The New Irish: Towards a Multicultural Literature in Ireland?

Dr. Luz Mar González Arias
University of Oviedo

Dr. Marisol Morales Ladrón
University of Alcalá

Dr. Asier Altuna-García de Salazar
University of Deusto

Introduction

The major changes that Ireland has undergone in the last decades—the Celtic Tiger years—have triggered the unprecedented arrival of peoples from different parts of the globe. Although traditionally a land of emigrants, Ireland is now transformed by the difference these diasporic subjects embody. The purpose here is to analyse the extent to which the Celtic Tiger has already altered what is known as “Irish literature” and the possibilities of a multicultural agenda within that category.

This article is divided into the three sections that summarise our three contributions to the discussion and that are intimately connected: it opens with an overview of multicultural theory and literary practices that will help determine if such a framework is applicable and/or relevant to the present Irish situation. The second part looks at the literature written by white Irish-born author Roddy Doyle, whose most recent fiction is underpinned by issues of marginality, ethnicity and race. And finally, the third section examines the literary output of some of the many “ethnic minorities” that inhabit Ireland, namely that of the Polish community. We hope this article will help discover similarities and divergences among the different perspectives and artistic discourses gathered here and will ultimately reflect the diversity of contemporary Irish writing.
1. A Taxonomy of New Modes of Writing in Ireland

Luz Mar González Arias
University of Oviedo

The Celtic Tiger phenomenon has deeply transformed the social, political and cultural life of Ireland, one of the most important consequences of this being large-scale immigration. There have been obvious societal changes derived from the arrival of diasporic subjects in a country historically schooled in emigration and used to being the recipient of racialisation in colonial discourses and social practices. The changing faces of this “New Ireland” have been the topic of some recent publications (Kiberd 2005; Faragó; Faragó & Sullivan; Lentin & McVeigh) that address the processes of “othering” that, both historically and currently, have displaced newcomers and any deviations from a supposedly homogeneous Irish identity. However, one question remains to be answered, namely, to what extent have these changes affected and/or are affecting contemporary literary representations in Ireland. It is the aim of this section to offer tentative answers to that complex issue and determine whether or not we can talk of a “multicultural Irish literature”.

But ... what do we mean when we talk about Irish multiculturalism? The term, as has been the case with much theoretical phraseology (colonialism, postcolonialism, hybridity, etc.) has often been utilised from an undesired homogenising praxis that obliterates socioeconomic, geographical and cultural specificities. In other words, using multiculturalism as a free-floating signifier in theoretical and critical discourses has turned the different contexts to which it is applied into a tabula rasa. The dissident voices of a considerable number of theorists and critics have objected to the effects of this kind of umbrella labelling. And so, whereas the concept of “English Literature”, as we knew it decades ago, has been utterly transformed by the rich incursion of diasporic voices into the literary arena of the UK — as John McLeod contends in *Postcolonial London: Rewriting the Metropolis* — it is not unproblematically that we could apply the concept of multiculturalism to what we term “Irish literature”. The topic has become one of the most heated debates within the area of Irish Studies since the onset of the Celtic Tiger era. The move towards a multicultural reality is too young in Ireland and has not been articulated — neither artistically nor critically — in the same ways as in England, due to the many historical, social and cultural differences between both backgrounds.

It could easily be argued that the relationship of the native Irish population with the immigrants of Eastern European, African or Asian countries is not necessarily regulated by the centre/margin, master/slave dichotomies of a colonial past, nor do the diasporic subjects follow a similar pattern: in Ireland immigration has, in general, a deep economic dimension that is not always present in England and that determines much of the activity of the newcomers in the host country. In an interesting contextualised approach to the issue, Declan Kiberd traces the historical roots of the Celtic Tiger by establishing a well-woven link between the times of Parnell and the Celtic Revival and the rapidly changing times of the Tiger (*The Irish Writer and the World* 269-288). Whereas in the past the Irish produced one of the most experimental literatures in Europe — working with the language of the colonisers — the economy, he contends, did not catch up with the high levels of sophistication in the arts. This lack of relationship between economy and literature, Kiberd continues, is also evident today, although with a difference in perspective:

*There is no major celebration or corrosive criticism of these developments [economic developments] in good novels, plays or poetry. There is no Trollopean *The Way We Live Now*, much less a Tom Wolfe-style *Bonfire of the Vanities* even among our younger writers... Many writers find it hard to believe sufficiently in the shiny surfaces of Celtic Tiger Dublin to go to the considerable trouble of rendering them.* (276)

Irish writing has been stigmatised as rooted in myths of authenticity buried in a rural past. Kiberd does mention a few exceptions to the omission of Irish economic successes from the texts, although he perceives the tendency towards a separation between the two spheres of Irish reality as pervasive. His essay was originally written in 2003 which, given the speed of events and the contemporary nature of the subject matter dealt with, makes updating necessary in order to account for the most recent artistic productions and renderings of (Post-)Celtic Tiger Ireland. In a recent interview, Irish poet Celia de Fréine stated:

*Multicultural Ireland has become a reality, but I think it will be some time before a canon of Hiberno-Polish or Hiberno-African writing emerges. If we glance across the Irish Sea at the multicultural cities of our neighbour, the UK, the strength and vibrancy of Anglo-Asian and Anglo-African writing is evident. The UK experienced a significant influx of immigrants*

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1. The author would like to acknowledge Fundación Banco Herrero, and its programme “Ayudas a la Investigación 2007”, for a bursary to work on the project “La influencia del ‘Tigre Celta’ en las manifestaciones artísticas de la Irlanda contemporánea: ¿Los comienzos de una literatura multicultural?".

2. It was later reprinted as a chapter of Kiberd’s *The Irish Writer and the World*, published in 2003. The quotations in this paper are taken from this latter edition.
from its former colonies in the fifties, but it has taken fifty years for their writing to become a major presence in the UK canon. Because of the Celtic Tiger, and a more acute awareness of diverse cultures, I think the birth of multicultural literature in this country will be quicker, more spontaneous and less painful. Already, there are creative writing classes in Dublin for our ethnic minorities. (Gonzalez Arias 152).

Several conclusions can be drawn from de Fréine’s words: first, that multiculturalism of some sorts exists in the country; second, that this reality has not yet been properly reflected in the national canon; and last, that the move towards a multicultural literature will be smoother and somehow faster in Ireland than it was in the UK. We could argue that Irish writing has grown sensitive towards non-canonical modes of expression and authorship in the last decades, especially since women writers have struggled to clear some space for their creativity. This inclusive tendency could make the transition towards a new conceptualisation of “Irish literature” “less painful”, to quote from de Fréine.

In spite of the historical efforts to secure a stable Irish identity, the past has proved too volatile and porous to maintain a successful evenness in definitions of Irishness. For many academics and politicians the Irish have always been prepared to accept pluralism and coexist with diverse social groups. That Ireland was ever monocultural, it has been contended, is no more than a myth, since the arrival of peoples and tribes has pervaded the Irish past, and the bicultural dimension of the island on both sides of the political divide is a landmark of Irish identity. For Mary McAleese the Good Friday Agreement implies deep respect for the Other, at both symbolic and social levels (Kibberd & Longley vii-ix), a discourse much appreciated given the current diversity of the social map of the island.

Although Irish nationalism was based on the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion characteristic of nation-formation processes, the Irish, it has been repeatedly contended, are unable to display signs of racism, themselves the recipients of much stereotyping as the eternal Others for the English and North-Americans. That the Irish have been conceptualised as the “blacks” of Europe and North America (Ignatiev) is part of the national psyche. However, racism and racist attitudes towards the so-called new Irish — adopted Irish, immigrants, asylum seekers and refugees, among other groups — have been displayed on the streets of Irish cities during the last decade and it is probably through writing that the most interesting attempts at reconciliation are being enacted.

Whereas Kibberd’s point cannot be underestimated — that Irish literature does not completely reflect the changing faces of the country — it is also worth noticing that Irish-born authors and minority writers are altering the literary maps of the country as well as received notions of canonicity. The economic recession of the last year in Ireland is being perceived as the death of the Tiger. The artistic consequences of this are difficult to foresee. But even if the ethnic communities working in the country at present go back to their homelands, some will necessarily stay and continue to leave their impact on the national literature. The following pages outline a taxonomy of contemporary Irish writing by or on ethnic minorities, with a small (far from exhaustive) list of examples in each category. It is designed to help answer the question this Round Table discussion stemmed from by offering an overview of the current Irish literary diversity.

A first taxonomical division to account for the presence of new subject matters in Irish writing is offered by what I call “the racialisation of the Irish”. Ireland’s racialised past is invoked to halt the tendency towards the stereotyping and stigmatised Othering of the ethnic and racial communities of the Celtic Tiger (how could a people historically discriminated against project racist attaince onto others?). And whether or not this is being the case at the level of everyday life, since the 1990s Irish-born writers — mainly but not exclusively — have been reflecting the difficulties the Irish had in different waves of emigration and their representation as racialised subjects. Lia Mills’ 2005 Nothing Simple is an interesting instance of this strategic perspective. Although the novel has been read as an essay in domesticity and gender differences within the household (Hayes 2005), what makes this novel particularly relevant at the moment of its publication is its whole plot. Nothing Simple is the story of an Irish family who travel to the USA in the 1980s and spare none of the difficulties they encounter in their search for a green card and their adjustment to the new sociological and geographical environments. The sense of alienation that the white English-speaking characters are confronted with in America is at times poignantly described by Mills. Reading this text within the context of Celtic Tiger, Ireland infuses a sense of empathy with migrant populations elsewhere and interrogates the category of the “Other” — would this sense of alienation be increased if Mills’ characters where black African asylum seekers in Dublin? What do we mean when we talk about “marginal” Irish realities? The novel was published around the time when many of these debates were being

3 The question that still remains to be solved and that will probably be at the centre of Irish literary debates in the next decades is what we mean when we talk about “Irish writing”. It is outside the scope of this essay to answer such a question. However, and for the sake of clarity, the term “Irish literature” will be utilised here to refer to the body of creative work published in Ireland, regardless of the birthplace of the author.
kindled by politicians, sociologists and intelligentsia in general and such a reading becomes necessarily more urgent and relevant than the domestic theme woven into it.

Gish Jen’s “Who’s Irish?” (3-16) further delves into the processes of othering the Irish have been historically subject to. In the story that gives Jen’s collection its title, a Chinese grandmother reflects on her Irish-Chinese-American granddaughter. The hybrid identity of the small girl is far from being perceived as a welcomed sign of the postmodern, fragmented, plural self, and is instead despised as “wild” all through the narrative by the Chinese matriarch. The behaviour of the child, Sophie, is dissected in deeply essentialist terms and her tendency towards “public scandal” —walking around naked, misbehaving with neighbouring kids—is associated with her Irish—not Chinese, not American—origins: “Did you ever see a Chinese girl act this way?” (12); “But Sophie take after Natalie’s husband’s family, their name is Shea. Irish” (3). The story ends with a space for intercultural communication but, as in the previous case, denotes the historical stereotyping of the Irish as “other-ed figures”, even though, as the narrator puts it, they are white people who speak English (4). Reading these works from this perspective inspires the reader to question the validity of inhabiting a white Irish centre at the expense of perpetuating the dynamics of othering implicit in the racial encounters of a fluid national identity.

A second taxonomical division stems from the fact that in Irish writing more and more thematic weight is being assigned to migrant issues, what I call “the white perspective” or “the perspective from without”. Whereas back in the eighties the anxiety to achieve national definitions constituted most subtextual layers for poems and novels, the ethnic and racial minorities that flood and transform the cities of Ireland are one of the topics that white Irish-born authors begin to incorporate into their work. Since their publications reach the market easily—publishing presses seem reluctant to publish work that doesn’t sound “Irish” enough or is not clearly about Ireland—these texts have become the main markers of a new Irish reality. Roddy Doyle, who has always shown a preference for displaced subjects and for the marginal realities of Dublin, is the author most frequently associated with Irish multicultural dimensions. The Expatriates and Other Stories (2007) includes the author’s revision of his own novel The Commitments (1986). If the Northern Dubliners in Jimmy Rabbitte’s original band were the blacks of Europe, of Ireland and of Dublin, Doyle now further problematises the position of the margin bringing to the forefront the existence of subjects that have been invisible, as Kibred contended, but that should be the object, as well as the subject, of representation.

A quick look at recent Irish writing offers insight into these new thematic interests. The Faber Book of Best New Irish Short Stories: 2006-7 (Marcus 2007), includes texts by Eoin McNamee (“North of Riga” 279-284) and Sebastian Barry (“A Russian Beauty” 303-307) on the subject matter of immigration. Mary O’Donnell’s Storm over Belfast (2008) also inscribes the Other in two of her stories (“Yugoslavia of My Dreams” 211-225; “Little Africa” 226-245), and Mary O’Malley’s 2001 poetry collection Asylum Road displays sensitivity towards a more inclusive definition of Irishness. “In the Name of God and the Dead Generations” (25-26) is the poet’s revision of Ireland’s most nationalist text and asks for a reappraisal of national identity, posing the question, as the blurb goes, “of who we are as we respond to emigrants who seek asylum in Ireland”.

Finally, canonic-formation processes are being altered by a timid, although existing, attempt at publishing literature produced from within the ethnic communities themselves5, what could be called “the racial/ethnic perspective from within”. Hugo Hamilton’s memoir The Speckled People (2003) illustrates the liminal identity of a child born to an Irish nationalist father and a German mother. Through the metaphor of the speckle—“home-made Irish bread with German raisins” (7)—Hamilton

4 At the 2008 JASIL Conference in Porto (July 2008), Susan Cahill presented an interesting paper on Irish publishing policies and their relationship with migrant writers. Fortunately, the situation is beginning to change: Rosalda Faraghi (UCD) and poet Eva Bourke are currently compiling an anthology of Irish immigrant poetry that will be published by Dedalus in 2009.

5 For a more in-depth analysis, see the section by Marisol Morales Ladrón in this paper.
In the Wake of the Tiger
displays the linguistic and social conflicts of those in-between two worlds, feeling displaced in both and impelled by a necessity to belong. The collection of short stories *Travelling Light*, edited by Sarah Webb (2004), is another instance of changes in canonicity, since the volume includes texts by well-known white Irish-born authors together with four stories by diasporic voices: Cauvery Madhavan, Nena Bhanderi, Olutuyin Pamela Akinjobi, and Ho Wei Sim. In her recent contribution to Irish feminist scholarship, Borbála faragó contends that “in all likelihood it will take some considerable time before the identity of the ‘Irish Woman’ will incorporate Ireland’s emerging minorities” (145). Irish women’s poetry, although it could be traced back far in history, did take off as a visible literary category in the early eighties. However, as faragó maintains, the immigrant women poets of Ireland are invisible. Although two of the most reputed anthologies of Irish women’s writing—The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing, Vol. IV & V and The White Page—account for a 20% and a 27% (respectively) of poetry by immigrants or women with mixed background, faragó states that their invisibility as a group is quite apparent. It seems, she continues, that “it is less ignorance of their work which is the problem but rather a reluctance to re-interpret and interrogate the notions of Irishness that inform these collections” (150). Anne Cluysenaar (Belgian-Irish), Sabine Wichert (originally Prussian), Jo Slade (English-brown), Heather Brett (Canadian), Ursula Rani Sarma (Indian-Irish), Nuala Archer (Irish-American) and Carmen Mac Garrigle (English-brown) are analysed in faragó’s clever close reading, which reclaims more space both in publishing policies and in critical debates for the work of this invisible creative group.

One of the most interesting contributions to immigrant writing is *Herstory: Migration Stories of African Women in Ireland*, compiled by Olutuyin Pamela Akinjobi (2006). The volume contains the memories of ten women in their journey to Ireland in search of better living conditions. Although some critics would be reluctant to accept this kind of testimonial writing as “literary”, the ten narratives inscribe the voice of coloured subjects and open a space for further fictional and non-fictional work by the ethnic communities present in the Irish landscape. If Irish literature has always been famous for its richness, experimentalism and innovation, we can only hope that the current racial and ethnic groups living in the country will be fairly reflected as subjects of their own narratives and that all of it can have a space under that prestigious umbrella we call “Irish writing”.

2. Roddy Doyle and the Literature of the (post-)Celtic Tiger
Marisol Morales Ladrón
University of Alcalá

During the last decade, the Celtic Tiger phenomenon has become an ongoing concern within Irish studies. Of wide economic proportions, it has equally altered Irish society, culture and values. If Ireland was once a country of emigrants, it has rapidly turned into the home to people of many different nationalities, from Eastern Europe, India or China to Africa, and it has also received a wide variety of ethnic groups, refugees and asylum seekers. One of the most noticeable consequences of the Celtic Tiger has been the positive image that Ireland has projected towards the world. At the same time, the old Irish struggle to defend the ideals of a monocultural society has given way to the enhancement of the positive and negative effects of multiculturalism. Therefore, the negotiation of a cultural site within which the diversity of immigrants and the Irish find their place has opened the ground for the emergence of what has been termed the “new Irish”, thus challenging once more the already fluid notion of Irishness. Framing the present section within this context, my purpose will be to explore how the ethos of a plural society has been represented in the literature produced during the Celtic Tiger period, mainly as seen in the works of Roddy Doyle. My focus on this writer, which spans from the publication of *The Woman to Walked into Doors* (1996) and its sequel *Paula Spencer* (2006) to his contribution to Metro Eireann and especially his publication of *The Deportees and Other Stories* (2007), aims at illustrating the social and economic changes that Irish society has been experiencing somehow simultaneous to the process of assimilation among immigrants.

In the year 2003, Fintan O’Toole complained in *The Irish Times* about the fact that there were not “Celtic Tiger” novels yet (Hand 2003). Two years before, Declan Kilberi had also noted that “Celtic Tiger Dublin” had been better represented in the medium of the film than in the form of the novel, suggesting that this “standoff” situation “probably had something to do with the separation of the realms of
business and bohemia since the founding of the state”. Whether this is an exaggeration of the traditional division between arts and business or not, the truth is that at the end of his discussion Kibert was wisely able to foresee that multiculturalism was to become “a major theme in Irish writing, perhaps the major theme in the next decade or so” (2001).

Nowadays, at the wake of the Tiger, we can be more judicious and capable of analysing the aftermath of this economic prosperity and, especially, of assessing the changes that have taken place within Irish culture. It is true that we are facing a new stage in Irish writing. On the one hand, as Eugene O’Brien has explained, Irish literature has now acquired a recognised central space within Europe and the rest of the world thanks to its economic, social and cultural expansion (157). On the other, the cultural diversity of the nation is certainly making its impact on the literature produced underlying the issues of multiculturalism, immigration and racism. This is not to say that labels such as the “Celtic Tiger novel” or “Celtic Tiger literature”, to refer to the emergence of a new kind of writing — as if there were an artificial “then” and a “now” — should be considered rigid categories. Quite the contrary, nowadays, more than ever, both local and global interests coexist in an alternative way to read Ireland under a plural world. One should not forget that Irish literature has always been placed within a complex space in which both continuity and disruption interact (Peach 1). Nevertheless, the attempt to historicise the present will inevitably lead us to define and to classify. Thus, writers of the Celtic Tiger period would be those who deal with the new challenges that have affected Irish society, culture and ethics, and also those who pose questions related to Irish identity within a multicultural framework. Some of these authors are Irish by birth although many others have occupied a new space within this culture, questioning what it means to be identified as “purely” Irish in a plural society. Among those, we could pinpoint Cauvery Madhavan’s Paddy Indian (2001), Margaret McCarthy’s My Eyes Only Look Out (2001), Sarah Webb’s Travelling Light (2004), Marsha Mehran’s Pomegranate Soup (2005), Doyle’s Paula Spencer or The Departees, and Ellis Ni Dhuibhne’s most recent novel, Fox, Swallow, Scarecrow (2007), among a growing list.8

Within this renewed space of Irish writing, the name of Roddy Doyle stands out as one of the most committed public voices of minority groups and marginal subjects. In fact, as Maureen T. Reddy has affirmed: “Whether more radical fiction writers will take up the challenge to shape Irish understandings of race and racialization remains to be seen, but Doyle has begun the necessary work of decentering white consciousness” (387). From the beginnings of Doyle’s literary career, his ideology has always been both transparent and consistent, addressing issues related to class struggle, marginalisation and poverty. In his attempt to expose the victimisation of an all-too-sudden modern and unequal society, he has dismantled traditional socio-moral values and, even more, he has contributed to reconceptualise the notion of Irishness; a concept which, according to sociologist Ronit Lentin, “has not been sufficiently problematised in relation to gender and ethnicities... nor has the term ‘Irish women’ been ethnically problematised” (Irishness 6).

In the year 1996, Doyle published a controversial novel, The Woman Who Walked into Doors, which caused much fuss among religious, educational and political institutions. Paula Spencer, the protagonist, was a battered woman overwhelmed by a miserable life full of difficulties caused by alcohol, abuse and the raising of four children. She was pictured as a mere survivor, whose self-inflicted guilt overshadowed the cause of her bruises, black eyes, broken bones and scars. She was, in essence, an invisible and silenced woman who “walked into doors” — being this the public excuse given to explain the physical damage—and who eventually discovered that she was just one among many others, all of them women that she had continuously met at the hospital offering similar justifications. Doyle’s attempt to unveil a truthful picture of Paula’s past, full of contradictions and uncertainties, and at the same time to conceal unwanted memories from her own mind, guided her narrative towards a psychological healing therapy that left the ending open after the death of her abusive husband.9

Its sequel, Paula Spencer, appeared ten years later with a protagonist who was ready to “walk through doors” and to overcome years of

8 At the VI International EFACTS Conference, held in Seville in December 2007, Asier Abaroa gave a paper entitled “New Cultural Narratives in Ireland”, which focused on the analysis of some of these novels. See also his own section within this round table article for a discussion of further multicultural narratives.

9 It is most extraordinary that Doyle chose a story that needed to be told and retold. Originating from his own television screenplay Family (1994), a BBC serial written for Channel 4, he rewrote the last chapter, devoted to Paula, into the above mentioned novel. This, in turn, was made into a play of the same title (2003). Again, ten years later, Doyle recovered Paula from her dead-end past and turned her into a more optimistic narrative that significantly bore her own proper name in its title.

10 See my previous and more detailed analysis of this novel: “De puertas adentro: narrativa interior y violencia doméstica en The Woman Who Walked into Doors de Roddy Doyle”, in which I explored Doyle’s satire against four sources of patriarchal authority which, according to my views, had driven Paula to her condition as a victim of domestic violence. The institutions discussed were the educational system, the family, the health care service, and religion.
pain, suffering and violence. Above all, she was a woman facing a new Ireland, where her struggle to keep sober meant nothing compared to her difficulties finding a job. From her marginal socio-economic status she had to compete with other marginal peoples, the newcomers, who had all of a sudden occupied a new space. Having been an “other”, since her identity was reduced to her limited role as a battered wife, she becomes involved in the process of “othering” these immigrants with whom she has to allocate her own unstable position. Following Bhabha’s terminology, the “in-between” space that she occupies now displaces her from society at the same time that racializes the others. Significantly enough, this spatial displacement is metaphorically re-enacted through the narrative, in which Paula has lost her own voice, the first person account that characterised the former novel, giving way to that of the narrator who now articulates her own fragmented mind.

Paula’s discrimination is seen in light of the contemporary issues affecting Irish life and politics; mainly, the distribution of work among a multicultural society. At the supermarket she admires the good looks of the “foreigners”, most of them Nigerian women, working on the checkout, in spite of the fact that she had also applied for this job (Doyle, The Woman who walked... 24-26). Surprisingly in a way, she expresses no overt prejudice towards these immigrants although she feels more marginalised. She wonders whether she is racist: “They’re all over the place, the foreigners, the black people. Is that racist? They’re all over the place. She doesn’t know. She means no harm. It’s just a phrase. And she doesn’t mind it. She likes looking at all the foreigners” (26). As expected, her genuine attitude towards the newcomers is not generalised in the novel. Her neighbour Rita, for instance, is more discriminatory encouraging Paula to make their Christmas shopping in Enniskeen not only because it is cheaper but especially because the shop assistants are Irish (78-79).

In this regard, Paula Spencer could easily fall into the category of a post-Celtic Tiger novel, if only to invalidate the assumptions held concerning the economic prosperity of Ireland’s working classes. No matter how much Paula has tried to improve her life, she is still a member of the low class, in fact, of the lowest within the less favoured sectors of the population. Early in the narrative, she recognises that “the Celtic tiger thing” (25) has passed her by. While major changes are visible in the shops, the cars and the people, who seem to have more money than what they can spend, Paula’s fridge remains empty most of the time. Certainly, as the narrator states: “She’s been left behind”; even more, “[s]he was never in front” (56). Paula is the only white Irish woman working among foreigners and accepting menial jobs. She looks for the women who used to work as cleaners but who would not accept this work anymore, like her sister Carmel, who has managed to take advantage of the more favourable economy investing in a second home in Bulgaria (28). Thus, Paula becomes a member of the racialized minority, othered by the received value system, and by the state institutions. Not in vain, Dermot McCarthy already saw in The Woman Who Walked into Doors the germ of this effect, interpreting it as a “grim reminder that for those already living on the economic and social margins of Irish society, the new prosperity merely pushed them further from the centre” (155).

Nonetheless, Paula’s position as an “other” of society among “others” is not an isolated case. The narrator reveals that: “There’s plenty like Paula” (12), a fact that could be explained applying Michael Cronin’s theory on the “chrono-politicisation of Ireland”. According to him, in consumer societies where mobility has become a supreme virtue, the immobile are the losers. ... Those who are grounded by poverty, disability or prejudice are keenly aware of an isolation that is both social and geographical. They are the Irish locals who can watch the Irish globals river dancing from Paris to Paraguay but who find themselves trapped in the slow lane of neglect and indifference. (55, 62)

It is true that, at one point in the novel, Paula comes to see herself as “one of the tigers” (40) because, as she is the only Irish cleaning woman among Nigerian and Romanien men, she has been promoted to supervise them. However, this move proves unsatisfactory for her: firstly, because she is part of a system that oppresses people and, all of a sudden, she has to participate in the process of othering; and secondly, because her new position has not brought any substantial change, neither will she be earning more money nor will she work less hours. This episode is re-enacted again when she accepts a job to clean after a concert only to discover that she is the only white there. However, when all the women leave the van, the blacks queue behind her (58). It becomes clear that the novel stresses the “in-between” space that Paula occupies, neither here nor there, which traps her in an isolated marginality. According to Linden Peach, “the socially marginalized are not only labelled as different by the kind of spaces they occupy and their perceived status in the dominant society but ‘othered’ by the dominant discourse through the way in which they are represented” (9). Certainly, without a permanent job or even a contract, without any medical or protectionist right, and without a pension or even a bank account on her own, her position in society is, following Lentin’s terminology, that of the racialized other.
She is excluded from the system to which she belongs as much as she is also barred by the immigrants with whom she works.

With the purpose of opening a space for multiculturalism in Ireland, in the year 2000 two Nigerian journalists, Abel Ufaga and Chinuko Onyejekem founded the monthly and now weekly newspaper *Metro Éireann*—published both on the web and in print form (www.metroeireann.com). Their slogan was “many voices, one Ireland”, and the publication purported to be integrationist, pro-immigration and anti-racist (Reddy 377). The webpage has different sections covering issues such as “The world at home”, “The new Irish”, “Business” or even “Recipes”, and addresses the “Africans in Ireland”, the “Polish in Ireland”, the “Indians in Ireland”, the “Filipinos in Ireland” and the “Lithuanians in Ireland”, among other groups. During the time it has been running, it has become a forum for the discussion of cross-cultural integration. Also, through the establishment of the MAMA, the “Metro Éireann Media and Multicultural Awards” they promote initiatives and alternatives that favour cultural difference.

Being the spokesman of the unheard sectors of the population, it does not come as a surprise that Doyle became rapidly interested in contributing regularly to *Metro Éireann* with original stories written in instalments and dealing with an array of topics affecting contemporary plural Ireland, from prejudice towards immigration, to racism, ethnicity, nationalism or identity. His collection of short stories, *The Deportees*, is the result of his adaptation to this unusual format, since one of the requirements of the newspaper was that each chapter consisted of 800 words. This restriction meant, as Doyle has recognized, that the stories “have never been carefully planned” (*The Deportees*... xiii). At the same time, the author’s main motive in writing them stems from the abrupt changes affecting Ireland: “It happened, I think, sometime in the mid-1990s. I went to bed in one country and woke up in a different one” (xi). Most of the stories, therefore, historicise Ireland’s problematised present, placing unexpected characters in the most unpredicted situations and offering unforeseen resolutions. Humour and parody also become essential ingredients for a writer who likes to satirise political, social and moral conventions.

Two of the stories rewrite previous themes. In “Guess Who’s Coming for the Dinner”, Doyle reworks Spencer Tracy’s classic film and places it in an Ireland not ready yet to accept a black person, especially if he might become part of the family. “The Deportees” also revises and redresses the life of Jimmy Rabbitte, the protagonist of Doyle’s famous first novel, *The Commitments* (1986), whose life seems to have been suspended in the air while Ireland has changed enormously. Jimmy’s main concern now is to find people for a new multiracial band, to be called “The Deportees”. A more comic story is, for instance, “57% Irish”, which describes the attempts of the protagonist at devising a test that will be able to measure the amount of Irishness that can be found in each person. What it means to be Irish is defined in terms of questions related to the knowledge of Irish pornography, Irish football or Irish music, reduced here to “Riverdance”. There are other stories, such as “New Boy”, “Black Hoodie”, “Home to Harlem” or “I Understand”, dealing more directly with racism and derogatory stereotypes.

All in all, these stories are the product of a new Ireland that has to come to terms with the effects of a plural society. The Celtic Tiger growth, with its globalised economy, has also brought globalised prejudices and worldwide ideantitarian concerns. In this regard, Doyle’s *The Deportees* could be seen as the complement of Oonagh Frawley’s edition of *New Dubliners* (2005), another collection of short stories written to commemorate a hundred years since Joyce began writing *Dubliners*. Although a century later, the main city of Ireland becomes now the site of returned Irish emigrants, as in Joseph O’Connor’s “Two Little Clouds”, Maeve Binchy’s “All That Matters” or Frank McGuinness’s “The Sunday Father”, which counterpart Colum McCann’s dramatic story, “As if There Were Trees”, about discrimination, racism and violence.

To conclude, one could say that the evolution of Roddy Doyle’s fiction from *The Woman Who Walked into Doors* to *The Deportees* parallels that of Irish society, moving from a strong dependence on oppressive and traditional institutions such as the church, the school, the family or society, to more modern sources of discrimination and oppression based on race, gender and class. These writings by Doyle are definitely modern in the sense that no matter how much they focus on marginal subjects, they underline issues affecting global societies, such as domestic violence, drug abuse, alcoholism, racism, a high rate of car accidents, and crime, among many others. As Lentin has clearly explained:

> Dublin is at once an internal rural-to-urban migration destination, a tourist centre and one of Europe’s prominent cultural capitals, where the effects of Ireland’s economic boom are evident in rapid re-building and changing consumer patterns — such as packed shops and restaurants — but also in the visible side effects of the underbelly of the ‘Celtic tiger’ economy, such as drugs, homelessness and begging. (At the Heart of... 229)

If the Celtic Tiger novel deals with the narration of the multicultural peoples that have coloured the socio-cultural landscape of Ireland, Irish literary history will also have to recognise the non-Celtic identity of these peoples.
3. Envisaging Inter- and Multi-Culturality in Ireland

Asier Atuana-Garcia de Salazar
University of Deusto

Whenever Irishness, Irish culture, society and literature have been approached we have been all too familiar with issues such as hybridity and hyphenation. However, Ireland has been “the result of a long history of unequal contestations between a variety of cultures and socio-economic and political forces” (Hickman 15-16). Well before the 12th century Ireland had already been multi- in language, (Cronin & Ó Cuileáinín) literature and society. The migration of the 17th century brought with it a social formation in Ireland that coexisted with Jews and Travellers. In Northern Ireland the 20th century witnessed the entry of Indians in the 1920s, and Chinese since the 1960s. Recently Portuguese, Polish and Lithuanians are colouring the picture of the ethnic minority communities in the North. In the Republic the number of Asians, Africans and migrants from the new EU states is constantly increasing (www.ncri.ie). How is it then that Ireland is only beginning to be perceived as multicultural, when it was always so? Over the last decade a new phenomenon has come to light in Irish writing. Amid Irish figures migrant writers in Ireland have begun to produce new narratives, mainly in English. Many of the productions dealt with here tackle this idea of monoculturalism in the host culture. They display an array of genres and themes which are a reflection of what Ireland is producing in terms of literature. In this vein, can a multicultural literary canon be envisaged in Ireland as Kiberd suggests? (Kiberd 2006).

The case of the representation and productions of the biggest immigrant minority, the Poles, is worth analysing. The Poles are thriving in many fields of social life and not only as a workforce. In Dublin there exist nine Polish newspapers: Polski Herald, Polski Express, Polska Gazeta, Życie i Praca W Irlandii, Sofia, Szpila, Wyprawa, Anonim and Polish Neighbour; three Polish radio broadcasts and one TV broadcast, besides cultural

11 The author would like to thank the Department for Education, Euskal Jaurlaritzako-Goberriko Vasco for postdoctoral fellowship support that made this research and writing possible.  
12 In a review of Doyle's The Departures (2007) Tim Martin states that multiculturalism is a new phenomenon as “in the Ireland of even 20 years ago such a concept would have been pure science fiction, which is a measure of how fast things have moved.” (The Independent, 16th Sept. 2007).
13 See the data of the Central Statistics Office in Ireland: on Census Night the amount of Polish people reached the number of 63,276, the second biggest was the number of Lithuanians, 24,628.

centres and a school of dance. This amazing range of social vitality has found a rapid translation into the arts, especially fiction and the theatre. Tom Galvin’s There's an Egg in my Soup... and Other Adventures of an Irishman in Poland (2007) recounts a fictionalised version of his life as a trainee teacher in Poland with the state agency APSO between 1994 and 1999. Although Galvin's book is a trip into how an Irishman experiences a Poland constantly compared to an Ireland about to be utterly immersed in the Celtic Tiger phenomenon, the novel wittily challenges perceptions of the Poles by both the Irish and the Poles living in Ireland. The final chapter in the novel, which portrays Dublin in 2005, is an exemplar of the rich multi and interculturality the Polish minority offer in Ireland, albeit some attendant disgraceful events of racism also appear. Thus, we find the worries of a Polish Parish priest, Fr. Andrew Pyka, who cannot cope with the number of Poles asking for confession in Dublin and finds it difficult to accommodate the community services demanded by his parishioners who end up going to the pub to socialise and get drunk. Most of the Poles are in Ireland to work and send “some bacon home” (Galvin 261). For Galvin, the problem will arise when the reaction to the influx of Poles is interiorised by the Irish.

what about when the real success stories begin to happen? What about successful Polish businesses? What happens when the Irish begin working for the Poles? What happens when the Irish have to pay rent to a Polish landlord? And what happens when more and more jobs are lost as factories and multinationals head off to Polska, while the Poles are cleaning up over here? (268-9)

The stage has seen the production of two plays in 2007 with a multicultural stance. Mushroom, by Paul Meade (Gána Nua Theatre) was staged between the 5th and 9th of June 2007 at the Civic Theatre in Tallaght. Performed by the Storytellers Theatre Company and directed by L. Halligan, the play deals with the lives of six young people (Irish, Polish and Romanian) who struggle to come to terms with their parallel realities both in Romania and in Ireland. Immigration is the link, but the play presents an idea of individual emigration together with a quest for someone and somewhere to belong. The Polish Ewa comes to Ireland seeking her husband, who had eloped with an Irish woman. In Ireland she reunites with her father, Andrzej, a nomad globetrotter more interested in studying the importance of Newgrange and the meaning of the stars.

14 Tom Galvin won the RTÉ/MAMA Award in Media in 2006. He is book editor of the Evening Herald and editor of the Polski Herald, weekly Polish supplement.
15 Paul Meade received a special Commissioning Award from the Arts Council to write this play.
and the universe. The young Irish man, Martin, travels to Bucharest looking for a link to his late Romanian mother. Martin meets his uncle Radu in Bucharest, Ewa finds a job picking mushrooms in a farm in County Monaghan, and befriends Maria, a Romanian girl, and Ion, a Romanian man striving to find a sense of home in Ireland. *Mushroom* explores multiculturalism from three different perspectives, that of the newcomers to Ireland, that of the second generation of immigrants coming to terms with their past and roots and that of the various types of immigrants in Ireland amongst themselves. Ewa’s father, Andrezej, rejects the reductionist idea of the Polish immigrant as a mere job seeker:

You come here to work! Things are not so good for you back home! Will you stay? Do you have family? They look at me they see a Polishman. I look at them and I think, I have worked all over the world, I fixed roofs in Italy, I built houses in Germany, I sold kebabs by the Black Sea, I saw the Pyramids, I spoke to the oracle at Delphi, I ... and you say ... “Good man yourself”. What do you think I am doing here? A job! Ha, Ha, A job! I can get a job anywhere. I came because ... but they don’t understand. I came ... I came because of Newgrange.  

In a call shop in Monaghan both Romanian Ion and Maria reproduce conversations looking for a job in Ireland or speaking to her mother back in Romania in an instance of transnational communication. New technologies to communicate better (mobile phones, the Internet and Skype), admitting to having work experience to get any job, following their religious duties or thinking they are in Ireland to improve their English worry these characters in their new country and back home. The language of interaction becomes an issue in *Mushroom*. Ewa finds her father has a peculiar accent speaking his native Polish. In the case of Martin and his uncle, Radu, in Bucharest, they have to resort to German as a lingua franca as their respective knowledge of Romanian (Martin’s late mother’s tongue) and English (Martin’s new native language), in which his uncle is not fluent, differ. The language barrier is also present in the interaction among immigrants when Romanian Maria explains in English how to pick mushrooms to Polish Ewa; an English reduced to simple-verb sentences lacking subjects and direct yes/no questions:


Andrezej: Hello Miek! Yes. Good. Do you know what he’s saying?

Ion: I can’t understand a word. All I hear is “hellohoowigohahooaaohohooah”. Is it English?

Andrezej: Irish English.

The work conditions immigrants face in Ireland is a central topic in the play as Meade reflects how jobs are assigned depending on the immigrants’ qualifications: a line is drawn between skilled (doctors, nurses, professors) and the unskilled workforce. But Andrezej, the consciousness of immigration in a globalized world, cannot comprehend how human beings are reduced to names on a list. Things can get better only through a realization of multi- and interculturalism in a modern world. In an example of lyricism and the

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16 Polish Neighbour contributor, Patrick Quigley explains that Monaghan is the heart of the mushroom business in Ireland and has witnessed the transformation of its social picture. Before, anyone from a nearby village was considered a foreigner, now “Polish is spoken in the lanes where I [he] went to school” (www.polishneighbour.eu/pm2, accessed 22/02/2008).

17 Paul Meade, *Mushroom* (2007), Original script. I would like to thank the author for having provided me with a copy of the original script.

18 An amusing scene shows Maria’s mother coming to understand how the cam for Skype works so that she can communicate with her daughter.
most poetic language of the play, Andrzej envisages a world linked to the universe of existence in a deep comprehension of the circle of life:

Andrzej: I came here because I wanted to feel something. Some connection, I wanted to connect to the ancestors. ... Stars. When I look at a star I don't want to understand it, ... I love the mystery of it. The beauty. It means everything, It says everything. You are not the centre. You are just a part. But, you are a part. The universe moves through you and you move through it. We will return through the gate. The Milky Way. We will meet the ancestors and we will understand what they understood.

Without leaving the multicultural stage in Ireland and prior to her performance of the character of Ewa, Polish actress Natalia Kostrzweda had written, together with Jerzy Lach, More Light in 2007. The play was first performed in Polish at the Smock Alley theatre in Dublin on the 12th of April and in English from 13th to 14th of April 2007. Kostrzweda plays the autobiographical part of Natalia, a sixteen-year-old girl who leaves her native Poland seeking a securer living in Ireland and a lost father who had been living in Dublin for some time. The young girl's ambition is to become an actress but has to face the hardships of immigration and leading a life independently. Rejected by her father, she finds a menial job in a shoe shop, the actual setting of the whole monodrama, where in the process of realising her dreams, ambitions, failures and necessities finds out she is already becoming an actress. The setting allures the audience as the high-heels shoes and all their boxes epitomise the concept of Western Hollywood glamour, a cliche Natalia seeks to find for herself. The piling of boxes points to promotion in the arts, as well as in the social and monetary ladder. However, Natalia delves into the personal and individual questioning of an immigrant's predicament. She wonders constantly who is to be held responsible for her situation as a young immigrant female looking for a job and seeking a career in the arts. But her plight is a more universal one, as she encompasses within her the portrayal of the alienation of the immigrant to Ireland. As with Muchroom two months later, More Light ponders upon individual and group life expectations in an atmosphere of immigration to another country. More Light represents an individual quest for one's personal development. But the play advances another dimension: “It's message is universal and shows the feelings of many immigrants who are not only a pair of hands to work but also have their own past experiences, ambitions and dreams” (www.polishneighbour.eu). The Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Dublin supported the play as one which “is to appeal to both Polish and English speaking audiences. It is the first effort of that kind, for a Polish actress living in Dublin to present a play about Poles in Ireland” (www.dublin.polemb.net).

Some other outstanding contributions in multicultural Irish writing have been dealt with above or in other chapters of this collection. As a conclusion and to name only a few we should refer to Margaret McCarthy’s 2001 collection of accounts of Irish people of mixed race parentage entitled My Eyes Only Look Out and Olutoyin Pamela Akinjobi's 2006 Her Story: Migration Stories of African Women in Ireland, a moving compilation of the heartrending struggles of African women who recently sought refuge in Ireland. Both books share a clear-cut explanatory language and partake of the approach to the discourse of race and gender in Ireland at the beginning of the 21st century. Bestselling Irish author Sarah Webb edited in 2004 Travelling Light. The thirty true-life travel stories are authored by known female names, such as Martina Devlin, Marian Keyes, Catherine Donnelly or Rosita Boland. The volume also includes fiction by Nigerian Olutoyin P. Akinjobi, Irish-Indian Nena Bandhuri, Malaysian Chinese Ho Wei Sim and Indian Cauvery Madhavan. The edition stands for an accumulative non levelling but interactive comprehension of what a new Irish literary canon is. Cauvery Madhavan also authored the lengthier Paddy Indian (2001), which tells Padman's story, an Indian doctor from a well-off and westernised family in Madras. The book is a mild comic-tale about the sojourners in Ireland. Padman's is a sojourn experience acutely alleviated by the absence of monetary problems or acculturative stress, two factors to be considered in the case of foreign medical students in Ireland (Gleennon and MacLachlan). In the novel, the Irish are portrayed as allured by the exoticism of Indian food and traditions, whereas Padman's exclusivist class in Madras epitomises the mirroring of bigoted attitudes towards multiculturalism ascribed to the west. For her part, Irishman Marsha Mehran's 2005 Pomegranate Soup and the 2008 sequel Rosewater and Soda Bread are an exemplar of intercultural fusion fiction marked by tinges of magic realism mingling the labyrinthine narratives of the lives of three Iranian sisters who arrive in Ballinacraough, a village at the foot of Croagh Patrick in Co. Mayo. Having fled from Iran to London and then Ireland because of the Iranian revolution, the Aminpour

21 Akinjobi's story “African Experiences” collects three short and strange happenings of three African women with a supernatural tinge; Bandhuri's “Enduring India” is a trip back to her roots by a rich middle-class Indian-Irish girl; Ho Wei Sim’s “The Chosen Path” is a biographical trip back to the author's roots and Cauvery Madhavan's “The Reluctant Wife”, a constant comparison between Ireland and India when the protagonist travels back to India to visit some relatives.
sisters seek refuge from their previous fears and to start a new life in pre-Celtic Tiger Ireland. Through an alluring smorgasbord menu, these immigrants interact with the previously apparent solid values of a “monocultural”, closed-minded host Irish society in an example of integrating acculturation.

It is probably too early to propose how new Irish multicultural narratives are transforming and interacting in Irish writing, although the examples dealt with here represent a clear stance. How these works are entering the market should also be a point to bear in mind. They are biographical works, sociological instances and also pure fiction; but they stand for new Irish writing by newcomers to Ireland. These works cultivate pluralism in Ireland in their exposition of reactions in the private and public spheres. These narratives are the expression of an attempt “to develop a version of ‘cosmopolitan citizenship’ that can provide a moral and political framework of universal rights and political consensus which could challenge neoliberal globalisation” (Kuhling and Keohane 3) north and south of the border in Ireland. To envisage a multicultural canon in Ireland should not be feared because the Irish canon—rather than hyphenated—has always been multicultural. As Declan Kiberd states, “a world which could savour those differences, without a levelling indifference, could valuable serve a multicultural idea” (Kiberd, The Irish Writer and the World, 262). Indeed, “every critic who tries to make these discriminations leaves a signpost to a better future which is admirable to precisely the extent that it has yet to be fully imagined” (Kiberd, ‘Towards a Multicultural Canon’ 221).

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