Stage Migrants

Stage Migrants:
Representations of the Migrant Other in Modern Irish Drama

By

Loredana Salis

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS

PUBLISHING

Stage Migrants: Representations of the Migrant Other in Modern Irish Drama,
by Loredana Salis

This book first published 2010

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-4438-2382-1, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-2382-1

To my mentor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Illustrations ix

Foreword xi
Máiréad Nic Craith

Acknowledgements xiii

Introduction 1

North and South: Preliminary Observations on Migration
and the Irish Stage 3

The South 17

The Canon 23

Playboys of this Western World 27

Saint Patrick 33

The Sporting Metaphor 39

Immigrant Games: Sport on the Irish Stage 43

Conclusions 53

Appendix A 57
Authors and Theatre Companies

Bibliography 63

Index 71

LIST OF CENTREFOLD ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1 UPSTATE *At Peace!* Leaflet

Figure 2 UPSTATE *At Peace!* Performance

Figure 3 Sole Purpose *Snow White* Leaflet

Figure 4 Carl Kennedy and Dan Tudor in Paul Meade's *Mushroom*

Figure 5 Paul Meade - *Mushroom* in performance

Figure 6 PAN PAN *The Playboy of the Western World* Dublin Premiere

Figure 7a PAN PAN Chinese *Playboy of the Western World*

Figure 7b PAN PAN The Chinese *Playboy of the Western World*

Figure 8 PAN PAN *Playboy of the Western World* Reviews

FOREWORD

MÁIRÉAD NIC CRAITH

Ireland, north and south of the border, has witnessed volatile patterns of immigration in the past decade, and stage representations of these fluctuations have begun to emerge. Much of the research in this publication is new and highly original: Loredana explores a series of plays which are relatively unknown – and many of the texts remain unpublished. They have been staged on a small number of occasions – yet the topics they explore are central, not just to Irish society, but to any community in a global context that hosts immigrants.

Memory House, for example, which was intended as 'a dramatic journey down memory lane', explores the tensions between personal and collective memory. The issue of memory and remembering is central to any immigrant experience – and particularly so in a post-conflict society. We are all familiar with the idea that the grass is greener on the other side, but for the immigrant characters in *The Land of the Green Pasture*, the move to Northern Ireland has not proved a pleasant experience. The construction of stereotypes is explored in a number of plays examined by Loredana, as well as the issue of the visibility and recognition of immigrants in the host community.

Language is a significant dimension in any cultural encounter and features quite strongly in *Shalom Belfast*, in which one of the central characters, Isaac, struggles to learn the English language in the form of local placenames (many of which actually originate from Irish). Language issues also feature in *Darkie*, a play exploring the experience of Bosnian workers on a mushroom farm in Northern Ireland. Like Brian Friel's *Translations*, the play is set entirely in English. Yet there are occasions when the characters act as if they were using their own language.

The exploration of plays in this text by Dr Salis is critical and insightful, and reflects a high degree of original thought. While Loredana engages with many published and unpublished scripts, her analysis is also informed by visits to the theatres, interviews with key stakeholders and unpublished direction notes. Her understanding of the representation of the issues in dramatic form and their contemporary significance is exceptional

and inevitably draws on her own long-established research in the field of dramatic Greek tragedy in Ireland. In her examination of the reworking of canonical texts, she has a particular expertise.

The revisiting and reworking of old material in new contexts is especially interesting. While Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*, 1907, caused furore and mayhem in the Irish dramatic world, the Nigerian version revisits the original plot and adds further layers to the complexity. In its first rendition, the chief character, Christy Mahon, apparently a murderer, gains the respect of the local community. In the 'multicultural' version, the principal actor, Christopher Malomo, a graduate from Nigeria, has apparently killed his father and finds refuge in a pub in Dublin. Loredana explores the old and the new in an insightful and evaluative manner.

Although multiculturalism has become an almost jaded theme in academia, much of the material presented here is fresh, original and highly relevant. Loredana's work should be set in the context of the Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages, where she was a research associate for a number of years. This publication emerges from the theme 'cultural encounters' which was a key aspect of Academy's research during my period as director (2004-2009); and as the population changes, the need for new research continues.

L'derry, January 2010

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For this work I am hugely indebted to Prof. Máiréad Nic Craith at the Academy of Irish Cultural Heritages, Derry, and to Micheal O'hAodha, who proofread the draft and encouraged me to publish it. I am also grateful to all who contributed to enrich my understanding of migration and of its theatrical representations in Ireland. This research was carried out as part of a co-financed project between the Academy of Irish Cultural Heritages, University of Ulster, and the Dipartimento di Teorie e Ricerche dei Sistemi Culturali, Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia, Università di Sassari, and funded by both the Academy and the Fondazione Banco di Sardegna, Sassari. My gratitude goes to all theatre practitioners, directors, writers, actors, amateurs, but also to staff at various theatre venues and cultural associations around Ireland who shared their views and experience and kindly provided me with unpublished scripts and other relevant material. None of this work would have been possible without their help and generosity. A special thank you to academic and library staff at Magee and Coleraine campuses, to the editors, to my colleagues, my friends and family, not to mention my mentor, Prof. Giuseppe Serpillo, and Prof. Robert Welch whose teachings I treasure especially.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a phenomenon Irish people are all too familiar with. The history of their country is largely the history of its people's departure from their native land as the Irish have been for long in search of political and economic stability as well as religious tolerance[1]. The reality of displacement and mass migration to countries such as Australia, the Americas, Japan, and to mainland Europe is no doubt a crucial aspect of this people's cultural identity, both North and South of the border.

The last two decades of the twentieth century have witnessed a dramatic inversion of such a historic trend: in the Republic, this has coincided with, and was encouraged by the economic boom known as Celtic Tiger. In the North, the peace process and the easing off of the political tension contributed to making the region more appealing and hospitable for newcomers. The media played a significant role in this respect as they helped re-launch the local tourist industry on the international scene, and consequently to attract both short- and long-term visitors.

This is not the place to analyse in depth the economic, political and cultural factors that have turned Ireland into one of the top destinations for students, tourists, asylum seekers and the so-called economic migrants, yet it is important to acknowledge the changes that have occurred over the past two decades especially, and the circumstances that have made Ireland the country that it is today. That Ireland has become the land of opportunities for thousands of people is a phenomenon which scholars from different academic backgrounds are seeking to explain given that mass immigration has had, and still has, a big impact on the local economy, social welfare and culture. It is to this final aspect that we turn our attention in the present context as we aim to investigate how migration has shaped and is reflected in Irish culture today. More specifically, the focus of our study is the representation of outsiders in Irish culture, with special attention to the way in which theatre practitioners have dealt and

[1] See 'Introduction', in Kerby A. Miller, Arnold Schrier, Bruce D. Boling, and David N. Doyle, *Irish Immigrants in the Land of Canaan. Letters and Memoirs from Colonial and Revolutionary America, 1675-1815*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, v.

engaged with debates of national and cultural identities, hybridity, multiculturalism and racism in post-nationalist Ireland up to 2008. That is the main focus of our investigation, which covers a period of time prior to the economic crisis that has swept the whole continent of Europe and the US over the past two years.

Our emphasis on theatre finds its justification in the words of Silvia Jestrovic, according to whom

> "[Theatre] appropriates the exilic perspective, [one that] highlights the duality between familiar and strange present in everything that we consider our own and in everything that we consider as foreign". [Theatre] shows the world through the eyes of a foreigner, enabling us both to discover the intrinsic otherness within the well-known and to know what's on the "other side"[2].

The question of agency, that is the extent to which the migrants that appear in most theatrical productions today are the object or the subject of new plays from Ireland, is a primary concern in the present context. Accordingly, questions are posed in relation to who represents migrants, and in what way; who their audiences are, and who commissions these new plays. All along, a distinction is made between the Northern and the Southern Ireland contexts as the experience of migration presents different and distinctive traits on either side of this island's political borders.

[2] Silvja Jestrovic, "Exilic Perspectives; Introduction," *Modern Drama* 46, no.1 (Spring 2003): 2.

NORTH AND SOUTH: PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON MIGRATION AND THE IRISH STAGE

The representation of migrants/outsiders is a much more common phenomenon amongst theatrical productions in the South than it is in Northern Ireland. There are a number of reasons for this and the size difference between the two countries is clearly a major factor. Accordingly, and because of the strong economy in the Irish Republic, there are more migrants living there than there are in the North. Arguably, mass migration is a relatively new phenomenon in Northern Ireland also and this fact is reflected in the low representation and participation of non-nationals in the arts to date. Given the current political situation and the healthier economy there are reasons to believe that more people will be travelling to or settling in Northern Ireland in the near future, and that this will, in due course, have an impact on the local culture. In other words, as far as the North is concerned, and in relation to the theatrical representation of migrants and migrancy on stage, it is still "early days".

There are other issues which need to be taken into account when comparing the state of the arts North and South of the Irish border. Funding is a crucial issue when it comes to theatre and the arts in general. In contrast with the Irish Republic, the arts are notably under-funded in Northern Ireland and this affects theatre practitioners who wish to engage in new projects. For some companies the recruitment of foreign actors, whether amateur or professional, has been a problem due to the fact that most migrants are already in full-time employment[1]. The biggest impediment for most companies, however, has always been related to public funding. Since 2002, there has been a thirty-two per cent loss in public funding for the arts with the result that, for instance, the future of

[1] Casting for *Snow White the Remix* by the Derry-based Sole Purpose Production proved to be problematic as non nationals in the area were in full-time employment and could not engage in rehearsals or in the planned five-venue tour despite the fact that professional fees were offered to successful candidates. In conversation with Patricia Byrne, Co-Artistic Director at Sole Purpose, L'Derry, July 2008.

big events such as the annual Belfast Festival appears uncertain[2]. The forthcoming Olympic Games in 2012 have contributed to yet another major loss of funding for the Arts Council of Northern Ireland as UK Lottery funding is diverted to this sports event[3]. Private sponsorship may be an option, although there seems to be "no great tradition" of this in Northern Ireland especially in the arts sector[4]. While funding difficulties cannot be denied, albeit there is a general feeling that the arts need support and that the local sector's self-confidence needs a boost. Again, this may be a matter of time and the situation will hopefully change for the better in a non distant future.

Since the 1990s, EU Structural Funds have represented the main funding sources for the local arts. These are non-arts sponsorships which, in the case of Northern Ireland, have been made available in an attempt to "reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation by increasing economic development and employment, promoting urban and rural regeneration, developing cross-border co-operation and extending social inclusion". Under the European Union's Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland (1995-1999), about eighty per cent of the 691 million ECU was allocated to Northern Ireland.[5] In 2000, PEACE II funding was also made available in the region to enable support for "a wide range of programmes throughout the region and across all communities. They brought together social partners from the private, public and voluntary sectors to work together for renewal, regeneration and, importantly, reconciliation"[6].

Community work benefitted enormously and, as part of this process community drama became particularly prolific. Reflecting on recent developments in the Northern theatrical scene, Fintan Brady of the

---

[2] Rachel Andrews, "Staging the Future," *Irish Theatre Magazine*, 32, no.7 (Autumn 2007): 31.

[3] Ibid, 32.

[4] Ibid, 32.

[5] *The EU's Special Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in NI*, http://www.gppac.net/documents/pbp/10/4_eu.htm [accessed on 6 June 2008]. See also European Commission: Peace and Reconciliation-An imaginative approach to the European programme for Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland. Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1998.

[6] "Pearson welcomes additional €160 Million for Peace II Programme", Dr Andrew Mc Cormick, Second Permanent Secretary at the Department of Finance and Personnel speaking on behalf of the Finance Minister, Ian Pearson MP (7 March 2005) at http://www.dfpni.gov.uk/news-mar5-peaceii (accessed on 6 June 2006).

Belfast-based Partisan Productions has observed that "once the funding dried up community drama slowed down; some went back into amateur drama, while some moved into other areas of community work. There is very little community drama as such today[7]. What is more, the Community Relations Council tends to fund drama work that involves exclusively the Catholic and the Protestant communities, the two largest ethnic groups in the region, a fact which means that there is little sponsorship for plays that deal with foreign migration. Yet, despite this lack of funding, there are signs of good intent on the part of some theatre practitioners, practitioners whose work acknowledges or seeks to involve the non-Irish communities of the region. Partisan Productions, for example has lined up three major projects including two short plays and a feature film all of which involve "outsiders" who live or work locally[8].

The community drama sector occupies a very important place in the history of Northern Ireland drama. Arguably, David Grant's pioneering report *Playing the Wild Card* still remains the most authoritative source on the subject[9]. Although the situation has changed since its publication in 1993, and an update on the last sixteen years' activities is now required, this report provides a valuable insight into the significance of community drama for the Northern Irish context, with special attention given to the difficult question of what makes professional drama "professional", and the extent to which community drama can also be deemed professional[10].

---

[7] Fintan Brady, interview with the author, 7 May 2005. Partisan Productions grew out of the work of Belfast Community Theatre, an award-winning arts organization that, since 1992, has worked with grassroots organizations across Belfast. The aim of Partisan Productions is to create public platforms for the presentation and debate of political and social issues in this city in order to support the development of a more civil and democratic society.

[8] The first short play is a monologue by a woman who works in a canteen where foreign workers go for their lunch every day. The second play is "a forum production which deals with a sequence of moments of confrontation". The feature film has been developed by a Dutch director and it is based on the experience of working in a local call centre for African and Latin American migrants in Northern Ireland. "The film explores issues of integration and housing etc… and it is due by the end of 2009". Interview with Fintan Brady, 7 May 2008.

[9] In this respect, it is worth noting that doctoral research has been carried out recently at the University of Ulster by Matt Jennings, PhD research student c/o the Drama Department, University of Ulster Magee Campus, L'Derry.

[10] "The line between community theatre and professional theatre remains less clear in a small community such as Northern Ireland". Here there is 'a greater fluidity' and a 'much readier sharing of professional skills across all these categories' which means also that 'defining each category continues to be difficult'. Chrissie Poulter quoted in David Grant, *Playing the Wild Card - A survey of community drama and*

In this respect, the work promoted by the Belfast-based Tinder Box Theatre Company is of special relevance. Tinder Box "is dedicated entirely to new writing for the theatre, the playwrights who create it, and the environment in which it takes place"[11]. Accordingly, the Company has been involved in a number of projects which "celebrate difference" and "nurture encounter" so that the arts are used "to provide quality and challenging creative "intercultural experiences"[12].

In 2006 and 2007, the company was involved in two projects with NICEM, the Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities. Their joint effort led to *Memory House* and *In the Land of Green Pasture*, which were presented during Refugee Week 2006 and 2007 in Belfast. For *Memory House*, a group of twenty-five people was involved in workshops, drama games and exercises intended as a "dramatic journey down memory lane"[13]. In the process, Tinderbox collected and collated phrases, impressions and memories which made up the final script. Performed by five actors, this brief play "explored the themes of shared and contested spaces, as well as the tension between personal and collective memory"[14]. *In the Land of the Green Pasture* by Helen Bebey is a short piece about the experiences of asylum seekers in Northern Ireland. Five disappointed and embittered characters share a common feeling that "the grass is not greener on the other side". It is certainly not greener in Northern Ireland, anyway, and this is a fact which they have learned the hard way: those people who migrated to the region thinking that it would be a land of green pastures have soon discovered instead – "How quickly those dreams fade! How quickly you realise that instead of grass there's nothing but cement"[15].

This piece also seeks to dispel certain common assumptions about incoming migrants and especially about the so-called "economic migrants" – those who come 'to take our jobs' and who would do even the worst of jobs in order to make money:

---

smaller scale theatre from a community relations perspective (Belfast, Community Relations Council, 1993), 7-8.

[11] John McCann, Outreach Director at Tinderbox Theatre Company, Belfast. See *Gathering Ground: Promoting Good Intercultural Practice Using the Arts*. I am grateful to John McCann who gave me copies of the final scripts for *Chaat Masala* and *In the Land of Green Pasture*. Page numbers between brackets refer to those scripts.

[12] McCann, *Gathering Ground*, 7.

[13] Ibid, 44.

[14] Ibid, 45.

[15] Helen Bebey, *In the Land of Green Pasture*, 2. Script reprinted in McCann, *Gathering Ground*, 57.

> *Matti*: You are not caged here, are you? They offer you money for free when you decide to leave voluntarily, and still none of you want go.
> *Louise*: *(Angry)* Do you think that money is the only thing that attracts us here?
> *Matti*: *(Defiant)* If it's not for the money then why did you come here?
> *Beatrice*: I came here because I wanted to make life better for my family. Do you know how happy my parents are just knowing that I'm still here? (3)

In the play, the characters speak among themselves; they also address the local community and seek a dialogue with them. This kind of exchange is crucial to the Tinderbox's strategy of using the arts to promote good intercultural practices. Interculturalism is in fact high on the company's agenda; it is intended as a form of mutual acceptance, and "sharing and exchange between distinct ethnic or cultural groups", the ideal of an intercultural community arts experience ensures "sustainable good relations … and further challenging collaboration" for diverse ethnic and cultural groups[16].

Similarly, the Belfast-based ArtsEkta, has been active in providing "a unique display of Indian and other ethnic arts within the North and South of Ireland". Defining itself as a "cutting-edge, progressive organisation with an international outlook", ArtsEkta (a word that translates the Indian for "bonding" or "uniting")

> works to enhance the practice, understanding and appreciation of Indian and other ethnic arts across North and South of Ireland within a contemporary artistic, social and educational context. ArtsEkta [is] dedicated to strengthening and deepening relationships between all the different cultures through an exciting and inspiring arts-based program[17].

In March 2007, Tinder Box in association with ArtsEkta produced *Chaat Masala, A Bollywood for Belfast,* a play about the Indian experience of Northern Ireland[18]. Performed in the Waterfront Hall Studio Theatre, this intercultural performance was the result of both improvisation and a series of five-month workshops involving a cast of twenty-five Indian and non-Indian community amateur actors.[19]. *Chaat Masala* charts the journey of teenager Vir as he goes from his native Mumbai to Belfast. From the

[16] McCann, *Gathering Ground*, 10.
[17] See http://www.artsekta.org.uk/ accessed on 6 June 2008.
[18] McCann, *Gathering Ground*, p. 38.
[19] Nearly three hundred people attended the performances between 19 and 20 March 2007. See McCann, *Gathering Ground*, 37.

beginning, the play draws attention to the way people react to the arrival of the young foreigner, and to the way Vir feels about his life in a foreign country. In Northern Ireland, Vir meets some relatives and members of the local Indian and non-Indian communities. The audience is made familiar with Indian culture, and more importantly, with common perceptions of Indian culture (e.g. arranged marriages, Hindus, music and dance) – as they have been promoted by the Bollywood industry. At the same time, spectators can see Northern Ireland through the eyes of the young protagonist as he meets new people in the workplace, at school, and in the street.

Chaat Masala revolves around the issue of stereotypes as much as it explore the locals' sense of hospitality: "Is Northern Ireland a great place to live?", asks a teacher to a mixed class of Indian and non-Indian pupils (24). The teacher's question is perhaps an echo of recent debates in the aftermath of an article which appeared in the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* and which labelled Belfast as "the the world's most racist city"[20] (a reputation that in the opinion of many people, the capital city of Northern Ireland "deserves")[21]. This play provides a positive response to the question of Northern Ireland's hospitality. At the end of the play people celebrate to the sound of a Bollywood tune in a Belfast video store where old acrimonies are resolved and distant families are reunited (43-45). This is a clear example of the type of good intercultural practice which lies at the heart of all Tinderbox's community projects.

Alongside community drama and the inputs provided by both outreach and education projects across the North, a number of "professional" dramas have also been produced which relate to migration and to the presence of foreign nationals in the region. Works such as *A Kick in the Stomach* and *A Kick in the Teeth* (Dave Duggan for Sole Purpose, 2006), *The Duke of Hope* (Conor Grimes and Alan McKee for Tinderbox, 2007), and *The Winners* (Rosemary Jenkinson for Ransom, 2008) are examples of a type of theatre which acknowledges the presence of migrant workers in Northern Ireland but does not critically engage with the social and cultural impact of immigration. These plays feature economic migrants such as Chris, the Polish bartender, Sophie, the French pianist and model (*The*

[20] Matthias Matussek, "The madness of Belfast", 28/02/2005. See http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,344173,00.html (accessed on February 5, 2007).

[21] Anna Lo of the Chinese Welfare Association as reported in an article from the BBC news website on 27/01/2006. See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/3434241.stm, accessed on (accessed on February 2, 2007).

Duke of Hope) or Woman 2, the anonymous pregnant woman who calls for help in Ibo (*A Kick in the Stomach*) – these are people who have moved to the region in search of a better job and who are likely to return to their countries of origin. There are a few references to racism and stereotypes; migrants are sometimes associated with sexual fantasies or are looked down upon because they are "only over here to take our jobs", but that is *almost* all the discussion of this that there is[22].

Another theatrical piece worth noting for its representation of Northern Ireland's fast-changing multi-ethnic and multicultural society is *Snow White - The Remix*. This is a thirty-minute show devised by the Derry-based Sole Purpose Productions to celebrate International Women's Day in 2002. The play re-works the classic fairytale of Snow White for an audience of young school children. In December 2006, the text was adapted for the Christmas Pantomime and put on at the Playhouse, Orchard Street, Derry, before touring a number of community centres around Northern Ireland. The revised version was about an hour long; it contained musical pieces and focused on the cosmetic industry and on issues of self-image and self-esteem amongst young girls (a clear reference to the ongoing debates over size-zero models and the negative influence of both the fashion and cosmetic industries on children and adolescents)[23]. By 2008, Patricia Byrne, the new artistic director of the company, had written and directed a third version of the show which sought to "tackle the theme of the beauty industries" while also exploring various aspects of multiculturalism. The play was not primarily about multiculturalism but it used actors from mixed ethnic backgrounds to "reflect the growing cultural diversity of Northern Ireland". It sought to make the encounter with cultural diversity a "positive experience" for children who come across different accents, traditions, and skin colours in this constantly changing society.[24] Hence the decision to employ an actress of an Indian

[22] See Dave Duggan, 'A Kick in the Stomach', in *Plays in the Peace Process* (Derry: Guildhall Press, 2008), first produced under commission from the Belfast City Council, by Sole Purpose Productions at Belfast City Hall on 19 October 2006, for a small staff-training event. Conor Grimes and Alan McKee, *The Duke of Hope* (Belfast: Lagan Press, 2007), presented by Tinderbox Theatre Company and first performed at the Drama and Film Centre at Belfast Queens University on 18 October 2007.

[23] For details of the 2002 and the 2006 productions of *Snow White – The Remix* see *Report Five–January 2005-December 2006*, published by Sole Purpose Production on the company's tenth anniversary.

[24] The 2008 performance added original music to the previous songs. As regards casting, Sole Purpose auditioned professional actors resident in the area who would be of a non-Irish ethnic background. Adverts were circulated in various venues

ethnic background to play the Queen; while the plastic surgeon appears to have an east-European accent and the seven dwarfs cook goulash for Snow White[25].

The works discussed so far reflect one particular trend in contemporary theatre from Northern Ireland. There is also a type of theatre which confirms that, in the longer term, Northern Irish theatre will produce works where migrants play an active role – as writers, producers and actors, for instance – and where plays are performed or composed by migrants or they are about migrants living in the region. Here follow a couple of significant examples.

In October 2000, *Shalom Belfast!* by the Irish playwright Rebecca Bartlett was presented at the Belfast Royal and went on to tour schools and other venues across Northern Ireland[26]. Produced by Replay Productions, this full-length play in twenty-eight scenes had in its premiere a cast of five actors, one musician and another actor who played the part of the chorus[27]. Bartlett's play won the "Diversity 21" Award that year for celebrating "the contribution the immigrant Jewish community has made to the economic, social and cultural diversity of Northern Ireland"[28].

Shalom Belfast! tells the story of Miriam, a widow of thirty-six and a Jew who is driven out of her native Lithuania and sails to Ireland with her son Isaac, aged sixteen. Set in the past, in the years between 1896 and 1938, the play charts the process of integration by the Kozetski family from their first arrival in Northern Ireland through the years of conflict at

---

including the local University Campus, Magee, while a Polish version of the leaflets was distributed through the local Polski Support Centre, Magazine St., Derry. One person responded to the advertisement, a student at the School of Performing Arts, University of Ulster. In total, six people were auditioned including prospective actors, dancers, singers and musicians from an African background. The cast included Abby Oliveira, a Scottish-African actress who played the part of the Narrator; Tara Vij of Indian descent, who played the part of the Queen, and Miroki Tong, a Chinese actress brought up in Canada who played the double role of the Woodcutter and one of the seven dwarfs. I am indebted to Patricia Byrne who kindly provided the information reported here.

[25] In an interview with Patricia Byrne (1 July 2008) I was advised that the Cosmetic Surgeon was to put on an English accent as opposed to his Northern Irish accent. Watching the performance, I had the impression that he spoke with an East European accent.

[26] *Shalom Belfast!* is an unpublished script. I owe a debt to the author who gave me a copy of her play and permission to quote from it.

[27] See Replay Productions at www.replayproductions.org accessed 20 March 2007 and programme notes from the original production of the play.

[28] Ibidem.

the start of the century and the depression that followed World War I and the 1920s Troubles. Integration is articulated in terms of transplantation through the metaphor of the family tree. In the opening sequence, a tree is seen from which a number of items are hanging and which Miriam decides to bring with her when preparing for her journey: the tree represents "the life tree of our family ... transplanted here where it could grow, away from the rocks of pogrom and prejudice" (1), and the hanging items are mainly religious objects including "a prayer shawl, the Menorah, covenant bag ... wedding ribbons for the joining of hands ... and a Star of David"[29]. Significantly, the tree remains onstage until the show ends; by then its roots will "have clutched the Irish soil", and "its shadow touched the lives of all those people that we have known, have still to know" (Miriam, 70).

The passage is exemplary of the way in which the play relates present-day events to both the past and the future since it makes its plot relevant to contemporary social and cultural contexts. The story of Miriam and Isaac provides a narrative pretext with which to recount the many stories of Jewish people who arrived in the North of Ireland and lived there at times of war and deprivation. Likewise, their story is the story of people who have left their countries of origin in search of a safer place to live, and who, in recent years, have made Northern Ireland their new home.

Both migrants and locals engage in a long process of mutual exchange which involves negotiation between their cultures, languages, customs and religious practices. Multiple encounters become possible onstage (just as they have occurred offstage in the past and as they it is hoped that they will occur in the future) in a contemporary social and political context which appears to be not that dissimilar after all. As the Nazis (onstage) persecute and segregate the Jews of the 1930s, people in the audience are likely to recognise analogous patterns of "intimidation" and "discrimination" relating to the (Northern) Irish context. The Chorus spells this out in the epilogue: "We recognise it too ... the weight of the past. The burden of the future" (69). These analogies act also as reminders that multiculturalism is not a novelty of the third millennium, on the contrary (Northern) Irish society has long been multicultural, and the real issues are not so much change and transition but rather visibility and recognition. In the words of the Chorus, "Silent voices [are] still to be heard" (70).

Language is a crucial aspect of Bartlett's approach to the cultural encounter of the Kozetski family with the local community. The title of the play itself, for instance, imagines a positive negotiation of differences as it brings together the Yiddish salute "Shalom" and the English toponym

[29] Rebecca Bartlett, *Shalom Belfast*, unpublished script (2000): 1. I am grateful to the author who gave me a copy of her play and permission to quote from it.

"Belfast" to indicate both the welcoming of Jews to Northern Ireland, the positive embrace towards Northern Irish life on the part of the migrating Jews, but also the possibility for the coexistence of both cultural identities on equal grounds. These notions are reiterated throughout the play as the process of Isaac's integration is marked by his acquisition of the English language in the form of local place-names, a process which is not as easy as it first appears. In fact, two years from their arrival Isaac is still struggling to learn local names as he comes across words which are too difficult to pronounce (18).

The play reflects the rationale of Replay Production in that it provides "educational entertainment" for a target audience of secondary school youngsters. Thus, the question of "What makes the Kozetskis one of us?" (32) is exemplary of the company's intent to promote "concepts of shared Cultural Identity and Diversity". And yet, the play overlooks the reality of anti-Semitism in Ireland, and the issues affecting the smallest ethnic minority on the island at present. In other words, *Shalom Belfast!* fails to engage critically with the ongoing denial of Jews' Irishness – the fact that there are Irish Jews and that they have made, and continue to make a significant contribution to the local economy and cultural landscape[30]. Bartlett's play is no exception; and likewise most theatrical works that deal with migration tend to avoid the contentious question of Irish racism. That this is so contributes to the possibility that racism is being denied in Ireland, and that this may be at once the cause and the consequence of forms of racism that are specific to this part of the world[31].

The denial of racism is the theme of *Darkie* by the Northern Irish playwright, poet and documentary film-maker Damian Gorman. Written for a performance by the Blue Box Theatre Company in May 2005, *Darkie* is essentially about visibility and inequality for foreigners who live in

[30] For a discussion of anti-Semitism in Ireland see Ronit Lentin, "Who ever heard of an Irish Jew?" Racialising the intersection of "Irishness" and "Jewishness"', in *Racism and Anti-racism in Ireland*, ed. Ronit Lentin and Robbie McVeigh (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 2002), 153-66.

[31] Racism has been largely unacknowledged in Ireland: "It was not until 1997 that government passed legislation outlawing racial discrimination – thirty years after its counterpart in Great Britain". Prior to 1997, academics Robbie McVeigh and Ronit Lentin denounced the existence of indigenous forms of racism through a series of influential publications. More recently, a conference entitled "Racism: Moving beyond Denial?" organised by the Dungannon and South Tyrone Borough Council, was dedicated "to the issue of racism and what should be done to tackle it". See Racism: Moving Beyond Denial?, a report, available online at www.dungannon.gov.uk/index.cfm (accessed on 17 September 2008).

Northern Ireland[32]. Gorman investigates the reality of racism in a context where migrants are said to be "treated like lords here given what they'd be paid at home" (52). The play is set in the present "in the summer of 2005", and explores the experience of a group of Bosnian nationals who work for a mushroom farm in County Tyrone, Northern Ireland. Run by the Martin family, the mushroom farm employs both local and foreign people but the latter receive a distinctively unequal treatment: "When you are here do what *we* do; what you're told" (45). Gorman uses the well-known racist term of "darkie" to compare the working and living conditions of many foreigners today to those of black people in the former British colonies. Accordingly, the play touches upon issues of underpaid labour, poor housing conditions, verbal and physical abuse as it explores the relationship between a group of foreign employees, their local workmates and the farm's management.

Language functions as a primary racial marker in the play: though English is spoken throughout, at times some of the Bosnian characters act as if they were "using their own language", and when they speak English they adopt an East European accent"[33]. In an early scene between Rita Carragher, the farm's Assistant Manager, and Djemal Sadic, one of the Bosnian workers, the former affirms that since the man in front of her cannot speak English "he is stupid" (17). The fact that he can speak French, German and Serbo-Croat is totally irrelevant to her: "Sometimes I think you forget where you are (Sighs) You people …" (17). Later on, the woman presents Djemal with a contract to sign. Her attitude to him is again markedly racist: "His wages will be £ 7 a day for six days – that's forty quid (Puts a sheet of paper in front of Djemal). Sign that, or make your mark or whatever (18). People like Djemal are silenced; in fact it is never "their turn to speak"; if and when they are given a chance to say something, they are promptly dismissed:

> Dobrila: My colleague wonders if it might be possible to do something about the cold in the cabin. He's concerned that his work performance might be impaired. Rita ("Sweetly"): Tell him of course … (Less sweetly:) He can buy his own bloody heater. Now *go!* (19)

[32] Blue Box is composed of final-year students from the Belfast Institute's Tower Street Building.
See http://www.belfastinstitute.ac.uk/news_and_events/article.asp?id=290.
Damian Gorman, *Darkie*, unpublished script (May 2005), 3. I owe debt to John McCann of Tinderbox Theatre Company who helped me make contact with Damian Gorman, and to Damian Gorman who gave me access to the original 2005 script from which all quotations are taken.

[33] In the text, words which should be accented are underlined. Gorman, *Darkie*, 3.

A similar behaviour is seen among workmates: as Enver well knows, "We're all "Darkie" to them. Me, you, Dobrila – it doesn't matter, we're all "Darkie" (21). Significantly, when racism erupts in the workplace one of the "darkies" is chased around by three people "wearing a white mask" who push his head down the toilet (42). The incident is reported by Dobrila: speaking with a distinctively foreign accent, she receives little sympathy from Rita whose only reaction is to ask whether the toilet was clean (44).

Integration is not an option within the limited confines of the mushroom farm. Though some may express their interest in cultural differences – "Who's the Catholic and the Protestants in your place", asks a local woman called Ishie, who later takes part in the assault in the toilet, the positive encounter of diverse people is met with resistance from both sides. Thus, for instance, the prospect of a love union between Djemal and Francesca Martin from the Martin family is unacceptable for people such as Enver for whom Francesca "is different from us" (63). Enver's views are similar to Rita's; like her boss, he too "really believes" (65) that the culture line cannot be crossed, and diversity will not "build a bridge". In his view Francesca cannot be "the one" for Djemal because she is a "western woman":

> Djemal: She's different Enver.
> Enver: I know she is –different from us.
> Djemal: No, from the others!
> Enver: But the others were different from the other too Djemal – I *know* you
> Djemal: I am mad about you.
> Enver: I know you are. But don't worry, it will pass.
> Djemal: I'm not so sure my friend. She could be the one.
> Enver: No she couldn't, she's …
> Djemal: What? … Christian?
> Enver: and western. It wouldn't work.
> Djemal: We're having fun.
> Enver: Exactly. Have your fun … that's what western women are for (63-64).

A similar argument is found also in Donal O'Kelly's *Asylum! Asylum!*, written and produced for the Abbey Theatre in 1994, and one of the earliest intercultural plays of contemporary Ireland[34]. *Asylum! Asylum!*

[34] Donal O'Kelly, "Asylum! Asylum!", in *New Plays from the Abbey Theatre 1993-1995*, ed. with an introduction by Christopher Fitz-Simon and Sanford Sternlicht (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 113-74.

centres around the Gaughran family and Joseph Omara, a Ugandan refugee who is to be "deported to country of origin" after his application for asylum is rejected (153). O'Kelly uses the metaphor of inter-racial romance to seek out cultural encounters at least imaginatively; in the play, Mary Gaughran, a solicitor of success, falls for her African client, yet the union between the two is rendered impossible by a combination of unbending law and prejudice from the local people, both of which are predicated upon fear: "Europe thinks we're leaky. They want to see us plugged ... The result is Operation Sweep ... All illegal aliens out" (153). Fear is a keyword in the play; it is inflicted as a "deterrent ... Fear is the only thing they understand" (166). There is also a fear of the "other", fear that the "other" looks better or sounds better; that s/he has a better story to tell. It is not a case, in fact, that Joseph wins everyone's sympathy by virtue of his stories based on recollections of his childhood and his father. Like a playboy of the western world this African immigrant enthrals those who listen to him (Leo, Bill and Mary); some imitate him (Leo), others are overcome by jealousy, indeed by fear (Leo and Pillar). And so Joseph is harassed and evicted firstly by immigration officer Leo Gaughran, Mary's brother, whose father Bill welcomes the asylum seeker in his house, and secondly, by Pillar, another immigration officer who fancies Mary. During a late-night discussion with Mary, Pillar suggest that Joseph, now an illegal immigrant, agrees to be driven out of the country "quietly ... no struggle. No bodybelt. No binding. Civilised behaviour" (154). Clearly, his proposal is a way to get rid of his love rival who is bound to leave anyway: "What the fuck do you see in him? Are you blind to the fact that he is a chancer ... Ten o'clock tonight. Ring me if you're interested? (155).

O'Kelly's play has not been staged in the North; in fact, there are no analogous examples of the theatrical experimentation with and articulation of cultural and racial barriers in relation to Northern Irish society. In the South, however, *Asylum! Asylum!* has helped to set the scene for a host of other theatre plays dedicated to the issues of integration vis-à-vis assimilation, cultural encounter, the legal handling of immigration and the role of the EU along with the possibility of forms of Irish racism and the way in which a traditionally-diasporic people relate to immigrants coming to their country today.