



Malouf, Michael G. *Transatlantic Solidarities: Irish Nationalism and Caribbean poetics*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009. ISBN: 9780813927794, 259 pages.

Transatlantic Solidarities, written by North-American scholar and professor at George Mason University, Michael G. Malouf, was published in 2009 and offers a different perspective in comparative studies by linking in literary, political and cultural terms the geographically distant islands Ireland and the Caribbean.

The sharp critic is revealed in the foundations of the analysis of Caribbean and Irish transatlantic cultures which are laid in the minute historical panorama, trustworthy biographical reference and, above all, in the close reading of documents and literary texts – novels, poems, plays, short stories, as well as lyrics and films.

In the introduction, Malouf discusses two versions of history: the first deploys the Irish as victims of British colonization, focusing on the 50.000 Irish who emigrated or were banished by Cromwell. In the second, they are the oppressors in the island of Montserrat, known as “The emerald isle of the Caribbean”, since they became adventurous colonizers and landowners in the late seventeenth century. However, Malouf prefers a third version considering Glissant’s description of the Caribbean as a “multiple series of relationships” (2), which reads the history of the Irish in the Caribbean as the “dialectical relation between nationalism and transnationalism evoked in these two immigrant cultures reinventing their national cultures abroad” (3).

The aim of the book is to present a version of history that reveals a Caribbean perspective on Irish nationalism in the form of three influential versions of transnational Caribbean literary and political identity. Malouf examines solidarity with Irish nationalism that is performed in the late 1910s and early 1920s by Jamaicans Marcus Garvey and Claude McKay, and in the 1970s and 1980s by St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott. He also deals with works of contemporary Ireland as of the 1990s, period of the Celtic Tiger, which focuses on the discussion of Ireland as being less victimized than the Caribbean.

The first chapter describes how the empire was concerned with the analogy between Ireland and Jamaica written by Carlyle, Trollope, Mill, and Froude. Malouf concludes that cross-cultural solidarities must be seen as discursively mediated by the imperial centre, an aspect that he does not consider a limitation, but a form of triangulation, later seen in works by Garvey, McKay and Walcott.

The second chapter begins with Eamon de Valera travelling to the USA under the title of Provisional President of Ireland, in 1921. Concomitantly, race relations were being reconfigured in the USA where Garvey founded the UNIA (Universal Negro

Association) in favor of a Pan-Africanism. Among other similarities we have Garvey's UNIA's "Black Star Line" (BSL) that was inspired by Sinn Fein's Irish mercantile "White Star Line". Garvey draws a distinction between a "national" Irish struggle and a "racial" black struggle. The BSL was not a success and when it went bankrupt Garvey was deported and de Valera became Taoiseach, in 1923. After being arrested in 1922, Garvey described the Irish movement as "double-edged" by criticizing their benefit from white supremacy.

In the third chapter, Malouf describes how Shaw, while on Holiday in Jamaica, refused to meet McKay. Later, in London, McKay was introduced to him as a "Black Diogenes", whom Shaw would perhaps be interested in studying. The outcome was the contrary, for it was McKay who reflected upon Shaw's questioning him on why he did not prefer to become a pugilist, a sport associated with Negroes. McKay's reply was that it was a "conflict between individual talent and external constraints" (81), since colored pugilists could not compete in Britain, whereas there was no prohibition for publishing books by black writers. Malouf compares McKay's poem "Tropics in New York" to Yeats' "Innisfree", for both deal with a market based on dialect and standard English so that they can be valued as writers. In McKay's novel *Banjo*, Malouf sees vagabond Kid Irish portrayed as a means to deconstruct concepts of whiteness. To Malouf, the aim of McKay's internationalism is to highlight the forces that shape nationalities "while revealing the dialectical relations underlying a rhetoric of internationalist solidarity that attends to difference" (123).

Malouf begins the fourth chapter by arguing that Walcott writes about Ireland in a colonial perspective. His point of departure is Walcott's "allusiveness" rather than his "allusions" (126) as he attempts to historicize his engagement with Joyce and Irish culture. He argues for a negative solidarity, for Walcott's affiliation with Joyce arises as the latter becomes cosmopolitan by reinventing a provincial Ireland. Malouf reveals in his reading of *Omeros* how Walcott "portrays a cosmopolitan Caribbean where all the participants in the history of the Caribbean – African, European, Indian – are members of a silent community who share in the experience of exile from their own pasts" (167). Therefore, Malouf shows how the Caribbean is represented in Walcott's "cosmopolitan culture of bricolage, where each individual part is only a figure for a larger whole located elsewhere" (171).

Chapter five takes the reader ahead to a time of change in Ireland, following the economic boom of the 1990s, where a prior export culture became a cosmopolitan import culture. Malouf focuses on films as Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game*, which contrasts Black and Irish experiences in Britain. In the play "Kingdom Come," by Stewart Parker, Malouf argues that Ireland and the Caribbean share similar positions in the map of transatlantic power. He approaches the history of the empathy between Irish and Afro-Caribbean cultures by Sinead O'Connor's Rastafarianism through which she engages with Irish culture. Furthermore, Malouf explores Sean O'Callaghan's *To Hell or Barbados* and Kate McCafferty's *Testimony of an Irish Slave Girl* as not making the

correct distinction between indentured labor and slavery. These different genres are relevant to contemporary Caribbean, yet Malouf concludes that their real interest relies upon contemporary Ireland, as they render the two sets of islands as inherently incompatible.

In the Epilogue, Malouf discusses “Country, Sligoville”, a 1992 adaptation of Yeats’s “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”, by Jamaican poet Lorna Goodison. Malouf believes that there are contradictions in understanding Yeats’s career, for recent criticism has tried to interpret him as a postcolonial poet while examining the authenticity of his Irish identity and versions of Irish nationalism his work created. “Country, Sligoville” is portrayed as a “transatlantic” poem, which offers a meditation on the role of memory, history and reading to be a part of a “circum-Atlantic,” a conjuncture of African, Caribbean and Irish cultures. Solidarity is depicted not so much between two cultures or writers, but by the solidarity they each find with the past. Malouf concludes that Yeats gives voice to a migrant experience, while Goodison seems to be writing from home.

Transatlantic Solidarities supports a third version of history, considering the Irish neither as oppressors nor as victims, and tries to set Ireland and the Caribbean side by side in practically all five chapters; however, Malouf makes the reader realize that their relation is not one of equality.

Many writers try to bridge these two geographically distant regions, though in most of the works mentioned Ireland tends to occupy “the position of the dominant identity, seeking confirmation or explanation through its meeting with an ‘Other’ whose identity is easily known from the Irish perspective” (195). This unsteadiness can be seen in the failure of Garvey’s BSL; in McKay’s need to write in Jamaican dialect due to his lack of place if he wrote only in formal English, and on Walcott’s need to escape the Caribbean in order to write because the West Indies had no prior literary tradition.

Even though the fifth chapter explores an antiracist archive of an alternative Irish history and argues for the need to “reread that archive with an eye toward the ambivalent place of popular culture in understanding race in Ireland” (177), the issues of immigration and racism in contemporary Ireland are hardly looked upon. According to Dermot Keogh, “since 1991, people of more than a hundred different nationalities have applied for refuge in Ireland” (42) and popular reactions to this situation is frequent, for “a little Ireland mentality has a dangerous resonance for those who seek tolerance in Irish society” (44).

Thus, we must take into account Malouf’s engagement with historical perspectivism by deconstructing essentialist binaries, as Irish and Caribbean, above and below, white and black, freedom and slavery, centre and periphery, among others. These are replaced by Malouf’s view in favor of a non-Eurocentric hermeneutics, while proposing a form of triangulation with a “third space,” other than Ireland and the Caribbean, but with the United States, in the case of Garvey and McKay in New York and Walcott in Boston. However, in order not to fall into the trap of neocolonialism, it

would be interesting for scholars to engage in further research on these literary, cultural and historical transatlantic relations between Ireland and the Caribbean initiated with the aftermath of the British Empire.

Works Cited

Keogh, Dermot. "Ireland at the Turn of the Century: 1994-2001." *The Course of Irish History*. Ed. T. W. Moody and F. X. Martin. Lanham, MD: Roberts Rinehart, 2001. 321-44.

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