Eleanor Lybeck, *All on Show: The Circus in Irish Literature and Culture*

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COMPTES RENDUS

BOOK REVIEWS

Eleanor Lybeck, *All on Show: The Circus in Irish Literature and Culture*, Cork, Cork University Press, 2019, x + 229 p.

All on Show: The Circus in Irish Literature and Culture is a unique undertaking which brings the ethereal world of the circus, as it is reflected in Irish culture, to scholarly attention. Proceeding from the well-established theoretical background of the carnivalesque, the author delves into the conceptual spaces outlined by the ambivalent nature of the circus and explores their metaphorical potential. The study elucidates the various ways in which this potential is realised within the central notions of Irish literature: national politics, family, gender, and identity.

To explicate the ways the circus sensitivity weaves itself into culture, Eleanor Lybeck traces the history of this kind of entertainment in Ireland and its connection with the theatrical art. The study benefits greatly from the extensive use of archive materials, including rare and exclusive documents, as well as from a large array of texts, such as song lyrics, press publications, essays, travel journals, letters, biographies of famous performers, etc. To demonstrate the interconnectivity of various cultural phenomena pertinent to her field of research, Lybeck resorts to intermediality, analysing art, theatre, cinema, illustrations, posters, bills, postcards, photography, and accounts of actual circus performances. The result is a panoramic view of the circus' cultural significance.

With its focus on literary manifestations of the above-mentioned significance, the book offers insights into the protean nature of the circus resorting to literary critique. In chapter 1 in particular ("Joyce's Family Circus", p. 16-28), the circus comes across as a place of vulnerability where physical control, cruelty, and humiliation are the tools of entertainment, metaphorically transferred onto one's psyche as the space of personal anxieties. Wider dimensions are involved as these individual insecurities penetrate into social, religious, and political spheres, in which the circus trope helps unearth cruelty, absurdity, and even surrealism of the respective domains. Lybeck shows how the grotesque circus body infuses the texts under scrutiny and directs characters towards minor and major transformations, brought on by the idiosyncratic energy of the circus. Many critical identity questions, within the context of Irishness, are viewed through the prism of performance, drama, and certain roles that are continuously played out in the ring of history, being adopted both by authors and their creations.

The study performed on such a profound level contributes to our understanding and indeed demands a rereading of several seminal works, especially *Ulysses* by James Joyce with its inextricable web of allusions and implications. Thanks to the meticulous analysis offered in the book, the circus trope presented in texts by

James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, Pádraic Ó Conaire, Brian Friel, Stewart Parker, and others yields its rich harvest of meanings and connections that are still relevant today. It is particularly emphasised in chapter 4 (“Revisioning the Circus”, p. 131-174), where the subversive nature of the circus is highlighted, especially with regard to gender and sexual anxieties. The trope’s significance for creating revisionist narratives is exemplified with the help of texts by John Banville, Paul Muldoon, Seamus Deane, and Seamus Heaney, as well as Neil Jordan’s 1991 film *The Miracle*. The conclusion puts the topic into perspective for the 21st century’s Ireland and points out that the circus metaphors reveal the same cultural continuities / discontinuities for Irish and worldwide cultural shifts.

Olena TYKHOMYROVA

Brendan O’Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland*, vol. III, *Consociation and Confederation: From Antagonism to Accommodation?*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019, xlv + 458 p.

This is the third volume of a remarkable and monumental three-volume *Treatise on Northern Ireland* written by Professor Brendan O’Leary, the world-reknowned specialist of Northern Ireland. The first volume is subtitled *Colonisation*, the second, *Control*. The last volume, reviewed here, is subtitled *Consociation and Confederation*.

The whole *Treatise*, and more particularly this third volume, is a masterstroke. Brendan O’Leary, perhaps more than ever before in his prolific writings, demonstrates his outstanding skills and style as an analyst of Northern Ireland’s politics and society. This volume, composed of seven chapters, brings together an incredible amount of primary and secondary sources – the size of the bibliography is impressive – of personal anecdotes, of statistics, of portraits, of notes, making it one of the most comprehensive accounts of the period ranging from Direct Rule to the more recent post-Good Friday Agreement (GFA) era. He offers a strong defense of the 1998 Agreement and of its results, in spite of the Brexit question which, as he shows, has considerably destabilised post-GFA Ireland since 2016. His thesis can be summarised as follows. Unlike Sunningdale and the Anglo-Irish Agreement (AIA), the GFA was a comprehensive and balanced solution to the multi-dimensional Northern Irish question, whose success is tangible: a quasi total cessation of political violence since 1997. Thanks to inclusive consociational institutions in Northern Ireland plus the North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) and the British-Irish Intergovernmental Council (B-IIGC), the GFA did not only bring peace. It contains the long-term possibility of the reunification of Ireland whose form, unitary, federal or confederal, is open to debate and negotiation.

O’Leary is very convincing when he demonstrates that the GFA is much more than Sunningdale for slow learners, as many tend to believe. For him, the GFA