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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Across the Margins: Cultural Identity and Change in the Atlantic Archipelago* by Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth

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## BOOK REVIEWS

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***Across the margins: Cultural identity and change in the Atlantic Archipelago*; edited by Glenda Norquay and Gerry Smyth. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002: pp.214.**

*Across the Margins* signals a further intervention in the burgeoning arena of 'spatialized' politico-cultural critique vis-à-vis Irish society. Smyth and Norquay's collection operates within the orbit of what has evolved into a discernible historical school, Archipelagic History; in this case interrogating the interactions of Irish, Scottish, Welsh, and English cultures. The edition follows Smyth and Norquay's previous editorial collaboration, *Space and Place: The Geographies of Literature*, as well as Smyth's solo publication, *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination*. The fractious constitution of 'marginality' and the attendant cultural politics of place serve as the editorial leitmotifs; indeed the collection extends a gathering debate on the politics of postcolonial space, evidenced in the recent publication of volumes such as *Ireland in Proximity* and Joe Cleary's *Literature and Partition*. The assertion that Ireland is a country that requires more theory and not less has been emphatically answered in recent times. Echoing the more concerted critique of Soja's 'postmodern geography' in *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination*, Smyth and Norquay locate the significance of this volume in its effort 'to relieve the intellectual hegemony of the former [historical imperative] while pointing out the complete interpenetration of each by the other': simply, the editors canvass the notion that temporal and spatial axes are fundamentally laminated.

Colin Graham's 'A warmer memory: speaking of Ireland' is also published in his more recent collection, *Deconstructing Ireland*, and it is this very idea of critically interrogating a discursive inflection of 'Ireland' that is the focus of Graham's discourse. Graham throws into relief the conceptual nomenclature of 'Irish Studies' and 'Ireland', he notes, 'Giving 'Ireland' a meaning which fills out the term comfortably is seemingly the underlying principle of Irish criticism's existence' (36). The materiality of cultural critique recedes, therefore, as the favoured deployment of paradigmatic typologies and conceptual tropes both envelope and distantiate any semblance of Irish 'reality'. By invoking Barthes' Michelet and Albert Memmi, Graham avers the impossibility of critically 'representing' history from below; just as Spivak's subaltern cannot speak, can the endeavours of editions such as, *Theorising Ireland*, *Reinventing Ireland*, or *Inventing Ireland* ever approximate to an adequate sense of 'Ireland'? He concludes,

'Put simply, if 'Ireland existed self-evidently, why would we need to examine it, contest it, invent it, state its anomalies, or write it?'(38).

Through the *vox pop* modalities of the now defunct 'Britpop' phenomenon as well as the seismic chutzpah of punk rock, Sean Campbell's 'Sounding out the margins: ethnicity and popular music in British cultural studies' examines the persistence of a homogenised white ethnicity in contemporary British society. Despite the palpable Irish residues evident in both the music and professed influences of John Lydon, John Marr, Stephen Morrissey and the Gallagher brothers, recent studies of British ethnic constituencies have subsumed or utterly failed to register any sense of distinct Irish ethnicity. Campbell notes, 'it has been almost axiomatic in cultural studies simply to overlook the particular immigrant background of the second-generation Irish' (117). The 1978 publication *Policing the Crisis*, issued from the 'Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Culture', is severely reproached by Campbell for its portrait of a strictly attenuated snapshot of what is, Campbell contends, a cornucopia of disparate ethnicities within the British state. He points to the predominance of class as socio-political differential rather than the specifics of ethnic origin and/or inheritance. That is not to say that Campbell advertises any form of ethnic essentialism or reductionism, but merely urges a 'paradigm shift that might [sic] engender...a fuller understanding of the complex and diverse contours that constitute Britain's multi-ethnic margin' (135).

Childs, who has previously published a highly instructive introductory volume to contemporary postcolonial theory, broadens the edition's remit beyond England's relations with the 'Celtic fringes.' His chapter, 'Where do you belong?': De-scribing Imperial identity from alien to migrant', is concerned with 'what is at stake in a shift from a discourse that sees polarised identities (dis) located in either rootedness or rootlessness, belonging or alienation, to one that sees them characterised by relocations through oscillation, travel, diaspora and immigration' (52). Leaning heavily on the work of Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy, and refracted through the literature of Paul Scott, V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie, Childs discusses the prose writings concerned with India(ns) and England since Independence in 1947. He explores the internally diffuse ethnicities that constitute the British 'nation'; national identity, to invoke Bhabha and Benedict Anderson, is not solely founded on foreign/external difference but in 'multiple imagined communities within and not across margins' (51). Just as India has been a constant in British self-fashioning, contemporaneously 'empire in reverse' transports this symbiosis to the metropolitan centre. The dichotomous relations between centre and margins are dissolved in Child's conceptualisation, as migrancy becomes an acceptable site of 'travelling identity'; movement does not preclude belonging but doubles the possibility. Childs, then, urges a recasting of the concrete terms of identity-formation, as

the delimiting signifiers of temporal and spatial allegiance are no longer tenable.

While the edition is inclusive in terms of literary forms, critical theory, and popular culture, there are minor reservations about its 'material' import. Specifically, one would perhaps demand a chapter that clearly explicates the dynamics and/or actualities of Scottish/Welsh/Northern Irish devolution processes; even the interrelations operative therein. Equally, a useful addition to the cultural politics of marginality would have been a chapter on contemporary historiographical debates as they concern themselves with postcolonialism, identity-formation and border negotiations. In particular, one would have to look no further than the historiographically 'marginalised' figure of Roger Casement; indeed such a discussion could also include Casement's personal experience of both political and physical marginality. Despite these limited reservations, Smyth and Norquay furnish Irish cultural debate with a well-rounded and timely edition on both the theoretical and literary negotiations surrounding marginality within the Atlantic Archipelago.

**Eoin Flannery**

***Time for Action. A report to CTBI.* London: Church House Publishing, 2002, pp.176.**

CTBI stands for Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. This is a report by the group established to examine issues of sexual abuse, whose moderator, Methodist David Gamble, may be presumed to have had a main hand in compiling the report. Gamble warns appropriately that the book is not intended for easy reading. *It challenges the Churches both to offer better support to those who have been abused, and create an environment where abuse is clearly unacceptable and far less likely to recur.* It is hortatory and challenging, calling for action and justice. Though relatively brief, it carries the mark of seventeen hands representing a range of organisations, so inevitably is something of a literary camel, the committee's version of a horse. The reader has to wrestle with many acronyms, CTBI, CSSA, MACSAS, S.O.C.A., PECS, COPCA and so on.

More than acronyms, the reader must experience the sadness, outrage, distaste and helplessness provoked by stories of sexual abuse. The term is given a broad definition, including incest and child abuse, rape and other forms of sexual violence, sexual harassment, pornography, homophobia, prostitution, female genital mutilation and much more besides. Their essential feature is that the sexual activity is not welcome, mutual or consensual, and that it involves differentials of power. By spreading their net wide, the authors force themselves into a more diffuse focus than if, for instance, they had limited themselves to child sexual abuse. There are sections on emotional deprivation, care dependency, the vulnerability of people who are disabled, racially different or in residential care. What starts with sexual abuse spreads to all sorts of needs, and therefore to all sorts of