

Sinéad Moynihan, *'Other People's Diasporas': Negotiating Race in Contemporary Irish and Irish American Culture*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013. 242 pages. \$39.95 USD.

We are not only told by Americans to go out of our native land to Africa, and there enjoy our freedom – for we must go there in order to enjoy it – but Irishmen newly landed on our soil, who know nothing of our institutions, nor of the history of our country, whose toil has not been mixed with the soil of the country as ours – have the audacity to propose our removal from this, the land of our birth.

Frederick Douglass, 1849

If Frederick Douglass made his transatlantic voyage from America to Ireland and back today, one wonders how he would reconcile the facts that the grandchild of an Irish citizen who has lived his or her whole life outside of Ireland can obtain Irish citizenship, but a child of immigrants born in Ireland cannot. The grandchild, despite knowing nothing of Irish institutions and history and certainly never having mixed his or her 'toil' with Irish 'soil', can claim citizenship while the child born and raised in Ireland cannot. Douglass would likely be appalled at the 'audacity' not only of the 2004 referendum but also at Fine Gael T. D. Leo Varadkar's 2008 suggestion that Ireland pay immigrant workers a sort of severance and then deport them back home. Like Douglass, Sinéad Moynihan examines Irish racial attitudes in light of immigration. In *"Other People's Diasporas": Negotiating Race in Contemporary Irish and Irish American Culture*, she focuses her study by looking at white Irish and Irish-American relationships with African immigrants in particular, a fitting choice given the long history of connections and conflicts between those groups. As Moynihan sifts through Irish literary and political examples of white Irish writers using African immigrants to understand their own experience of race and diaspora, she is sure to mention the egregious instances of racism displayed by Leo Varadkar and others, but that is not her primary goal. Instead, citing what she calls the 'historical reluctance of Irish Studies scholars to engage with issues of race' (p.9), she devotes her study to parsing the racist assumptions that inform the work and words of white Irish cultural critics and artists. These writers have in many cases responded with integrity, intellectual commitment, and compassion to the demographic changes Ireland saw between 1998 and 2008, but when they engage with 'other people's diasporas', they can fall prey to what bell hooks called 'eating the other' some fifteen years ago: as Moynihan explains, they fall prey to the 'impulse to

recolonize and appropriate' (p.39). Committed to exploring how this can happen despite the best of intentions, Moynihan provides readers with a number of careful evaluations of whether the work of Irish writers, ranging from critics to playwrights to stand-up comics to short story writers to film directors, goes far enough to confront the racial inequality that has become so endemic to modern Irish culture.

A few key claims that underpin Moynihan's analysis of how race and racialized thinking inform Irish cultural politics stand out; she introduces most of them early on and refers back to them throughout the book. She is not always the originator of these claims, but her application of them to the texts under analysis is compelling, and she has a gift for putting each text into dialogue with other texts and contexts. Further, anyone new to criticism on race in Irish literature and culture, particularly in the Celtic Tiger era and beyond, will appreciate her survey of the most influential writers on this subject.

One of the ideas that underpins the whole book is that the Irish tend to make analogies between their experiences of oppression and immigration and those of others. She shows again and again how these analogies can have liberal intentions but be used for conservative ends. For example, she draws on Steve Garner's work to explain how the Irish famine can be recalled both to inspire sympathy with asylum-seekers and refugees and to stoke defensiveness against foreign invaders who, like the English, will wreak havoc on the country (pp.20-21). Even when the liberal intentions remain liberal, she shows how they can be characterized by a failure to acknowledge the difference white privilege makes. Moynihan is very careful to trace the uneven power dynamics that characterize the experiences of two frequently compared groups, the 'New Irish' in Ireland (African immigrants, for example) and the 'New Irish' in the United States (white Irish immigrants to the U.S. in the 1980s and 1990s). Again, the liberal intention, flowing from the 'historical duty' approach to the treatment of immigrants to Ireland, would be for the Irish to treat their own 'New Irish' with humanity because of the way their 'New Irish' relatives or own selves were treated and continue to be treated in the U.S. However, she uses my own work and the work of Diane Negra and Joe Cleary, for example, to show how that generous intention can also reinforce Irish victimhood and secure the innocence of Irish whiteness (pp.15, 23-25, 55). In that same vein, she also cites Michael Malouf's valuable description of how difficult it is to balance 'self-criticism and historical retrieval', and we see that balancing act on display in texts that engage with the transatlantic movement of Irish immigrants and African slaves: Donal O'Kelly's play *The Cambria* (p.127), Joseph O'Connor's novel *Star of the Sea* (pp.46-49), and literary

and historical critics' formulation and deployment of the concept of the 'Green Atlantic' (pp.41-42).

Another central claim is that cross-racial relationships and mixed-race Irish people will not usher in the utopia they seem to promise. Instead, as Moynihan shows, the revolutionary potential of mixing is frequently short-circuited by any one of a number of tendencies: an underdeveloped understanding of racial tolerance (Roddy Doyle's presentation of father Larry in 'Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner', pp.197-98); the assumption that racism only exists in the diaspora and is only adopted by 'New Irish' immigrants to foreign lands because they become initiated into 'structures of white power' (Sinéad Moriarty's novel *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*, p.202); an underappreciation of how melodrama short-circuits cross-racial empathy (Ronan Noone's play *The Blowin of Baile Gall*, p.132, and Emma Donoghue's novel *Landing*, p.207); the assumption of or difficulty challenging the idea of a 'unified white Irish self' in favor of transnational Irish identities (O'Connor's novel *Redemption Falls*, pp.56-59, and comedian Des Bishop's DVD *In the Name of the Fada*, p.161); and the insufficient demands that artists make on themselves and their audiences. In a chapter treating Eugene Brady and Pierce Brosnan's film *The Nephew*, for example, Moynihan claims that the film's Irish-African-American protagonist, Chad Egan-Washington, is meant to recall Thin Lizzy's Phil Lynott, popularly seen as 'the mixed-race embodiment of the possibilities for contemporary multicultural Ireland' (p.169) before refreshingly pulling in American theories of the tragic mulatto (pp.178-79) and David Theo Goldberg's discussion of the mixed-race subject to explain that mixed-race people do not embody the coming together of different races as much as they 'fi[x] in place the racializing project . . . . naturaliz[ing] racial assumption, marking mixed-ness as an aberrant' (p.180). Brady may envision Chad as the embodiment of Ireland's racial future, but as Moynihan points out, 'The white Irish viewer of *The Nephew* is not unsettled by his or her confrontation with racial otherness in the film . . . because it has been domesticated' (p.179). Any future multicultural society truly based on equity will require white Irish to give up power and rethink Irish identity.

A final claim that frequently turns up in Moynihan's book is that Ireland looks to the United States as it struggles to respond to demographic shifts and grapple with its racial future (pp.163-64). It is important to note, as Moynihan does, that after decades of considering themselves superior to Americans who couldn't seem to manage racial difference (She cites Des Bishop's DVD *Live at Vicar St.* for an amusing echo of this claim, p.145), the Irish are examining the American drama of civil rights and multiculturalism for lessons. If the Irish manage to

avoid American mistakes, of course, this could be a good thing, but it is more likely that the Irish will struggle to see their own racism, whether in the past (as demonstrated by racism against Travellers at home and 'Pakis' in London) or the present (a likely outcome if Ireland follows the American lead of embracing only a surface multiculturalism and eventually pursuing a post-racial fantasy). Again, Moynihan is not the first to note the shadow that America's racial experience casts over Ireland, but she deploys it in original and fascinating ways. Her multilayered reading of Jim Sheridan's film *In America*, for example, looks at how Irish and American racial dramas, dramas of the 'New Irish' in both places, are worked out in the film (pp.163–65). She reads *In America* as a response to 9/11 and the rhetoric preceding the 2004 referendum, showing that the white Irish family at the centre of the film provides a way for [white] American audiences to heal from the trauma of 9/11, retain their association of the dangers and exploitation witnessed in illegal immigration with immigrants of color instead of innocent white [Irish] immigrants, and, in the tradition of *Huck Finn* and many American novels and films, use black male characters as vehicles for their own self-realization (pp.182–92).

In the book's epilogue, Moynihan asks us critics to monitor how art will deal with these issues now that emigration out of Ireland is surging again. How will the tendency to analogize, to misunderstand cross-racial relationships and the mixed-race subject, to compare different groups of 'New Irish', fare if both New Irish in Ireland, returned New Irish from the U.S., and Irish who never left might now be joining the diaspora again? Specific suggestions of what to look for are not quite clear in this closing moment of the book, but based on the works of art, popular culture, and criticism that Moynihan has surveyed, I believe she wants us to challenge artists and critics to push viewers and readers out of their comfort zones and question works that allow white Irish and Irish-American audiences and readers to enjoy their racial and class privilege unchallenged (p.155). Merely pointing to connections between Irish and African immigrants and migrants or making gestures of 'ethical imagination', as Luke Gibbons has described it (pp.39, 153), will not be sufficient. This might leave some readers feeling like writers who engage with these issues can do nothing right or that she is asking Irish writers to create political statements and not art. On the contrary, Moynihan shines a light on issues that Irish writers must face. If Ireland continues to look to America for guidance on how to deal with racial diversity (or perhaps Canada as Moynihan suggests), its critics and artists might also come to see that a white critic can be racially progressive and still influenced by a privileged perspective. To take just one example, Des Bishop on

the one hand uses his status as 'returned Yank', as outsider yet insider, to call out the Irish for their racism (pp.146–47). In his DVD *In the Name of the Fada*, Bishop testifies to the transatlantic hybridity of Irish culture by rapping in Irish and featuring a Korean American singing a *sean-nós* song in Donegal Irish (pp.160–61). On the other hand, his unfortunate commentary in the same DVD that his connection to the Irish language is 'genetic' (p.160) and his comparison of 'his experiences of living in Ireland as a white Irish American [to] the experiences of nonwhite immigrants to Ireland' are unethical, Moynihan suggests (p.150). The inescapability of privilege should not make white Irish and Irish-American artists shy away from these topics, but acknowledging this reality should open up room for discussing the pervasiveness of racialized thinking and creating space for honest conversations about the challenges of reimagining not a world without race, but a world where race does not create inequity, whether in art or life.

CATHERINE M. EAGAN  
Las Positas College  
DOI: 10.3366/iur.2015.0187

Shane Alcobia-Murphy, *Medbh McGuckian: The Poetics of Exemplarity*. University of Aberdeen: AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies, 2012. 202 pages. £14.99 GBP.

Leontia Flynn, *Reading Medbh McGuckian*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2014. 200 pages. €31.20 EUR.

Borbála Faragó, *Medbh McGuckian*. Cork: Cork UP, 2014. 225 pages. €56.89 EUR.

Medbh McGuckian is without doubt one of Ireland's leading poets. With an oeuvre comprising thirteen original poetry collections to date she is also among the most prolific of her craft. And yet it was only in 2010, almost three decades after the publication of her debut collection *The Flower Master* (1982), that the first full-length study devoted to this remarkable poet's achievement appeared in print. One reason for this neglect may well be the notorious opaqueness and tantalising quality of McGuckian's work that tends to leave her readers baffled and defies ready-made categories. However, after the pioneering essay collection *The Poetry of Medbh McGuckian: The Interior of Words* (ed. Shane Alcobia-Murphy and Richard Kirkland) saw the light of day in 2010, three monographs by individual scholars have now appeared in quick succession. This in itself is good news for readers and critics of

