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Auteur

Déborah Vandewoude
MCF Anglais
Université d'Artois
Laboratoire Textes et Cultures
deborah.vandewoude @ univ-artois.fr

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Feeling Irish enough: Shifting identities and the advent of the new Irish in Roddy Doyle's *The Deportees* (2007)

Jean-Philippe HENTZ
Université de Strasbourg

Résumé

Depuis l'an 2000, Roddy Doyle a publié des nouvelles par épisodes dans *Metro Eireann*, hebdomadaire fondé en avril 2000 par deux journalistes nigériens et particulièrement destiné à la population immigrante et multiculturelle d'Irlande, en forte augmentation ces dernières années. Les huit premières nouvelles ont été publiées en 2007 dans un recueil intitulé *The Deportees*. Elles traitent des effets du changement rapide qui s'est opéré en Irlande, devenu un pays d'immigration et de diversité ethnique et culturelle. Ces nouvelles sont une façon de s'approprier cette nouvelle réalité, mais aussi de poser la question de ses effets secondaires et de ses conséquences en termes d'intégration, d'identité, de racisme, d'acceptation ou de rejet.

De l'absurdité de la mesure d'un taux d'irlandicité à la création utopique d'un groupe musical multiculturel, les personnages y sont confrontés aux stéréotypes et à leur déconstruction, ainsi qu'à l'obligation de composer avec un pays aux repères mouvants où la définition de soi semble être moins évidente qu'auparavant.

En tenant compte de la façon dont les Irlandais étaient considérés il y a à peine un siècle, on pourrait s'interroger sur un tel renversement des rôles, qui implique non seulement une redéfinition de l'identité nationale irlandaise, mais aussi la définition d'un nouveau processus : celui par lequel on devient irlandais. Faisant écho tour à tour aux points de vue, peurs et espoirs des immigrants comme des Irlandais de souche, ces nouvelles tentent d'exprimer la constitution d'une nouvelle unité nationale à travers la multiplicité des voix, des langues et des expériences.

Mots-clés : Irlande – identité – immigration – nation – cosmopolitisme

Abstract

Since 2000, Roddy Doyle has published short stories in instalments for *Metro Eireann*, a weekly newspaper founded by two Nigerian journalists in April 2000 and focusing on news about Ireland's growing immigrant and multicultural population. The first eight stories were published in 2007 in a book entitled *The Deportees*. These stories deal with the effects of the shift that occurred almost overnight in Ireland, from a country of emigration to a country of immigration and cultural-ethnic diversity. These stories are a way of appropriating this new reality, but also of questioning its side-effects and consequences: integration, identity, racism, acceptance or rejection.

From the absurdity of the measurement of a rate of Irishness to the Utopian setting up of a cosmopolitan band, the characters in these stories are faced with stereotypes and their deconstruction, but also with the obligation to deal with a country of shifting landmarks, where self-definition seems to be less obvious than before.

Bearing in mind the way the Irish were considered barely a century ago, we may wonder at such a reversal of roles which implies not only a redefinition of the Irish national identity but also the definition of a new process: the process of becoming Irish. Echoing in turn the points of view, fears and hopes of the immigrant or of the native Irishman, these short stories attempt to express the construction of a new national unity through a multiplicity of voices, languages and experiences.

Keywords: Ireland – identity – immigration – nation – cosmopolitanism

Introduction

In the year 2000, two Nigerian journalists living in Dublin launched *Metro Eireann*, a weekly newspaper presented as “the primary source of news and information on Ireland's fast-growing immigrant and ethnic communities” (metroeireann.com). When writer Roddy Doyle heard of the newspaper, he asked its founders if he could participate in the project and it was decided, as he recounts in the preface to *The Deportees*, that he would publish short stories in monthly instalments of 800 words. The first eight stories were published as a book, entitled *The Deportees*, in 2007. Doyle has continued writing for *Metro Eireann* and seven more stories have been written up to now, all available only on the website of the newspaper for the moment.

Roddy Doyle had two main objectives when he decided to write and publish these stories: first, to express the dramatic changes undergone in Ireland in the last few decades; secondly, to deconstruct racist stories he had heard and propose stories of encounter and cosmopolitanism instead. All the stories in *The Deportees* actually work along the same principles, summed up by Doyle in the preface: “Someone born in Ireland meets someone who has come to live here” (Doyle, 2007: XIII). The short stories published after 2007 still work along the same principles, though they take into account the post-crisis situation in Ireland and its accompanying consequences and problematics, which do not appear yet in the stories of *The Deportees*.

This paper focuses mainly on five of the eight published stories whose themes and motives are actually representative of the collection as a whole. Through encounters between natives and immigrants, or “old and new” as he also phrases it, Roddy Doyle explores the possibilities of a country and a nation considered as works in progress, confronted with constant evolutions and shifts in their definitions and compositions. What is at stake is actually less the sharing of a common territory or of the national wealth than the impact of this situation on the consciences and behaviours of the populations. Each of the stories is a possible answer to the same central question, almost reminiscent of the *Lettres Persanes*: how do you become Irish? Indeed, if being Irish may seem to be a given, the characters in the stories, be they Irish or immigrants, all go through processes of self-definition and re-definition which seem to point out that the Irish themselves have to come to terms with the new Ireland they live in and must therefore become Irish again, find ways to fit into the cosmopolitan present reality while at the same time reconnecting themselves to the essence, rather than biased representations, of Irishness.

From the 1990s onwards, Ireland “went sexy” (Doyle, 2007: 213), in the words of Declan O’Connor, the main character of “Home to Harlem”, the seventh short-story in *The Deportees*. This ‘sexiness’ of the country refers to its renewed attractiveness in the eyes of both the Irish themselves and people outside Ireland. Indeed, the rebranding of Ireland as a place of innovation, entrepreneurialism, cosmopolitanism and overall energy changed the vision the Irish had of their country but also of their own national identity, a shift which has been accompanied by the arrival of a growing number of immigrants, attracted by the opportunities offered by the Celtic Tiger.

Roddy Doyle’s short stories are actually ways to deal with this shift, not only to define and explain this new spirit sweeping contemporary Ireland, but also to appropriate it. In the preface to *The Deportees*, Roddy Doyle explains that what made him want to write these stories was the almost overnight change that Ireland had just undergone: “It happened, I think, some time in the mid-90s. I went to bed in one country and woke up in a different one. That was how it felt, for a while. It took getting used to» (Doyle, 2007: XI). This impression, which he shared with a whole generation of Irish people, had actually been at the back of his mind for some time, as can be read in an interview given in 1996 and published in Gerry Smith’s *The Novel and the Nation* (1997):

So I suppose a lot of people, including writers, around this age are looking around and thinking, “Jesus Christ, we’re living in a different country”. For anybody living in Ireland, particularly in the last five years, it’s not just an economic thing. It’s cultural, religious, social, every aspect. You should bring your passport to bed with you because you’re going to wake up in a different place. (Smith, 1997: 102)

The short stories are actually not only about the confrontation between immigrants and natives, but also about the natives’ – and the author’s – feeling of foreignness, of alienation in their own country. Indeed, the Irish characters in these stories are all coming to terms with a new version of Ireland, and their encounter, confrontation or union with foreigners metaphorically express their solving, or trying to solve, the issue of their own alienation.

The writing of these short stories corresponds to a specific, almost political project: through them, the writer actually takes part in the reflection on the changes Ireland has undergone and the act of writing therefore becomes an act of citizenship, in keeping with the “integrationist, celebrate-difference” (Reddy: 2005) editorial project of *Metro Eireann*. This political dimension is all the more present as the stories were written and published during a period when Irish society questioned its own capacity to integrate these new arrivals. These questionings especially

found expression in the 2004 Citizenship Referendum “in which, at a majority of four to one, the Irish electorate voted for the removal of birthright citizenship to children of migrants” (Lentin, 2007: 610). As explained by Ronit Lentin, who is also a contributor to *Metro Eireann*, this referendum aimed at amending article 9 of the Irish Constitution “to remove birthright citizenship from children born in Ireland who do not have at least one parent who is an Irish citizen or who is entitled to Irish citizenship” (Lentin, 2007: 611). The organization and results of this referendum are considered by Ronit Lentin as symptoms of a racialisation of the Irish State’s policy on immigration, with a definition of citizenship that implicitly includes ethnic origins, while at the same time racism is still considered as a marginal phenomenon in Irish society. This is recalled by one of the founders of *Metro Eireann*, Chinedu Onyejelem, in an interview given to Maureen Reddy:

Onyejelem reminded me several times that various government officials and powerful pundits keep insisting there is no racism in Ireland, or, at most, they assert that racism is a new phenomenon that arrived with the wave of immigrants of colour, thereby subtly blaming racism on its targets. (Reddy, 2005)

This contradiction is at the heart of the project of *The Deportees* through which Doyle proposes other definitions of citizenship in Ireland, based on the key concept of encounter, as the encounter with the Other is the ultimate test against which racist prejudices can actually be revealed, but also deconstructed. The structure of *The Deportees* itself mirrors this idea of an encounter which eventually leads to fusion and the promise of a renewed definition of Irishness: in the first story, “Guess Who’s Coming for the Dinner”, Larry Linnane meets a young Nigerian, whom he wrongly believes is the boyfriend of one of his daughters. The fusion or hybridization feared by Larry, which elicits upsetting racist feelings in him, is only fantasized and disappears when Larry realizes the true nature of his daughter’s relationship with the young Nigerian. The final acceptance of the Other in this story is therefore peaceful but separate co-existence: the newcomer is considered as equal, but both native and newcomer remain in their respective private environments. This is not the case in the last story of the collection, entitled “I Understand”, in which Tom, an illegal immigrant in Dublin harassed by a man who wants to exploit his uncertain situation, falls in love with Ailbhe and eventually seeks refuge at her home. The last lines of the story, which are also the last lines of the book, end on Ailbhe’s invitation to Tom to come in, thus metaphorically referring to Ireland – the Land of a Thousand Welcomes – letting in those who seek refuge on its shores, but also to the fusion of native with newcomer:

- So, she says. – Do you remember my name?
 – Yes, I say.
 Kevin told me. I wrote it on my sleeve.
 – Yes, I say. – Your name is Ailbhe.
 – Ten out of ten, she says. – Enter.
 – Please, I say.
 I look at the street. I look at her.
 – I might be in danger, I say.
 – I like the sound of that, she says. – Come in. (Doyle, 2007: 242)

Chronologically speaking, “I Understand” is not the last story published by Doyle in *Metro Eireann* before the publication of the collection: it was actually the fourth story, published between the end of 2003 and the beginning of 2004, just prior to the Citizenship Referendum. Placing it at the end of the collection and therefore having the book end on those two simple words, “come in”, is akin to a kind of manifesto, even a vote, through the voice of Ailbhe whose very name, which means ‘white’ in Irish, refers to a nation who refuses to define itself through ethnic criteria and is not afraid of hybridization. Indeed, when Tom asks Ailbhe what her name means, she does not give him the actual meaning of Ailbhe, but answers: “It’s Irish for the Slut Who Drinks Too Much at the Weekends” (Doyle, 2007: 232), thus humorously reinventing the meaning of her name according to her own self-derisory definition of herself. Her name, however, serves as a kind of password to enter her home, a sesame which is not based on etymological meaning but rather on a redefinition of what the name means according to the shared experience and private jokes of Tom and Ailbhe. By doing that, Doyle operates a kind of translation as defined by Seamus Deane in the introduction to *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*:

By [translation] I mean the adaptations, readjustments, and reorientations that are required of individuals and groups who have undergone a traumatic cultural and political crisis so fundamental that they must forge for themselves a new speech, a new history or life story that would give it some rational or coherent form. (Deane, 1990: 14)

By reinventing the meaning of Ailbhe’s name, by giving it a new dimension, Tom and Ailbhe are actually forging a new speech and entering a new, hybridized life story, all the more so as Tom’s name itself is an empty shell that needs to be defined anew. When he first meets Ailbhe and gives her his name, it appears that Tom may not be his actual, or original, name:

- She laughs at Kevin, and she smiles at me. I do not know which is more significant, the laughter or the smile.
 – What’s your name? She asks.
 Perhaps the smile. I hope so.
 – Tom, I say.
 I have many names.
 – Oh, she says. – I was expecting something a bit more exotic.
 (Doyle, 2007: 231)

Tom seems to be a chosen rather than a given name, the last in a series of names which had succeeded each other from his traumatic childhood in Africa, where he was a child soldier, to London where he first stayed and Dublin where he intends to remain. Having many names also makes him the allegory of the immigrant, as he is himself and all of them at the same time, thus taking on the same symbolic dimension as Ailbhe for Ireland. Therefore, choosing to place this short story at the end of the collection clearly marks an evolution in Doyle’s definition of the encounter, which passes from acceptance of the newcomer through the viewpoint of the native, written in the third person, to fusion with the newcomer through the eyes of the newcomer himself, in the first person, leading to what Maureen Reddy terms a “shift in perspective”:

With this fourth story, Doyle decentralizes white Irish perspectives and consciousnesses, requiring his white Irish audience to imaginatively inhabit an African self. This shift in perspective is daring and politically significant, as here we have a fully-realized Other who refuses to be Other. White Irish readers are asked to look at the Irish context differently, to move outside their comfort zone to a place where whiteness and Irishness are neither central nor normative. (Reddy, 2007)

This shift in focalization actually forces the reader to merge into Tom’s conscience and become a hybridized reader, thus enacting through his/her reading the political project which underlies Doyle’s short stories.

In facilitating both encounter and hybridization through his writing project, Roddy Doyle actually acts as *proxeni*. According to Julia Kristeva in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988), the *proxeni* was an intermediary, in ancient Greece, between newcomers to a city, an immigrant community for instance, and the citizens. The *proxeni*’s role was to submit to the representatives of the city the immigrants’ supplication, i.e. request to settle, permanently or not, on the territory of the city. Following the same pattern – an encounter between a native and a newcomer – the stories all illustrate a form of supplication. However, it is not only the immigrants who metaphorically submit a request to be accepted in a new country, but also the natives themselves, who crave acceptance in a country which has become somewhat foreign to them.

The form of the writing itself, the short story, may be considered as a tool to appropriate this radically different country. In the words of Declan Kiberd in “The Celtic Tiger: A Cultural History” (*The Irish Writer and the World*), “The pace of change may be just too fast for most [Irish writers], for it is never easy to take a clear photograph of a moving object, especially when you are up close to it. Nothing, after all, is more difficult to realise than the present – we are always at its mercy more than we are its masters” (Kiberd, 2005: 276). According to Kiberd, contemporary writers are actually more likely to express present changes through a return to the past, notably through autobiography and a journey back to the more stable and apprehensible Ireland of their past. On the other hand, Roddy Doyle’s short stories are in a way snapshots of the present, and the form of the short story may be the most adequate to capture the present and its instantaneousness, all the more so as the stories are written in instalments of 800 words and published in a kind of just-in-time fashion, which could be seen as a way to try and master the present, or at least to keep up with its pace.

The arrival of numerous immigrants in Ireland has had of course a direct impact on the definition of the Irish nation and on the issue of the integration within the nation of these new Irish. In *The Deportees*, this reflection is particularly dealt with in the story entitled “57% Irish”, in which Ray Brady is offered a quite peculiar job by the corrupt Minister for Arts and Ethnicity: to invent a device which would make it harder for newcomers to become Irish. Ray is a PhD student in sociology and he has been obsessed with the same question since the 2002 World Cup: how do you measure Irishness, an idea which came to him after Ireland had scored against Germany:

[...] Ray had hugged and kissed maybe fifteen people in the pub, and he’d found himself in the arms of a big lad from Poland. And he’d wondered. Why was this guy hugging Ray? Kissing his forehead. Punching the air. Throwing his head back and singing. YOU’LL NEVER BEAT THE EYE-RISH [...]

Why?

Because his own team was shite? [...] Because he’d been in Ireland a while and felt that he was one of the gang? Because he wanted to feel that way?

Why?

How did you measure nationality? (Doyle, 2007: 100–101)

Ray Brady therefore devises a computer-processed test, called the Failte Score, which measures the newcomers’ rate of Irishness, i.e. identity reduced to quantifiable data. Presented as scientifically objective, it is actually programmed so that the final results are decided by the authorities. Ironically, ‘fáilte’ means ‘welcome’, and we

may also detect a pun with the verb ‘to fail’ and the adjective ‘faulty’: the Failte Score is therefore in reality the test which rejects instead of welcoming and which on top of that is meant to be failed, it is “success and failure pre-ordained” (Doyle, 2007: 112). Through this test and the questionings that it gives rise to, “57% Irish” is both another echo to the debates in Ireland around the questions of citizenship and national identity caused by the arrival of numerous immigrants and an illustration of what Ronit Lentin terms a “racial state”:

[Racial states] exclude in order to construct homogeneity [...] while appropriating difference through celebrations of the multicultural. The racial state is a state of power, asserting its control over those within the state and excluding others from outside the state. Through constitutions, border controls, the law, policy making, bureaucracy and governmental technologies such as census categorizations, invented histories and traditions, ceremonies and cultural imaginings, modern states, each in its own way, are defined by their power to exclude (and include) in racially ordered terms, to categorize hierarchically, and to set aside. In the modern state, race and nation are defined in terms of each other to produce a coherent picture of the population in the face of a divisive heterogeneity. (Lentin, 2007: 612)

The Minister for Arts and Ethnicity clearly embodies this ambivalence of the racial state, with an official title referring to both tradition and multiculturalism and an actual policy which aims at controlling and excluding any heterogeneous threat. Behind the absurdity and humorous tone of the story there actually lies a fundamental worry: that of seeing Ireland evolve into a dystopia and a racist – if not racist – nation-state imagining itself by itself rather than by integrating new elements of self-definition. In “I Understand”, Tom and Ailbhe’s names were empty shells redefined by encounter and hybridization and their names take on new, future-oriented meanings. In “57% Irish”, the empty shell of the Minister’s title must remain empty and be used only as a decoy to better exclude what could threaten a fantasized status quo.

In a somewhat Orwellian fashion, “57% Irish” is a criticism of the absurdity of the administrative handling of immigration, an absurdity beginning with the idea of quantifying Irishness or with the title of the ministry itself, arts and ethnicity being put in the same bag, so to say. However, if the title may sound absurd, linking arts and ethnicity actually refers to the wider problematic of the links between culture and nation that are at the heart of the concept of cultural nationalism. According to Gerry Smith in *The Novel and the Nation* (1997), there are two forms of cultural nationalism: one is past-oriented whereas the other is future-oriented. The first form – past-oriented – contends that: “[...] the kinds of artefacts and narratives

produced by individuals and communities are related to the peculiar national system of social organisation, political order and historical identity from which they have emerged” (Smith, 1997: 15).

The second form – future-oriented – considers culture as a way to give form to a political nation that is yet to be constituted, which corresponds to the project of *The Deportees* as a whole. The Failte Score is obviously based on the first definition of a past-oriented cultural nationalism which implies a narrow definition of the Irish national identity. Indeed, the Failte Score tests the rate of Irishness of the newcomers through exposure to elements of stereotyped Irish culture, i.e. “The best and the worst of Ireland, a jagged line of green hills and bared arses, fiddle and feedback” (Doyle, 2007: 114), plus images from video clips of Irish bands and of an Irish porn star. This Prévert-style inventory is supposed to reflect the essence of Irishness, the common cultural patrimony shared by the whole nation and which should therefore be shared as a prerequisite by the immigrants as well. However, this essence, which Declan Kiberd terms the “essential unity” of a nation, is actually a claim, an illusion: “Nations are in fact a response to the hybrid nature of living conditions, yet for all their claim to essential unity, they create even further hybridities” (Kiberd, 2005: 313).

The minister and Ray are in fact fully aware of this illusion and the Failte Score is used for political purposes, as the minister does not agree with the official immigration policy of his government and wants to maintain a conception of nationalism in its most conservative form. The past-oriented minister is therefore the embodiment of ‘old’ Ireland and of a conception of the nation as a coherent ethnic and cultural entity, but he is also the representative of a colonial spirit inherited from pre-Independence Ireland. Indeed, though he wants to make it harder for immigrants to become Irish, the minister still literally cashes in on the situation, as he rents slums to newly arrived immigrants, therefore re-enacting a coloniser-colonized relationship. In this respect, “57% Irish” also tackles the issue of post-colonialism in Ireland and its impact on the way the Irish see themselves. Indeed, the Minister’s vision of Ireland is based on stereotypes inherited from the colonial period and which have been interiorized, thus forming an identity trap, a closed and excluding system of identification which cuts the Minister from any other possibility of definition. However, questioning this closed system, symbolized in the story by the endless projection of ‘authentic’ Irish pictures which seem to echo the shadows projected on the walls of Plato’s cave, is the only way to actually be able to step out of the cave and re-define identity, as explained by Seamus Deane in the introduction to *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*:

In the attempted discovery of its ‘true’ identity, a community often begins with the demolition of the false stereotypes within which it has been entrapped. This is an intricate process, since the stereotypes are successful precisely because they have been interiorized. (Deane, 1990: 12)

As for Ray Brady, whose girlfriend is Russian, he finally demolishes the false stereotypes, the false idols of a past-oriented Ireland, from the inside and chooses another definition of the nation, as he decides in the end to reprogramme the Failte Score so that almost everybody passes it. Ray is actually quite representative of other Irish characters in *The Deportees* in so far as he chooses to live in the Ireland of the present instead of remembering the idealized Ireland of the past or reproducing patterns of colonisation or exploitation of those who would not correspond to a past-oriented definition of Ireland. Ray becomes Irish again out of choice and not by inheritance, just like an immigrant would do.

A nation’s capacity to integrate hybridity is at the heart of “Home to Harlem”, whose title itself indicates the shifting definition of the notions of home and homeland. Declan O’Connor, the main character, is both black and Irish: he was born in Dublin, but his unknown grandfather was a Black-American from Harlem. His mixed origins, the colour of his skin, lead him to question both his own identity and his belonging to a wider Irish national identity, a ‘we’ in which he does not quite recognize himself as he feels “less Irish” or “not Irish enough” (Doyle, 2007: 212). Through his quest for his grandfather, Declan is first past-oriented, looking for the origins of his apparently contradictory identity. Besides, he considers that the place of his origins is Harlem, which he terms as “the land of his ancestors” (Doyle, 2007: 180) and not Ireland where he was born: he is therefore looking for a self-definition which would come from both outside the present and outside his native country. Declan expresses this process of self-definition by identifying with the writing process of the American poet Langston Hughes: “I like the way he can be inside and outside. [...] It’s like being Irish [...]. And it’s like being black and Irish” (Doyle, 2007: 192–193). The notions of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ are also geographically illustrated in “Home to Harlem”: having decided to settle in New York, Declan is estranged from Ireland and confronted with a country where he is a foreigner, which actually serves as a catalyst for the definition of his Irishness. First using Irishness and Irish stereotypes as a pose, notably to seduce a young woman to whom he gives “the whole Irish bit” (Doyle, 2007: 195), he follows both a geographic and spiritual path which progressively leads him towards a true reconnection to his identity as an Irishman. This evolution is close to the one experienced by Ray Brady in “57% Irish”, as it starts with the affirmation of a stereotyped, borrowed identity and ends with a demolition-reconstruction process leading to the appropriation of a renewed sense of identity and belonging.

According to Declan Kiberd, nations are “necessarily fictive” in nature, as they produce a swaying discourse which is “open to endless renegotiation” (Kiberd, 2005: 314). Declan is a nationless character because he does not have a national fiction into which he can fit: Declan is “other”, as mentioned on his registration form for college in the ethnic origins section and enters a quest for his origins and identity, the Grail in this case being the ‘we’ he craves for. The short stories in *The Deportees* actually focus on the others of and in Ireland, mostly immigrants, but also on the otherness felt by the Irish themselves; Declan stands somewhere in between these two groups, as he is the other of both, a hybridized Irish confronted with narrow definitions of Irishness. Such a definition, which he refuses to apply to himself, was that imposed on his mother’s generation: “When she grew up, back then in Ireland, you were Irish or you weren’t, one thing or the other. You couldn’t be both; you couldn’t be black. Has it changed? He doesn’t know. When he’s here [in the US] he thinks so. When he’s there [in Ireland] he’s not so sure” (Doyle, 2007: 203).

Just like Ray Brady in “57% Irish”, Declan is torn between a past-oriented definition of Irishness into which he does not fit and a future-oriented, but still to be defined reconstruction of both the individual and national identities. His way of solving this identity issue is to do research work on the alleged influence of the Harlem Renaissance on Irish literature and through this to find a fiction of identity to which he could finally belong, even if it means lying and inventing links and influences where there have never been any: “Declan would prove that Harlem had kick-started Ireland’s best writing of the twentieth century – or at least some of it. And, if he couldn’t do it, he’d cheat; he’d make it up. Yeats had died clutching his copy of *The New Negro*. Beckett never went to the jacks without *The Souls of Black Folk* under his arm” (Doyle, 2007: 181).

Creating a fiction of his own which would ensure him to find his place in the wider national fiction is in fact the first step in Declan’s quest, the temptation of a delusion which would stand for identity. But this only makes him aware of the delusive nature of what stands for Irishness: “That’s what being Irish is a lot of the time, passing for something else – the Paddy, the European, the peasant, the rocker, the leprechaun. It’s sometimes funny; it’s sometimes dangerous and damaging. And then there’s being black and Irish» (Doyle, 2007: 201).

Declan inserts himself in a filiation of delusion, of stereotyped representations of Irishness: it is finally through misrepresentations of what being Irish is that he can begin to define his own contradictory Irishness, thus enacting the demolition process defined by Seamus Deane. He is himself a misrepresentation, like all Irish people. It is therefore not through a sterile attempt at finding a hybridized origin which would explain him, but through the parallels between the African-Americans and the Irish that he can achieve the unification of his own hybridized identity: “It’s the parallels he’s interested in now, black and Irish – what they mean, and the literary

fight on both sides of the Atlantic. That’s what he’ll work on: himself” (Doyle, 2007: 201). Irish literature and the Harlem Renaissance question the same problematic national ‘we’ and Declan becomes aware that “They are both in [him]” (Doyle, 2007: 213). Declan’s quest is therefore not a quest for answers, for the answer to the question of his origins, but on the contrary a quest for questions, for a perpetual questioning of his individual and national identity, an “endless renegotiation” in the words of Declan Kiberd, which instead of condemning him to a fixed but illusory form of identity which would not guarantee him any sense of belonging, will allow him on the contrary to exist as a black Irishman, in a dynamic, future-oriented and therefore constructive self-definition. In *The Deportees*, each story is actually a way to define a new, sometimes idealized ‘we’, a project to pave the way through fiction for a new definition of a cosmopolitan Irish identity.

As one of the symptoms of change in the country, cosmopolitanism and the image of an Ireland both open to the world and welcoming the world on its shores is one of the recurring motives of *The Deportees*. In “Guess Who’s Coming for the Dinner”, the first of the eight short stories, fifty-year-old Larry, the main character, shares in this feeling of cosmopolitanism and the feeling of being sophisticated which goes with it. Larry belongs to the generation who witnessed the change and is fully aware, but also proud of it. This is especially the case when he drives on the Artane roundabout in suburban Dublin, which symbolizes in Larry’s mind the modernity and sophistication of Celtic Tiger Ireland: “Every time Larry drove onto and off that roundabout, he felt modern, successful, Irish” (Doyle, 2007: 3). The roundabout, with its traffic, noise, and unending movement, stands in Larry’s mind for Ireland itself, perpetually on the move, perpetually busy, a kind of merry-go-round of modernity. But it also leaves an impression of dizziness, of a reality seen through the misty eyes of intoxication and is not without recalling the projected pictures of ‘true’ Irishness in “57% Irish”. In fact, Larry’s cosmopolitanism is first experienced within the walls of his own idealized world: he is proud of his open-mindedness and tolerance, of the fact that his daughters can talk of any subject in front of him, but it is only through his daughters’ conversations that the outside world comes to him: “What Larry really loved was the way the girls brought the world home to him. Every morning at breakfast, and when they came home for the dinner, before going out again, they talked and shouted, all of them together [...]” (Doyle, 2007: 3). The constant movement and noise of his daughters in the house remind Larry of the Artane roundabout, which reinforces the impression of a small world spinning on its own axis but shut down from the wider outside world. Larry’s daughters are fully and self-confidently part of the new Ireland and they give him the illusion that he is part of it too, while he actually experiences it second-hand. The setting of this short story, the intimacy of Larry’s family, is actually a typical means of expressing wider social or cultural changes in contemporary Irish literature, as explained by Susan Cahill in *Irish Literature in the Celtic Tiger Years 1990–2008*:

These issues relating to sexuality, gender roles, the conflict between history and memory, and constructions of identity find a potent gathering point in the trope of the family and indeed, representations of the family, and the complex bonds that constitute it, are major themes that re-emerge in contemporary Irish fiction. (Cahill, 2012: 18)

All the ingredients listed by Susan Cahill are actually present in “Guess Who’s Coming for the Dinner”: the disruption caused by the arrival of a young Nigerian man into the life of the family leads to a questioning of identity and roles which metonymically reflects wider questionings on the disruptive potential of immigration within Irish society. The use of such metonymies actually appears several times in Doyle’s stories, and writing on what happens when newcomers encounter natives in the context of small communities or family units is akin to looking at Irish society as a whole through a microscope, studying the cells to better understand the functioning – or dysfunctioning – of the whole organism.

Cosmopolitanism as a sophisticated varnish and the experience of cosmopolitanism, of actually sharing the space of the city or the intimate sphere with foreigners are not on the same plane as Larry realizes when, in his own words, his daughter “Stephanie brought home the black fella” (Doyle, 2007: 3). Cosmopolitanism and the confrontation to the other actually mean the apparition of doubts and prejudices, as well as questionings on one’s own capacity to accept the other in his/her difference. Cosmopolitanism means, almost literally, the disappearance of the limits of the city, which becomes instead an open space of mixity and hybridization. The city is consequently likely to merge into the wider world and to lose its dimension of closed and hence reassuring space. Likewise, the walls of Larry’s own imagined city seem to crumble down with the arrival of the “black fella”. Indeed, Larry is first loath to meet this Nigerian man, whom he wrongly believes to be the boyfriend of one of his daughters. His unwillingness to meet Ben, the Nigerian, contradicts what Larry had thought about himself up to that moment: the certainty that he was a modern, open-minded father is suddenly shattered by a feeling of rejection that he has difficulties understanding and defining. His openness appears to be paradoxically confined to a closed territory. In fact, Larry, just like his city, is torn between cosmopolitanism and provincialism, between the boundless territory of the metropolis and the enclosed space of the (post-)colonial town. According to Fredric Jameson, in his contribution to *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature*, this difference in the apprehension of the space of the city appears characteristically in literature in the way encounters between characters are treated, as he shows by contrasting London and the Dublin of Joyce’s *Ulysses*: “London [...] is an agglomeration (and metropolis) in which such encounters are sheer coincidence; Dublin is a classical city in which they are not merely normal but expected” (Jameson, 1990: 62). However, what occurs in Larry’s life is the abnormal and the unexpected, at least in his own experience. Indeed, when he hears of Ben for the first time, Larry “couldn’t have been more surprised,

and angry, and hurt, and confused” (Doyle, 2007: 5), a mix of feelings which he does not control, even though when he actually meets Ben and shakes hands with him, Ben’s hand is “[t]he first black hand Larry had ever shaken. He felt sophisticated...” (Doyle, 2007: 11). This handshake, which for Larry is literally a first-hand experience of cosmopolitanism, is almost presented as a close encounter of the third kind, as the meeting of two worlds which do not understand each other, but also as Larry’s confrontation with his own contradictions. Post-colonial Dublin has become a cosmopolitan metropolis and this shift is metonymically reproduced in Larry’s individual experience. The ‘classical’ or ‘colonial’ city of Dublin, as Jameson terms it, with its village characteristics of expected encounters – and where chance encounters are of a rather dubious nature, as illustrated in “An Encounter”, the second story of *Dubliners* – has been replaced by a more unstable and open space in which encounters are made in a more random manner. By placing the concept of encounter at the heart of his stories, Doyle actually writes back to Joyce and proposes a more porous urban space, cleared of its post-colonial characteristics and open to randomness and the acceptance of such changes.

As in Larry’s case, the encounter and confrontation with the other as foreigner begins with a confrontation with one’s self. For Larry, it leads to self-analysis:

All week, he’d had to think, and ask himself rough questions.
[...] But it was a long time since a question had made him squirm. And he’d been squirming all week.
He wasn’t a racist. He was sure about that now, positive – he thought. When he watched a footballer, for example, he didn’t see skin; he saw skill.
[...] There wasn’t a racist bone or muscle in his body, nothing tugging at him to change his mind about Stevie Wonder or Thierry Henry because they were black. [...]
But, why then? Why didn’t he want a refugee in the family?
(Doyle, 2007: 8)

Larry tries to rationalize his feeling of rejection, to prove to himself as well as to his family that he is, in his own words, “an honest man” (Doyle, 2007: 9). However, and in spite of his not finding any trace of racism in himself, Larry cannot come to terms with the situation he is confronted with, still feeling deep within himself an irreducible refusal, or fear, to accept Ben’s presence. This confused feeling is an example of what Declan Kiberd terms “the fear of hybridisation” in “Strangers in their own country; multiculturalism in Ireland” (*The Irish Writer and the World*). Kiberd defines the fear of hybridisation as “a terror in the face of potent but repressed forces within one’s own culture” (Kiberd, 2005: 310), i.e. a reaction to the potential jeopardizing of a culture by new, alien elements, a motive which can be found in other stories of *The Deportees*, like “57% Irish” with the position of the Minister on

Irishness. However, contrary to the Minister, who embodied the political stance of a racist state, the insecurity that Larry feels in front of Ben is not a manifestation of racism as such, but rather a symptom of the changes undergone by Ireland and being echoed in Larry's unconscious. Cosmopolitanism implies a sense of loss, the loss of familiar landmarks which may shake the self on its foundations: what Larry experiences without being fully aware of it for the moment, and somatises through his 'squirming', is that he does not really belong any more, that his way of seeing and handling the world no longer fits in, no longer corresponds to the present context. In the words of Roddy Doyle in the preface, Larry needs a passport to re-enter Ireland.

As can be seen in Larry's case, the fear of hybridisation is also a terror in the face of repressed forces within one's own self. Indeed, according to Julia Kristeva in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, the foreigner is the hidden face of our identity, but he/she disappears as a foreigner when we accept to see ourselves as foreigners, to recognize the foreigner within ourselves:

Étrangement, l'étranger nous habite : il est la face cachée de notre identité [...]. De le reconnaître en nous, nous nous épargnons de le détester en lui-même. Symptôme qui rend précisément le « nous » problématique, peut-être impossible, l'étranger commence lorsque surgit la conscience de ma différence et s'achève lorsque nous nous reconnaissons tous étrangers, rebelles aux liens et aux communautés. (Kristeva, 1988: 9)

In Larry's case, it is sympathy and empathy which help bridge the gap between 'foreigner' and 'we' by rubbing off his own alienation, the estrangement imposed on him by his own closed, or pseudo-open, world. The feeling of empathy is triggered by Ben's talking about the abduction and disappearance of his sister in Nigeria, which Larry links in his mind to a report he had seen on abductions in Latin America and which had deeply marked him. By making this link, Larry actually bursts the boundaries of his own self, becomes part of a common global suffering. He becomes other and hence able to feel connected to Ben, which corresponds to Julia Kristeva's notion of "being other": "*Vivre avec l'autre, avec l'étranger, nous confronte à la possibilité ou non d'être un autre. Il ne s'agit pas simplement – humanistement – de notre aptitude à accepter l'autre ; mais d'être à sa place, ce qui revient à se penser et à se faire autre à soi-même*" (Kristeva, 1988: 25). Larry actually becomes other, he has integrated the hybridized nature of his identity and therefore he becomes able to commune with Ben. This epiphany of Larry's actually announces the experience that the reader will have when reading the last story of the collection, "I Understand", written in the first person and in which the reader actually communes with a black man by having direct access to his thoughts and consciousness. Indeed, in this last story, "readers cannot refuse to share Tom's perspective because if they do, there is nowhere else for them to stand" (Reddy, 2005). In exactly the same way, Larry cannot refuse to

share Ben's perspective, because it is the only human thing to do – or "humanistic" in the words of Kristeva. In "Guess Who's Coming for the Dinner", this communion is symbolized in the last lines of the story by Larry asking Ben where he can buy Ben's perfume, ironically called 'Towering Ebony'. The perfume, which Larry first considered as proof that Ben had something to hide (Doyle, 2007: 12), becomes literally and symbolically the common essence that he and Ben are now sharing. Ben actually reveals Larry to himself which, according to Declan Kiberd, is part of what the new immigrants bring with them, as they "provid[e] a priceless service, reconnecting people with their own buried feelings" (Kiberd, 2005: 318).

This reconnection to the self, be it national or individual, through the intervention of the foreigner is particularly dealt with in the short story "The Deportees", which gives its title to the whole volume. "The Deportees" is the name of a cosmopolitan band formed by Jimmy Rabbitte, who was already the main character in Roddy Doyle's first novel, *The Commitments* (1987). In *The Commitments*, Jimmy Rabbitte formed a soul music band composed of musicians and singers from a Dublin working-class background. The aim of that band was to give soul to Dublin. "The Deportees" follows the same kind of pattern with, this time, the formation of a band exclusively composed of immigrants, travellers or bi-nationals. "The Deportees" is both a kind of sequel to *The Commitments* and a re-writing of the novel, almost an updating taking into account the new context of contemporary Ireland: like Declan renegotiating his own identity, Doyle seems to have renegotiated his own writing, questioning the validity of what is claimed in *The Commitments* by re-evaluating it in "The Deportees", thereby accepting and revealing the hybridity of his own creative identity as an Irish writer.

Just as the band in *The Commitments* stood as an allegory of the soul of Dublin, the band in "The Deportees" is a metaphor of cosmopolitan, multicultural contemporary Ireland. However, the theme of alienation was already present in *The Commitments*, as Jimmy Rabbitte says of the Irish, especially the working-class Irish, that they are the "niggers of Europe" (Doyle, 1998: 9), a line which directly refers to both the still existing relative poverty of Ireland at the beginning of the 1980s and racial theories of the 19th century advocating a genetic proximity between Africans and Irish as sub-human races. Using again the character of Jimmy Rabbitte and the plot of *The Commitments* therefore serves as a kind of reminder of the way the Irish themselves were seen not so long ago and how their otherness was stigmatised and used against them. This is also directly referred to in the ad Jimmy Rabbitte publishes in order to find members for his cosmopolitan band, where he mentions that "White Irish need not apply" (Doyle, 2007: 36). This echoes American job ads from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries in which mentions like "No Irish need apply" could be read. In Jimmy Rabbitte's ad, the discrimination is reversed, as preference is given to non-natives, but at the same time, these non-natives – or non-whites – are seen as representative of Ireland: the Irish are not discriminated

against this time, but contested as an all-white nation. Here again, we can read as a watermark a form of political manifesto and the questioning of a nation which is tempted by a self-definition as 'white' at the same time as its very composition is being modified by immigration. Such issues were particularly raised at the time of the Citizenship Referendum, with the consequence that "for the first time the Irish in Ireland became 'white', and Irishness became equated with whiteness precisely when it became increasingly difficult to make this equation" (Lentin, 2005: 613). Jimmy Rabbitte's equation is the exact opposite of this racial vision of Ireland and his band, whose name itself refers to the political issue of immigrant deportation, is actually both an artistic and a political project. The band is therefore not only a mirror of contemporary multicultural Ireland, reflecting only the mere appearance of its mixed population, but it is also the embodiment of a vision and definition of the nation as cosmopolitan in essence: white Irish need not apply because claiming to be white Irish, i.e. linking nationality, cultural identity and race, is a political and ideological positioning which actually contradicts the cosmopolitan dimension of the Irish identity.

In fact, Irish identity had been cosmopolitan for a long time, well before the 1990s, be that as part of the United Kingdom and the British Empire or through its diaspora. In the words of Declan Kiberd, "Ireland [...] always was multicultural, in the sense of eclectic, open, assimilative" (Kiberd, 2005: 312). However, such cosmopolitanism was rather a projection of Ireland abroad than an absorption of the world's diversity within the boundaries of the Irish territory. This absorption means changes in the constitution of the Irish population, but also in the definition of the nation, as explained by Declan Kiberd in "Strangers in their own country; multiculturalism in Ireland": "The nation is less a legacy of the past than the site of the future, a zone of pluralisms which will prove its durability precisely by the success with which it embraces refugees, exiles and newcomers" (Kiberd, 2005: 314). In "The Deportees", the band is indeed a zone of pluralisms and a kind of laboratory for the new nation. Jimmy Rabbitte takes over, as manager of the band and *doppelgänger* of the writer, the role of *proxeni*, submitting the supplication of the immigrants through music and using music as both an assimilative and revealing medium, thus enacting the reconnecting capacity attributed to the new immigrants by Declan Kiberd. Indeed, when the band plays at a birthday party, they are described as "happy, sexy; [...] cooking and Irish", and the success of the concert is such that "Christianity had left the tent" (Doyle, 2007: 69). Through the music of the band, the guests at the party seem to go back to an original, pagan past, before Christianity took hold of Ireland and shaped it. Paradoxically, cosmopolitanism is what allows a return to the roots of Irishness: instead of jeopardizing the national identity, it makes the stifling constraints that threatened this identity literally explode, an experience of reconnection which most of the characters in *The Deportees* go through.

Conclusion

The Deportees is therefore both a literary project and an experiment in and of citizenship. As a literary project, its aim is to reflect the changes and issues at stake in contemporary Ireland. In this instance, the writer plays the classical role of witness and storyteller, trying to express through his writing the feelings of a nation confronted with a whole set of new and unsettling interrogations. The characters in each of the stories epitomize these feelings, from rejection to acceptance, through doubts, contradictions or self-questioning. What all these characters have in common though, is their craving for belonging, for integration within the new nation that is being formed under their very eyes. In this perspective, the short stories take on another dimension and become the supplications of a *proxeni* addressing the citizens of Ireland on behalf of newcomers to the city, be they of foreign origins or asking for a renewal of their belonging to an Irish nation which is endlessly renegotiating its own definition. Roddy Doyle said that he would need a passport to enter today's Ireland. However, as there is no such passport, he forges one for himself and his contemporaries through his stories.

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Auteur

Jean-Philippe Hentz
Docteur de l'Université de Strasbourg
hentz.jean-philippe@orange.fr

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