



Études irlandaises

43-1 | 2018

Irish self-portraits: the artist in curved mirrors

Matthew Barlow, *Griffintown : Identity and Memory in an Irish Diaspora Neighbourhood*

Camille Harrigan



Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/5555>

DOI: [10.4000/etudesirlandaises.5555](https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesirlandaises.5555)

ISSN: 2259-8863

Publisher

Presses universitaires de Caen

Printed version

Date of publication: 30 May 2018

ISBN: 978-2-7535-7578-3

ISSN: 0183-973X

Electronic reference

Camille Harrigan, « Matthew Barlow, *Griffintown : Identity and Memory in an Irish Diaspora Neighbourhood* », *Études irlandaises* [Online], 43-1 | 2018, Online since 30 May 2018, connection on 24 September 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/5555> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesirlandaises.5555>

This text was automatically generated on 24 September 2020.



Études irlandaises est mise à disposition selon les termes de la Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Partage dans les Mêmes Conditions 4.0 International.

Matthew Barlow, *Griffintown : Identity and Memory in an Irish Diaspora Neighbourhood*

Camille Harrigan

REFERENCES

Matthew Barlow, *Griffintown : Identity and Memory in an Irish Diaspora Neighbourhood*, Vancouver, UBC Press, 2017, xiii+249 pp., ISBN 9780774834346

- 1 In this monograph based on his PhD dissertation, Matthew Barlow writes a biography of Griffintown whilst tracing the memory work - the stories “created, recreated, reinforced, and projected about it over the past century” - that has shaped the Montreal locality (7). It is these stories and narratives, examined through the lenses of diaspora and memory studies, which are Barlow’s critical contribution.
- 2 Griffintown has been the subject of much amateur attention in the last decades. Thus, Barlow’s work constitutes a long awaited academic analysis of a key locale in the history of the Irish in Canada. First, Barlow contextualizes the Irish Catholic working-class of Griffintown in Montreal’s ethno-religious and linguistic *milieux*. His introduction also lays the bases for his analysis of the necessary interplay of history and memory in the neighbourhood.
- 3 Chapter 1 opens this analysis of the “persistent memory work” which the community engaged in to reinforce their Irishness, forever reshaping their history as *Irish Catholic*. Chapter 2 continues to chronicle the history of the area whilst engaging critically with previous work done on the Irish in Montreal. Chapter 3 traces the history and identity of the locale during its last glorious days and examines its already changing physical landscape in the years leading to World War II.
- 4 The last chapters, which constitute half the monograph, are Barlow’s best input. Chapter 4 is an exploration of the trends that impacted Griffintown and explained its

demise. Barlow places it at the confluence of socio-economic and political changes that impacted Montreal after 1945: industrialization, the socio-economic rise of working-class Irish Catholics, their voluntary removal from the area and the changing politics in Québec. It is therefore a re-imagined Griffintown that cultural caretakers celebrated in multiple initiatives from the 1990s onward.

- 5 Chapter 5 examines those initiatives, which Barlow termed the Griffintown Commemorative Project. They were part of the larger resurgence of Irish culture in the diaspora in the era as well as an attempt by Irish Montrealers to reinscribe their own history into the city's cultural and physical landscape. So successful were they that Griffintown has become synonymous with Irish Montreal. This is something Barlow himself contributes to throughout this book when he applies his Griffintown conclusions to the entire Irish Catholic population in the city.
- 6 If one might have wished for more from material Barlow collected himself, the scholar chose to engage instead with the sources created by the Griffintown enthusiasts that preceded him. Chapter 5 nevertheless remains Barlow's most engaging analysis. His exploration of who tells the Griffintown story - and how - proves invaluable in showing how collective narratives used in remembrance are often simplified and nostalgic. Barlow is, finally, quite effectively contributing to our understanding of the interaction between history, memory and identity in Irish Montreal.