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Review of Ailbhe McDaid's *The Poetics of Migration in Contemporary Irish Poetry*

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This minor ‘imperfection’ aside, *National Identities and Imperfections: Unbecoming Irishness* is a commendable addition to the field of Irish Studies with an overall high quality of contributions and fascinating insights into contemporary Irish literature and beyond.

Ailbhe McDaid, *The Poetics of Migration in Contemporary Irish Poetry*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). 265pp. ISBN: 9783319638041, £89.99

Review by Audrey Robitailié, University of Edinburgh.

Part of the ‘New Directions in Irish and Irish-American Literature’ series, this timely monograph examines contemporary Irish poetry through the perspective of migration and memory. The book interrogates how today’s poets relate to the Irish history of (e)migration by acknowledging, discussing, or dismissing it in their poetical renderings of their own migratory experiences.

Focusing on migrations from Ireland, Ailbhe McDaid’s study uses Aleida Assmann’s four forms of memory — individual, social, political and cultural — to which she adds a fifth: intertextual memory. Her theoretical framework also includes Pierre Nora’s *lieux de mémoire*, Bachelard’s *Poetics of Space*, and Deleuze and Guattari’s nomads. The book offers close readings of poems by twelve poets, including five women: Eamon Wall, Greg Delanty, Paul Muldoon, Vona Groarke, Sara Berkeley, Bernard O’Donoghue, Martina Evans, Colette Bryce, Harry Clifton, Sinéad Morrissey, Justin Quinn, and Conor O’Callaghan. Each chapter is dedicated to two or three poets, united by a common theme.

The book opens with a chapter on the poetry of Wall, Muldoon and Delanty, examining how the Irish heritage of emigration has influenced their work, both as a burden and as an opportunity. The analyses of all three poets’ oeuvres are steeped in metaphors of fissures and cracks, symbolising the process that McDaid describes. The second chapter discusses the work of two female poets, Groarke and Berkeley. Reflecting the instability of the migrant situation, the imagery of water runs through their verse. While Groarke writes about communication and the distance brought about by migration, Berkeley’s post-pastoral poetry exposes the environment as a universal issue, rather than seeing the land as a personal marker of identity. Chapter Three offers close readings of O’Donoghue, Evans and Bryce, poets who relocated to England, and whose poetry is filled with acts of appearance and disappearance. Finding ways to articulate the relation to the home space, O’Donoghue rewrites myths, Evans uses elements of collective memory, and Bryce makes a very Deleuzian use of lines that echoes the French philosopher’s ‘lines of flight’. In her fourth chapter, McDaid describes Clifton’s and Morrissey’s poetic takes on marginality, otherness, and peripherality as writings of migration experiences. She ends very appropriately by discussing Quinn’s and O’Callaghan’s poetry in the final chapter, focusing on the way in which technology affects the experience of migration. For these two poets, the dichotomy of home and abroad is no longer valid because of the possibilities and challenges created by technology. Their poetry, marked by transitions, is an exploration of these. The bibliography, divided between primary texts and other works, as well as the index referencing both poetical and critical authors and theoretical concepts, will be a useful starting point for researchers of migration poetry in the Irish context.

Argáiz's *Literary Visions of Multicultural Ireland*. Yet, despite her wish to provide as wide a spectrum of poets as is feasible within the scope of one monograph, one omission remains significant: the range of poets under examination would have been fuller and more representative of Irish poetry had it included Irish-language writers. As Máirín Nic Eoin has demonstrated in her 2013 article in *Breac*, transnational Irish-language works abound: the poetry of Seán Hutton, who migrates between Ireland and England, of Derry O'Sullivan, who lives in Paris, of Louis de Paor, who emigrated to Australia before returning to Ireland, or of Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, who has a long-standing connection with Turkey, would have been valuable additions to the corpus. Although briefly mentioned, the last three poets are not examined in detail. Ní Dhomhnaill's mermaid poems, for instance, would have offered an evocative parallel to Groarke and Berkeley's water imagery, as well as to O'Donoghue's reuse of myths.

Ailbhe McDaid's monograph is a welcome addition to the field of migration literature, offering a stimulating study of memory and ethics in migration poetry in the Irish context. It laudably seeks to go beyond borders, analyzing works that are marked by the fluidity of water, the transitional nature of travel, or by the new routes opened by technology, and finds itself nevertheless characterized by them, as migration studies are bound to be. Seamus Heaney claimed in *The Redress of Poetry* that "It is essential that the vision of reality which poetry offers should be transformative". *The Poetics of Migration* is an essential step towards the transformation of the field of (e)migration literature through the study of this transformative poetry.

Brian Cliff, *Irish Crime Fiction. Crime Files*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. 216pp. ISBN: 9781137561879, £79.99

Review by David M. Clark, The Amergin University Institute of Research in Irish Studies.

The contemporary boom in the popularity of Irish crime fiction has not, it would seem, been met with a corresponding echo from critics and scholars from the field of Irish Studies. Indeed, the present monograph and the earlier edited collections by Elizabeth Mannion (*The Contemporary Irish Detective Novel* [2016]) and Declan Burke (*Down These Green Streets: Irish Crime Writing in the 21st Century* [2012]) represent the only book-length contributions to the study of the genre in Ireland. While Cliff recognises the appearance of a growing number of articles, he still bemoans the dearth of critical writing on the subject, a shortage which, he hopes, his contribution will help to mitigate. While the author presents his work as 'a survey, not a history' of crime writing from Ireland, with the exception of a few brief mentions of earlier writers, Cliff's work is basically dedicated to writing which has appeared after the ground-breaking publication of James Connolly's *Every Dead Thing* in 1999, that is to say, Irish crime writing from the twenty-first century.

The book is divided into four main sections, concerning, respectively, crime fiction from Northern Ireland, contemporary crime writing from the Republic of Ireland, the role of women within Irish crime fiction, and transnational themes found within Irish examples of the genre. Crime writing from Northern Ireland, Cliff argues, is constantly faced with the uncomfortable heritage of the Troubles thriller and the difficulty of writing 'ordinary decent'

Review of Irish Studies in Europe



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Abstract

This is the review section for *RISE*.

Reflecting the times we live in, McDaid's monograph offers a refreshing change of perspective on transnational poetry. Although she begins with the overused image of Mary Robinson's candle, she updates the terms of the critical debate by moving away from the rhetoric of diaspora and emigration, to a thought-provoking discussion of migration. Echoing David Lloyd's discussion in a 2013 article published in *Breac*, 'Diaspora' is a term that claims the writer for a particular homeland, whereas 'migration' is a more neutral word that gives freedom of movement back to the individual. Through this reflection on the meaning of migration, McDaid is thus moving away from the notions of rootedness and attachment to the land. Her focus is on memory rather than places. She notes: 'Migration is the suspension between cultures as well as the perception of belonging/not-belonging; migration inheres not merely in the act of departure but also in the ongoing processes of arriving that are instigated by the initial act' (4). By focusing on migration literature, McDaid gives her readers an opportunity to consider poetry through an analysis devoid of moorings to the yet fertile ground of national literatures. This move away from landlocked poetry to the liminal creative interstices of the migrant voice is all the more appreciated in a contemporary world restrained by ever-present borders.

Using the same homophonic phrase as Jahan Ramazani in his *Transnational Poetics* (2009), McDaid rightfully remarks that 'Contemporary poetry exposes the limitations of a place-privileging critical approach that prioritises roots over routes' (xi). It seems paradoxical then that immigrant poets are not studied, although they are referred to, if the focus is to be put on journeys rather than heritage. If we are to favour routes over roots, the focus on memory is perhaps misleading. As proposed by Bertrand Westphal in his 2011 *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, a geocritical approach that offers comparisons of the ways Irish poets depict Ireland, America (north and south), and other places may seem relevant in this regard. Yet this perspective goes against the ethics of the monograph, in light of the discussion on migration literature initiated above. The field of migration literature in fact seems paradoxically bound to carry on the pitfalls it recognizes in previous research. The book thus exemplifies the inherent contradictions of a literature of migration, seeking to move away from territorial constraints and yet inevitably bound to spatial considerations of border-crossings.

Bridging a gap in the existing research on the topic, McDaid's attention to poets who have been overlooked in academic studies, or not examined with a migration focus, is also praiseworthy. The careful inclusion of five female poets attempts to remedy what she sees as a significant shortcoming in studies of migration literature. Although she mentions greats like Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin or Eavan Boland, she further chooses to focus on lesser-studied feminine poetic voices such as Sara Berkeley or Colette Bryce. In addition, the book will contribute conveniently to research on specific poets, since the chapters and subsections are neatly structured around a single poet's oeuvre, even though McDaid endeavours to establish connections between the works she examines.

The author explicitly and understandably narrows down her study of migration poetry by looking only at migrations from Ireland, seeing that immigrant poets have been the subject of other academic works, since it is a blooming area of research, as evidenced by Eva Bourke and Borbála Faragó's *Landing Places: Immigrant Poets in Ireland* and Pilar Villar-