan started in the second half of the nineteenth century, after Commodore Matthew Perry had breached Japan’s isolationism for the sake of trade. Thanks to the ensuing vogue of *Japonisme*, via Imaginism and the rediscovery of ancient epigrammatic poetry, ‘Oriental’ taste and aesthetics entered Western culture for good. In the early twentieth century, together with the French, intellectuals such as Lafcadio Hearn, Oscar Wilde and W.B. Yeats were responsible for the popularization of the Japanese style. Thus, the ‘Japanese effect’ in contemporary Irish poetry is the trace of a modernist fad that the Irish passed on to the West.

Even though not all-encompassing, De Angelis’ research is extremely well accomplished. She deals with a wide and varied selection of Irish poets, whose work she analyses with a well versed knowledge in Japanese poetic structures and conventions. The outcome of her research is structured around six chapters that comprise aspects of the work of Seamus Heaney, Derek Mahon, Ciaran Carson, Gabriel Rosenstock, Michael Hartnett, Paul Maldoon, Thomas Kinsella, Eoghan Ó Tuairisc, Anthony Glavin, Andrew Fitzsimons, Sinéad Morrissey and Joseph Woods.

The first chapter, titled “Petals on Sandymount Strand”, is dedicated to the recently disappeared Seamus Heaney. Heaney, who visited Japan twice, cultivated a lifelong interest in Japanese poetry. His poetry went through a “haiku phase” when he was confronted with grave loss and mourning. Writing haikus helped him express his melancholy or, as the Japanese say, his *mono no aware*. Heaney found comfort in the sense of absence and reticence that short Japanese poetic structures, like the haiku and the tanka, are able to convey. He appreciated the clarity and the semantic density that Japanese poets like Matsuo Bashō, Yosa Buson and Kotabayashi Issa mastered. They wouldn’t use “unessential frills which obfuscate the central image” (17), but would rather rely on the power of suggestion.

The Japanese themed work of Derek Mahon and of Ciaran Carson are the subject of respectively the second and the third chapters, titled “Snow Was General All Over Japan” and “Self-Contained Images and the Invisible Cities of Tokyo”. Of Mahon, De Angelis takes into account unpublished materials included in the Derek Mahon Papers at Emory University. Hers is an experiment in French genetic criticism which she supports with pictures of Mahon’s crossed out drafts. De Angelis reveals all the stages that turned the unpublished poem “Hiroshima” into the 1975 poem “The Snow Party”. The pictures show Mahon’s efforts to subtract from the text, a *labor limae* at the service of both aesthetic and political engagement. For Ciaran Carson, who visited the country in 1998, Japan is a psychedelic experience instead. During his five-day visit he was struck and exhilarated by the utter foreignness of Tokyo. Comparing Carson’s imagery to the work of Italo Calvino, De Angelis argues that “Carson’s Tokyo is an ‘invisible city’, or a multiplicity of ‘invisible cities’” (65). Reminiscing the “Tears in Rain” speech by Rutger Hauer in *Blade Runner* (1982; “I’ve seen things...”), the author explains that Japan has had the greatest impact on Carson’s imagination.

Probably, the following three chapters represent the most interesting part of this book. The fourth chapter, “The Gentle Art of Disappearing”, analyses the differences in the work of three Irish authors of haiku, Gabriel Rosenstock, Michael Hartnett and Paul Maldoon. The premise of this chapter is that haiku poetry has become an international form. Indeed, its popularity is attested by the World Haiku Festival, established in 1998, and by various Haiku societies around the world. Chapter number five instead, tackles one of the most painful moments in the history of the twentieth century, the bombing of Hiroshima. In “Tu n’as Rien Vu à Hiroshima”, De Angelis explores the multifarious ways in which Thomas Kinsella, Eoghan Ó Tuairisc and Anthony Glavin managed to “represent the unrepresentable” (115).

Finally the last chapter, “Between East and West”, contextualises the work of three younger authors, Andrew Fitzsimons, Sinéad Morrissey and Joseph Woods. All of them have a deeper link with Japan. Fitzsimons has married a Japanese woman and has moved to Tokyo, while Morrissey and Woods have

lived there for some time. Their image of Japan differs significantly from that of the older poets discussed here. It is not a place of the imagination, but of emigration. Their viewpoint is candid, devoid of that hardwired sin of exoticism which usually taints our image of Japan, and thus they are “reluctant to accept the idea of an affinity between Ireland and Japan” (145). To them Japanese poetry is an inspiration more than a model for poetic composition. They use it to expose their alienness, their bitterness and frustration, but also, as the following words by Fitzsimons show, their love, “I live in Tokyo, and I love Tokyo, but it is by no stretch of the imagination a beautiful place. It is surrounded by ugliness, intense ugliness and chaos” (144).

De Angelis’ book is filled with beauty and is a pleasure to read. She guides the reader through the discovery of an aspect of Irish poetry that is probably not so well known. Most importantly she manages to highlight the impact that Japanese poetry has had on contemporary Western poetry at large. Her approach is crisp and fresh like the poetry she investigates. Moreover, through her description of the “Japanese effect”, we are introduced to the specificities of some contemporary Irish poetry, i.e. its political engagement, which is not limited to Irish troubles, and its preoccupation with aesthetics, balance and reticence. It is commendable that De Angelis never gives way to exoticisms and final sentences. Admittedly, there is one thought we are left with that looks like an ultimate truth: “What the Japanese beauty is I don’t know. There are so many varieties of Japan” (144).

*Arianna Gremigni*

Mariavita Cambria, *Irish English. Language, History and Society*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2012, pp. 154. ISBN 978-88-498-3486-4.

What is Irish English? Which are its origins, development and key features? Which, following the demise of Irish Gaelic, has been the role of language in constructing a new identity and culture in a country subjected to a colonisation process stretching over many centuries and whose psyche is still now strongly marked by “a fractured identity continually renegotiating its own position between two languages and partly expressing its instability” (12)? These are some of the questions to which the interesting, well grounded, persuasive and lively written book by Mariavita Cambria tries to provide an answer by acutely exploiting the scholarly traditions dealing respectively with Irish English and with theories of the postcolonial, but even more by investigating the specificities of the historical, social and cultural background of the language also through the analysis of a selection of well chosen texts used as case studies.

Thus, while Cambria’s main intention here is to investigate the case of Ireland as a sort of “colonial laboratory” (15), where the English applied and

experimented with colonial strategies which were, at a later stage, applied all over the world contributing to the construction of the British Empire, she does this in the first place by using the metaphor of language as house or home to describe the relationship between the mother tongue and the language imposed by the colonial power, specifically the British Empire, and arguing that “The British Empire did not build homes but houses. Houses made of British stone, of the English Language” (11). From this it follows that Irish English, the variety of English spoken nowadays in Ireland, can be considered as one of the first ‘Englishes’ which have been the subject of so many academic works for the last decades.

To support her argument, the author illustrates the main factors playing a role not only in the construction of Ireland and Irish people as the ‘colonial other’, but also in the mechanisms that contribute to the variety of Irish English. And it is in order to provide examples for her theory, that she undertakes an Hallidayan approach to texts, considered as units of meaning and as the place where representation is created. Therefore, besides the four Chapters into which it is divided, the book contains twelve “Insets” which run through the volume and exemplify how “representation and language go hand in hand and cannot be separated when discussing Irish English” (14). The Insets include different genres and text types, they range from paintings to letters and embody the place where concrete examples of the main issues of the volume are given.

In Chapter 1, “Ireland: the Dislocation of language”, Cambria rephrases Homi Bhabha’s pivotal study and highlights the links between Ireland and the dislocation of representation when the other that is represented has the same skin colour of the subject representing. In particular, she here accounts for the inclusion of Ireland in the framework of postcolonial studies by illustrating some of the most recurrent techniques of representation. Extracts taken from Derricke’s *Image of Ireland* (1578) and Keating’s *The History of Ireland* (1620) are given and analysed as examples of the representation of Irish people during the Elizabethan period showing how the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer was often built in terms of dichotomous pairs.

In her second chapter “Inventing a Celtic audience: the birth of the Abbey Theatre”, the author tackles the issue of nationalism and the construction of national identity in postcolonial contexts. The chapter addresses the problem of how a counter narrative was created and elaborated in Ireland in order to get rid of the British conquerors. A huge role was played by the founding of the Abbey Theatre which helped the recovery and creation of a cultural heritage and which “runs parallel to the choice of theatre as a form that provided a sound basis for a political process of liberation” (59). Lady Gregory’s *Our Irish Theatre* (1899) is included as Inset 6 to exemplify the idea of a counter narrative contrasting the stereotyping *Stage Irishman*.

While the first two chapters constitute the theoretical framework for considering Ireland a postcolonial context, Chapter 3 and 4 investigate the

issue of the language and link the case of Irish English to the more general issue of the English language varieties. The title of Chapter 3 “Irish English: History and origins” clearly shows the aim of the chapter. It illustrates the historical and linguistic process that gave birth to Irish English. The Chapter shows the role that the repressive British language policies played in the language shift that brought most Irish people to the partial abandonment of Gaelic in favour of English. The extract from *The Statutes of Kilkenny* (1367), given as Inset 10, epitomizes the brutality of some English laws.

Chapter 4 “A concise outline of Irish English grammar”, shifts its focus to the main features of Irish English and provides examples of how this variety of English works in terms of vocabulary, phonetics and syntax. After illustrating the main approaches in the studies of Irish English, the Chapter accounts for the links between Irish English and Gaelic. It also stresses the fact that some of the features of Irish English are common in other varieties of English confirming the theory of Irish English as a contact variety. The use of “ye” in a letter from an Irish emigrant living in the U.S. given as Inset 12, is an example of this.

In conclusion, while one of the merits of the volume lies in the detailed language analysis related to the more general picture of postcolonial studies inserted in a terrain where linguistics meets cultural studies, Mariavita Cambria’s book also provides the reader with a fascinating analysis of how language and imperialistic power are strongly interwoven in postcolonial environments and highlights the painful relation many colonized countries have with their stepmother tongue.

*Gemma Persico*

Villar-Argáí Pilar (ed.), *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland. The Immigrant in Contemporary Irish Literature*, Manchester, Manchester UP, 2014, pp. 273. ISBN 978-071908928-2.

It is difficult to imagine a more dispiriting time to review this collection of essays. Race relations in Ireland are at a seemingly all time low. This is particularly evident in my own - times utterly depressing times beautifully bewildering – north. In May of this year James McConnell, a firebrand evangelical pastor, described Islam as “heathen”, “satanic” and “a doctrine spawned in hell”. Even more ignominious than these remarks was the support McConnell received from First Minister Peter Robinson who described Muslims in a television broadcast as trustworthy enough “to go down to the shops for [him]”, but not for much else! He offered a public apology of sorts, one that did not, however, prevent Anna Lo, Alliance MLA and the country’s first Chinese born parliamentarian, from resigning. If ever a serious engagement with constructions of otherness in Ireland was called for then surely now is the time. For although still predomi-

nantly monochrome, literature produced on the island is undoubtedly beginning to display a much more deliberate and contemplative approach to inward migration, something capable of facilitating change in the wider social arena.

*Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland* is a wide-ranging and even collection of eighteen essays exploring the emerging multiethnic character of Irish literature written in English. Discussing contemporary poetry, fiction (long and short), and drama, it embraces a healthy soup of genres and writers, some well known within the Irish canon, some not. Examining the cultural impact of inward migration, especially on literary representations of the Other, the work addresses a substantial critical lacuna. For while much has been written on constructions of ethnic otherness in the past, the immigrant and itinerant margins depicted in twenty-first-century texts have received less scrutiny from scholars. Addressing this imbalance, the collection has very clear parameters. It is primarily concerned with the relationship between white Irish “hosts” and immigrant “guests”, those brief and abiding encounters embodying myriad subtle and not so subtle, heart-full and disheartened, leaden and splendidly slippery, dynamics. The book considers the effect of immigration on Irish culture, especially areas of stasis and change, asking when and why diversity or hybridity is embraced, or alternatively, when and why “hosts” batten down the ethnonational hatches. It interrogates the concept of multiculturalism and what this means for contemporary Irish writers. Central concerns in these essays are: “How has literature in Ireland responded to inward migration? Have Irish writers reflected in their work (either explicitly or implicitly) the new influx of immigration? If so, are elements of Irish traditional culture and community maintained or transformed” (5). Divided into four sections (I “Irish Multiculturalisms Obstacles and Challenges”, II “Rethinking Ireland as a Postnationalist Community”, III “‘The Return of the Repressed’: ‘Performing’ Irishness through Cultural Encounters”, IV “Gender and the City”) the volume discusses texts produced during a time period commencing roughly a decade before the birth of the Celtic Tiger up until 2012. The emphasis is on how Irish writers conceptualise inward migration and multiculturalism. The introduction makes it clear that the viewpoint of the Other lies beyond the bounds of this study. While it is true that such considerations necessitate a full-length work, I nevertheless feel that an opportunity to translate critical multiculturalism to something more “inter”, something messier and more vigorous, has been lost by that exclusion. And yet, accents do mingle in this collection, accents informed by discourses of race, gender and, crucially with regards to inward migration in Ireland, class. Strangely, the latter variable is not flagged up in the introduction, an omission rectified, however, by Charlotte McIvor’s solid and compelling research.

Opening with a reminder of Patrick Lonergan’s injunction that “it is important not to exaggerate the value of white middle-class writers producing plays for white-middle class audiences about the marginalization of Ireland’s most recent immigrants” (2004, 150), McIvor’s paper explores the work of

three white Irish-born male playwrights, Donal O’Kelly, Declan Gorman, and Charlie O’Neill. It is not only thematic preoccupations that attracted McIvor to these writers but also their longstanding involvement with the Irish community arts movement, a movement that emerged out of what was possibly the worst period of the Troubles, the 1970s. McIvor’s socially situated analysis provides an overview of community theatre on the island. Demonstrating awareness of discursive interaction between race and genre, it is a useful essay which could function as a roadmap, or at least spark ideas, among writers wishing to construct the subaltern as speaking/seeking/seeing subject, or among those wishing to facilitate participation and creation out on the protean margins, a space always moving beyond and around narrow binarisms. This sense of marginal restlessness is evident throughout Amanda Tucker’s analysis of short and long fiction. Tucker’s contribution underpins the pivotal point that “a wider context than an immigrant/native binary is necessary to truly grasp Irish multiculturalism” (61). Affiliations are manifold. One’s position with regard to the centre eschews any notion of stasis. Tucker’s use of the sociological term “transmigration” – suggesting as it does “immigration that is multi-directional, open, and continuous” (61) – is particularly germane to Ireland. Inward migration did not begin with the Celtic Tiger; neither did it begin, as McIvor suggests, in the 1950s. Ireland’s history is one of arrival-departure-arrival, and again. Despite the post-partition drive to construct a single subject north and south, monolithic and Catholic/monolithic and Protestant, Ireland has always been a space of contested identities, a space of identities-in-the-making. Drawing attention to “systemic inequalities of gender, race, and geography” (58), Tucker’s sensitive and balanced political readings of Roddy Doyle, Claire Keegan, Emma Donaghue and Cauvery Madhavan help to highlight the slipperiness of connections and the shiftiness of the centre/periphery divide. Tucker’s analysis of Emma Donaghue’s novel *Landing* (2007) is particularly interesting, drawing attention, as it does, to the potential of “chick lit” for redescribing world, the first step, according to Salman Rushdie, towards “changing it” (1991, 13). Change is sadly absent in Kinga Olszewska’s poem “Site for Sale” discussed in Pilar Villar-Argáiz’s chapter “A Nation of Others’: the Immigrant in Contemporary Irish poetry”. The speaker in the poem, inquiring about a “Site for sale to locals in the area”, is told that she is not local enough despite being resident in the area for ten years. Villar-Argáiz rightly compares this discrimination to “colonial treatment of the Irish by the British” (66). Olszewska is overlooked in favour of a local. And perhaps, to a certain extent, something similar happens in this essay. Whilst her inclusion in a text about Irish born writers is laudable, the brief discussion of her poem could be viewed as an introduction to the real subjects of the piece, Colette Bryce, Mary O’Donnell and Michael O’Loughlin. Spanning urban/rural and north/south divides, Villar-Argáiz’s selection of poets covers a good geographic area, and by including O’Loughlin her paper also incorporates

the perspective of the returned, long-travelled, migrant. These finely-tuned close readings depict an Ireland in which the newly-arrived, conceptualised in the press as “hungry, pushy, shifty, gypsy” (67), are emphatically Other. Nevertheless, the trajectory of this group of essays indicates a general shift in awareness away from mere representation of multiculturalism towards what Edna Longley refers to as “engaging with genuine differences and making them fruitful” (2001, 5, 9). In the final essay in this section Margarita Estévez-Saá suggests that there has been a demonstrable increase in the prevalence of the ethnic Other in contemporary Irish fiction: “An exhaustive study of the Irish novels published since 1990 reveals it is not until the twenty-first century that Irish writers begin to systematically include the representation of immigrants in Irish society” (80). Discussing, among others, Hugo Hamilton’s novel *Hand in the Fire* (2010), possibly the first in Ireland to be written from an eastern European perspective, Estévez-Saá states “Hamilton is able to offer the Irish reader a brilliant example of how the immigrant is able to “enter into the story of the country at last”, becoming “a participant, a player, an insider taking action” (90).

Part II of the collection, “Rethinking Ireland’ as a postnationalist community” effectively argues that Irish writers are interrogating the concept of nation as a fixed entity, offering instead a subject that is radically in process, a subject affiliated with any number of flags or no flag at all. These essays suggest that the old loyalties, congealed in blood and time, are becoming increasingly frayed at the seams. New associations are being invented, and new communities imagined. Identities, as Stuart Hall has pointed out, are not “an essence but a positioning” (1994, 395). Eva Roa White, in a detailed and astute essay entitled “‘Who is Irish?’: Roddy Doyle’s Hyphenated Identities”, coins the useful term “identity migration” to describe such positioning. She uses the phrase to suggest a “diaspora of the mind or inner voyage from one’s state of origin into another that affiliates one to another culture, race, gender or ideology with which one feels a connection” (96), thus infusing identity with a sense of mobility antithetical to the idea of monoculture. Not that Ireland ever was a monocultural space as the author rightly points out. However, like Charlotte McIvor, she places too much emphasis on the 1950s in relation to inward migration. In section I, McIvor, identifying certain groups who have lived in Ireland in small numbers since the 1950s, mentions Jews. By the 1950s the Jewish community in Belfast, a very influential group within the city, had been in existence for approximately ninety years. Otto Jaffe, a German born Jewish businessman, was twice elected Lord Mayor of Belfast. Chaim Herzog, 6<sup>th</sup> president of Israel, was born in Belfast. His father, Yitzhak Halevi Herzog, Chief Rabbi of Israel, had been the spiritual leader of the Belfast congregation from 1916-1919. By 1898, Belfast had a Hebrew National School and two synagogues. There were also smaller Jewish communities in Derry and Lurgan. Another important group, not mentioned at all, was the Italian community. By the mid 1800s Little Patrick Street in Belfast was home



to numerous Italian families: Marconi, Fusco, Rossi, Forte, Notarantonio, Vergatti, Capitano and the Morellis. Italian names listed for Nelson Street includes: Pasquale, Dragonetti, Sacilio and Marcello. This area of Belfast became known as “Little Italy”. The community was, however, broken up and spread across the city as a result of post World War II building development. Leo D’Agostino in an interview for BBC Legacies (2004) describes Italian migration to Ireland as “*pendolare*”. Evoking a sense of constant to and fro, “*pendolare*” also proves an apposite description of Irish harvest migration to Scotland which took place throughout the nineteenth century. Open-ended and multi-directional, it was a transmigration, something not all migrants desire. In Hugo Hamilton’s *Hand in the Fire*, Vid, a Serbian migrant, wants nothing more than to belong somewhere, a single clearly identified somewhere. Escaping the horrors of war in the Balkans, Vid comes to Ireland and tries desperately to fit in, to assimilate. But as Carmen Zamorana Llena states in her nuanced textual analysis of Hamilton’s work in chapter seven: “This approach initially relegates him into a passive, non-participatory existence in his host country, which in turn perpetuates his sense of *heimatlos*” (116). It is only through an act of civic responsibility, “by engaging actively and critically in the life of the country that Vid finds a sense of belonging and is able to transform Ireland into his own *Heimat*” (116). This chapter opens with a brief discussion of Mary Robinson’s attempt to broaden the boundaries of the phrase “the Irish people” by including “all those emigrants and exiles who live beyond the territory of the nation state” (108). Carmen Zamorana Llena concludes by arguing in favour of a move away from this type of ethnic based identity, acknowledging instead the Irishness of the Other within one’s own community. For as Anne Fogarty, drawing on the work of Paul Ricoeur, states “self and Other are mutually constitutive” (121), a position the state is reluctant to accept. Fogarty recognises that literary texts “mirror and reflect upon aspects of the problematic of immigration as enunciated by Irish sociologists and political theorists while also attempting to undo the silence frequently associated with this topic” (122). She argues convincingly that “the short story is a more flexible form than the novel” and thereby “has the capacity to register the effects of social change more rapidly than longer narratives” (123). Her fresh and insightful close readings of a range of stories go some way to proving this point. Drawing attention to an area of Irish literature that is sometimes overlooked, Fogarty observes that “the stories considered in this chapter evidence the conjoint concern of a wide range of writers with the figure of the immigrant” (130). This section concludes with Katarzyna Poloczec very full engagement with the poetry of Sinéad Morrissey, Leontya Flynn, Mary O’Malley and Michael Hayes. Poloczec states that “poetic representations of the ‘new Irish’ by Irish writers tend to be full of lyrical, pensive but, sometimes, also stereotypical depictions” (139). There is a need for greater specificity not only among poets, but also among academics. Phrases, such as migrants

from “the new EU member states” (134), prove unhelpful. This suggests an indistinguishable mass rather than diversity, disposable identities rather than identities in process. Poloczek’s chapter ends with an excellent choice of poem, Michael Haye’s “Survivor” which lists some, not all, of the peoples who have disembarked on Irish shores, reminding us that the unprecedented wave of immigrants associated with the Celtic Tiger was preceded by an unprecedented wave and an unprecedented wave and an unprecedented wave.

“‘The Return of the Repressed’: ‘Performing’ Irishness through Intercultural Encounters” is the third and, containing five chapters, longest section in the collection. Part III opens with Paula Murphy’s “‘Marooned Men in Foreign Cities’: Encounters with the Other in Dermot Bolger’s *The Ballymun Trilogy*” (2010), a work which, according to Murphy, demonstrates “how Irish identity in the twenty-first century must be understood and defined in relation to immigration as well as emigration” (156). Whilst this is undoubtedly true, Bolger’s staging of the plays with the same actors playing different characters from different geographical backgrounds could be viewed as a negation of specificity and a move towards essentialist levelling. However, Murphy’s stalwart and heartfelt defence of Bolger’s delineation of the commonalities of experience and the efficacy that such shared space can unleash in the political arena does much to distance the plays from any notion of a well-meaning liberal humanism intent upon diluting difference. Not that difference remains fixed, it can, and usually does, take on a different patina when the door is opened to our own strangeness. Julia Kristeva’s work on the foreign and Wolfgang Iser’s concept of transculturality provide the theoretical framework for Michaela Schrage-Früh immensely enjoyable essay “‘Like a foreigner / in my native land’: transculturality and Otherness in twenty-first-century Irish poetry”. Schrage-Früh draws on a fairly wide range of poets and, as should be more evident in a collection concerned with the marginalised, places centre stage the work of less well-known, emerging poets, Betty Keogh, Eileen Casey, Siobhan Daffy, and Adenike Adedoyin, concluding her contribution with a discussion of Pat Boran’s poem, “Bread”. It is a pity that more authors in the collection had not moved beyond the tried, the tested, the well-published, and the well-critiqued. Hugo Hamilton’s work, discussed previously, is the subject of chapter twelve, Jason King’s “Irish Multicultural Epiphanies: Modernity and the Recuperation of Migrant Memory in the Writing of Hugo Hamilton”. Beginning with memoir, King offers a critique of Joyce and Hamilton’s shoreline epiphanies, arguing that in *The Speckled People* (2003) “The modernist sensibility of transcendental homelessness is transformed into a less elitist susceptibility to feelings of homesickness, linguistic confusion, and anxieties about belonging that become registers of a ‘new Irish’ identity” (180). Moving on from memoir, King further examines this theme of self-realisation through fracture in Hamilton’s novel *Hand in Fire*, a somewhat ubiquitous text in this collection, and yet there is no sense of traversing old ground. This is an illuminating analysis which shows how a Serbian man, Vid Ćosić, constructs an identity and field of belonging through

identification with the ancestor: “From this anachronistic narrative perspective, Hamilton’s protagonist imagines the complete and utter disempowerment of the would-be emigrant – who has lost any hold on her community and is confronted with expulsion - to be akin to the predicament of the illegal immigrant on the threshold of deportation” (184). Chapter thirteen, “*The Parts: Whiskey, Tea, and Sympathy*”, is an outstanding essay from Katherine O’Donnell exploring a fleeting encounter between an Irish-born radio presenter and a Nigerian-born doctor in Keith Ridgeway’s comic novel, *The Parts* (2003). O’Donnell states: “no more than a few riffs in the jazz symphony of the novel, but these moments reveal so much about the practices of Irish identity and culture that they bear a forensic attention” (190), an assertion effortlessly supported by her incisive and very human reading. Part III concludes with Charles I. Armstrong’s essay “Hospitality and Hauteur: Tourism, Cross-cultural Space, and Ethics in Irish Poetry”. No serious engagement with multiculturalism in contemporary Ireland would be complete without a recognition of the important role tourism has played in changing the social fabric of the country. Tourists, invariably translated into an iconic and homogenising “the”, have in many instances been othered as much, if not more, than inward migrant workers. Moreover, their solid contribution to the economic and cultural vibrancy of the nation is frequently dismissed or simply ignored by cultural critics. Armstrong’s essay is therefore essential. It is also particularly satisfying as it interrogates the ersatz and elitist traveller/tourist dichotomy, a narrow, and tremendously tenacious, binarism. Examining a selection of poetry by Derek Mahon, Sinéad Morrissey, Mary O’Donnell, and Seamus Heaney, this analysis of literary representations of tourists ends on a positive note, “Heaney’s gesture of welcome” (212).

The concluding section of the book opens with “Towards a Multiracial Ireland: *Black Baby’s* Revision of Irish Motherhood”. Maureen T. Reddy’s reading of Clare Boylan’s ground breaking novel, published in 1988, foregrounds gender and, in particular, motherhood as crucial variables in the construction of an effective and fruitful interculturalism. Reddy argues that Boylan’s novel makes a case for “a thoroughgoing reassessment of Irishness and womanhood themselves, separately and together, positing antiracism as the requisite foundation for that reassessment” (217). In this lucid essay, Reddy argues very convincingly that interrogations of the racial Other, and reconfigurations of that construct, are utterly dependent upon a radical revision of constructions of Irish femininity, especially the mother. In chapter sixteen, “Beginning History Again: Gendering the Foreigner in Emer Martin’s *Baby Zero*” (2007), Wanda Balzano effectively problematises any simplistic approach to interculturalism, flagging up the all important intersection of gender and class: “What needs to be added to this broad parallel is the consideration of how women experience gender differently because of their access to or lack of social privilege” (237). Not that these two variables can be cleanly separated from race. Balzano makes it clear that social privilege is “often based on the grounds of race and even

degrees of skin colour” (236). Balzano also highlights racism and stereotyping amongst migrants themselves which is important because “if these overlapping hierarchies are ignored, we run the risk of creating a feminism that serves only the interests of women who have more privilege” (238). This is a useful essay; it nudges, prods and generally shakes things up. Moreover, it draws attention to the role of the press in the perpetuation of racist attitudes, something which really should have been given much more attention – possibly a chapter – in this collection. The following essay, “‘Goodnight and Joy Be with You All’: Tales of Contemporary Dublin City Life”, is Loredana Salis’ fascinating engagement with Dublin drama. Salis focuses on Paul Mercier’s unpublished *The Dublin Trilogy* (1995-1998), Sebastian Barry’s *The Pride of Parnell Street* (2007), and Dermot Bolger’s *The Parting Glass* (2011) in an analysis which, at times, makes use of the vernacular, thus helping to transport the reader into a Dublin cityscape. Highlighting different periods in Dublin’s recent history, these plays work well together. Mercier sets his play at the height of the economic boom. In his work Ireland is a building site, a betwixt and between, signifying “the unfinished project of modernisation, suspended between its haunting past and the desire for globalisation” (252). In Barry’s play, set at the turn of the century, inner city Dublin is an austere terrain in which “there is no place for those who do not conform or fail to actively participate in the country’s economy” (250). The transnational movement at the end of Bolger’s play offers more hope. His protagonist states that the only country he belongs to is his “wife”, and that he now feels ready to enter his “native city like a foreigner” (252), meaning he now feels ready to accept his own strangeness, a prerequisite for accepting the Other. The book concludes with David Clark’s ruminations on Irish crime fiction, “Mean Streets, New Lives: the Representations of Non-Irish Immigrants in Recent Irish Crime Fiction”. Discussing the genre, Clark states that “Even the recent ‘appropriation’ of the genre by transgressive non-white, non-male or non-heterosexual protagonists has failed to alter the fact that racism, like sexism, is a ‘necessary element’ of crime fiction” (257). This is a statement that clearly requires explication. None was forthcoming. Nevertheless, this is an interesting essay that, analysing a wide range of texts, provides detailed close readings and a comprehensive overview of the genre in contemporary Irish writing. Ending on an encouraging note, Clark’s chapter concludes a stimulating and insightful collection of essays which without doubt is essential reading for any scholar interested in contemporary Irish fiction, multiculturalism or postcolonial theory. *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland* is also an accessible, eminently readable, text. It is a book that could, should and hopefully will be read by people outside the academy. The publication of this collection comes at a time when racist attacks in Belfast, following the pastor and the politician’s remarks, have escalated. Once again the word is made flesh.

Clare McCotter

Walsh Fintan (ed.), *That Was Us: Contemporary Irish Theatre and Performance*, London, Oberon Books, 2013, pp. 256. ISBN 978-17831-9035-5.

A few years ago, Fintan Walsh challenged audiences with his groundbreaking edited collection of plays, *Queer Notions: New Plays and Performances from Ireland* (published by Cork UP in 2010), which for the first time recorded the work of contemporary queer Irish playwrights and performers. This recent edited volume is another compelling effort that acts, once again, as testimony to the vitality of contemporary Irish performance, in spite of major cutbacks in the arts in Ireland over the last fifteen years. *That Was Us...* takes its lead from the connections of performers, practitioners, companies, venues with the Dublin Theatre Festival from 2007 to 2013, and was commissioned by the Irish Theatre Institute. The title is taken from ANU Production's site-specific piece, *The Boys of Foley Street* (2012), a work which features in several essays that make up the book, and rightly so. "I borrow this line as the book's title", Walsh admits, "[...] because it serves to remind us of the ongoing role theatre and performance have to play in exploring questions of identity, responsibility, and civic participation" (1).

The five parts that make up the collection – "Theatres of Testimony", "Auto/Biographical Performance", "Bodies out of Bounds", "Placing Performance", and "Touring Performance" – are focused on key political, social, and cultural issues of present-day Ireland, emphasizing on the promising future of Irish theatre and performance. More scholarly, theoretical works by academics in the field of Theatre and Performance Studies are complemented and enriched by emotionally-charged first-hand recollections by practitioners – including pieces by the ANU Productions Co-Artistic Director Louise Lowe, the actor Dylan Tighe from *The Stomach Box*, the dancer John Scott, the writer Michael West, and the co-founder and Co-Artistic Director of *Bronketalkers* Gary Keegan. In this, the book departs from the conventional academic publication, and clearly aims at a much broader audience, as perhaps implied by the title – performance is where "we" all speak to our own personal and public traumas, past haunts, yet with a will to move on and to effect change in the world that surrounds us, here and now.

In Walsh's introductory essay, "The Power of the Powerless: Theatre in Turbulent Times", we are led to recall the peculiarities of "theatre and performance in a time of crisis" (2), during which Ireland has moved from the economic boom of the Celtic Tiger to recession, and, more recently, has witnessed the scandals ensuing from revelations of State and Church involvement in child and woman abuse (the 2009 Murphy and Ryan, and the 2013 McAleese reports). This has been responded to by the artists gathered in the volume, says Walsh, through recourse to an engagement with the concepts of "space" and "place", which in the collection is exemplified by site-specific and site-responsive performance; "remembering, witnessing, and questioning

responsibility”, as shown mainly by documentary theatre; “staging marginalised and minor stories”, such as those of queer and/or post-queer subjects following the decriminalisation of homosexuality, of working class citizens, and of other marginalised groups; and “feeling and affect” (10-16). Walsh has previously interrogated contemporary performance and culture from the standpoint of scholarship on feeling(s) and affect(s), as in his recent *Theatre and Therapy* (2013); and, indeed, this seems to form a common ground among the seventeen essays and reflections collected in *That Was Us...*, spanning biographical performance to adaptations for the stage, contemporary dance, and plays for children, among others. What Walsh has in mind is

an affective power, mainly trading in a politics of feeling, emotion, and sensation (rather than rhetoric), which seems to appropriately capture and intervene in the variously shamed, anxious, and disaffected moods that characterise our times. In this it can be seen as a response to tangible economic, political, and social difficulties, but it might also be interpreted as a fiery antidote to the steely discourse of austerity, and even political and religious cynicism. (15)

Walsh does not fail to do justice to the commitment and support shown to the arts by newly established statutory and other organisations and bodies during the first decade of the 2000s, such as the National Academy of Dramatic Art at Trinity, the National Campaign for the Arts, Culture Ireland, as well as the “ReViewed” and the “Next Stage” strands at Dublin Theatre Festival. In post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, companies have been suffering from major cutbacks for the production of their works, and thus have been forced to ensure a maximum chance of economic success in terms of return from money invested in projects: “This shift has gravely impacted upon the economic lives of artists [...] but it also altered the way work is made, and the kind of work that’s made” (3). This is a crucial aspect which Irish practitioners are increasingly called to deal with by inventing innovative approaches to their work.

*That Was Us...* brings together different generations of artists, while shedding light on traditionally marginalised sectors of performance-making in Ireland, namely, dance and children’s theatre. As such, the book offers both fresh takes on more established and critically discussed works, and innovative looks at the work of, for instance, Michael Keegan-Dolan and his company, Fabulous Beast Dance Theatre, as well as the children’s theatre company, Theatre Lovett. Concern with national matters is counterpoised by the international profile of Irish theatre, which is explored in greater detail at the end of the book. In the essays by scholars, the internationally acclaimed works by Martin McDonagh and Conor McPherson, and the biographical plays by Marina Carr and Emma Donoghue – playwrights who all belong to the much-celebrated 1990s generation – alternate with the canonical plays and with new adaptations for the stage of J.M. Synge, Sean O’Casey, and James Joyce, as well as Sebastian Barry and Samuel Beckett. New playwriting

includes the pieces of Úna McKeivitt's, Veronica Dyas, Amy Conroy, and Mark O'Halloran, whose take on queer subjectivities on stage has been welcomed by audiences, critics, and academics, and the trilogy by ANU Productions – *World's End Lane* (2010), *Laundry* (2011), and *The Boys of Foley Street* (2012), and, the pieces of documentary theatre of Brokentalkers – *Silver Stars*, *The Blue Boy*, and *Have I No Mouth*, which the company presented from 2008 to 2012. The artists and characters' voices are intermingled with the activity of established and new companies and groups; among them, the aforementioned ANU Productions, Brokentalkers, and Theatre Lovett; THEATREclub; The Company; THISISPOPBABY; The Stomach Box company; The Corn Exchange; PanPan; Rough Magic Theatre Company; and the eponymous Druid Theatre Company, a continuing example of success not only at home, but also abroad, mainly due to the skilful artistic direction by Garry Hynes.

Part I begins with the leading theatre scholar Brian Singleton's reading of ANU Production's trilogy, in which the company explores the potential of site-specific performance to relate to pressing social issues such as prostitution, woman abuse at the Magdalene Laundries, and the heroin epidemic in 1970s and 1980s Dublin. As recalled by Singleton himself, in their works "[r]eal life was as much performance itself as the theatrical one but it was also spectating, moving in and out of the spaces, journeys of the performers, and intervening occasionally with the dialogue" (37). Similarly for the Brokentalkers and their "theatre of the real", where, says Charlotte McIvor, they constantly push limits to extremes, rejecting conventional dramaturgy in favour of "staged interruptions in form and genre" (55) as they shift the subject of their work from gay men's coming of age from the 1950s to the 1980s, to Ireland's Reformatory and Industrial Schools, to meditating upon death. In Part II, Oonagh Murphy's essay on female-authored queer performance exemplifies a tendency in queer drama to "navigate the subtleties of the documentary form, creating spaces for queer bodies to exist and be recognised" while also challenging the homogenisation of the legislative, medical, and social spheres by thrusting LGBTQ issues centre stage (74). Still in Part II, Helen Meany discusses three biographical plays – Carr's *16 Possible Glimpses* (2011), on Anton Chekhov; Donoghue's *The Talk of the Town* (2012), on Maeve Brennan; and The Stomach Box's *No Worst There is None* (2009), on Gerard Manley Hopkins – that all pose interesting questions as to the meaning of "fiction" and "truth", and most importantly, where the boundaries lie between them and how, as audiences, we are supposed to relate to their crossing. Part III opens with Michael Seaver's reading of the role played by choreographer and director Michael Keegan-Dolan in the development of contemporary dance in Ireland, something he accomplished from his unusual position as "insider and outsider" in the Irish arts and culture. In works such as the Midlands Trilogy – *Giselle* (2003), *Bull* (2005), and *James son of James* (2007) – or his and his company's more recent *Rian* (2011), Keegan-Dolan shows how "the

spoken word can be betrayed by the silent body”, where memory is always part of a collective project (100, 113). The collection continues with Eimear Beardmore tracing the novel approaches that characterise plays for children by Theatre Lovett – *The Girl Who Forgot to Sing Badly* (2010) and *The House That Jack Filled* (2012) – which move from a desire to bring different generations of audience together by sharing a common passion and commitment towards “theatre” (128). James Hickson opens Part IV with his discussion of representations of working-class Dubliners as they have appeared at the Dublin Theatre Festival, in works by Sebastian Barry, The Corn Exchange, ANU Productions, Phillip McMahon, Mark O’Halloran, and Amy Conroy. Trish McTighe then offers an account of Samuel Beckett as “icon of the European modernist avant-garde” as well as “a source of Irish cultural pride” (169), calling forth a reassessment of the effect of the role played by the relationship between art and commerce/the market on society in general. Lastly, Part V deals with the impact of Irish theatre on the international stage: Tanya Dean and Sara Keating offer different perspectives on the work of Druid Theatre Company, and of the marathons *DruidCasey* (2004) and *DruidMurphy* (2012) in particular, and Peter Crawley frames the works of Irish companies within a European context.

The practitioners’ reflections at the end of the sections emerge as pure jewels improving the overall quality of this challenging and timely collection, as when Tigh remembers his encounter with Romeo Castellucci and his Societas Raffaello Sanzio’s *Genesi*, which was presented at the Dublin Theatre Festival in 2000, or when Scott takes us back to his involvement with The Living Theatre after watching the Dublin performance of *Prometheus Changed* (1978) – two very powerful momentary releases of feelings and emotions centre stage. Elsewhere, Lowe, West, and Keegan in their reflection pieces question their own roles as theatre practitioners, demonstrating that there is also so much more to theatre than can be said or grasped.

*That Was Us...* follows by a year the publication of *The Oberon Anthology of Contemporary Irish Plays*, edited by Thomas Conway, with which the highly esteemed London-based publisher demonstrated their investment in the contemporary performance scene beyond Britain. It may very well function as a companion piece to it, thus reminding us that Irish theatre still has and will continue to have so much to offer.

Samuele Grassi