

Benjamin Keatinge (editor), *Making Integral: Critical essays on Richard Murphy*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2019. 362 pages.

Richard Murphy frequently treated himself as a literary footnote, a mode of literary self-reproach that presumed a minor status. Renowned in the 1960s and 1970s for poems set in the West of Ireland and the history of the island, Murphy remained, if not prolific, then persistent: reviewing, writing, travelling, and publishing his acclaimed autobiography, *The Kick*, in 2002. Benjamin Keatinge's collection *Making Integral* provides a timely account of a poet frequently sidelined in studies of Irish poetry. Yet Murphy's inclusion in the controversial *Cambridge Companion to Irish Poets* suggests that the renewal of interest in his work preceded his death in 2019. If Irish poetry and its critical coteries have, historically, seemed a notoriously male affair rivetted by the national question, *Making Integral* contributes to the rethinking of 'Irish poetry' beyond the confines of the nation-state. Keatinge's achievement is to bring together a representative set of criticism alongside a comprehensive bibliography which should introduce Murphy's work to wider audiences and catalyse further study. In our turbulent present, as the centenary of Ireland's partition coincides with Brexit's threat of a hard border, and as the flammable rhetoric of ethno-national and racial politics catches across these islands, Richard Murphy's preoccupation with the discredited 'hypocrisies of the British imperial project' is deeply relevant.

Unlike the focused thematic format of a *Cambridge Companion*, for example, *Making Integral* is a generous critical compendium. There is overlap between some of the essays, with some quotations, works, and even interpretations recurring across the volume as a whole. For those unfamiliar with Murphy's work, Keatinge's thoughtful introduction helpfully delineates his background, career, and his social and artistic networks. Three outstanding essays open the book. Bernard O'Donoghue's insightful and sensitive piece on 'Richard Murphy's Plainstyles'; Gerard Dawe's pugnaciously eloquent essay on love and loss; and Lucy Collins's brilliant, and surely seminal, essay on 'Richard Murphy's Island Lives'. Read consecutively, these establish a strong critical foundation for the volume as a whole. O'Donoghue's prose embodies the very virtues he finds in Murphy, an understated concern with clarity which conveys critical epiphanies with modesty. Murphy's formal diction is contextualized as part of his engagement with the materials of history: aligning him with Wordsworth, Heaney, and Yeats rather than Modernism and the Movement. Dawe acutely reinterprets Murphy's reticence with the Irish vernacular as a 'shyness of condescension that stops him adapting a local voice that is not his own'. Dawe's essay robustly delineates the ways in which Murphy represents

the complexity of 'Irish' experience. This meant that "Ireland" would not be viewed [by the poet] as a "Celticised" myth-kitty, but rather an integrated site in which history plays out its conflictual role with effects upon families and individuals'. Blending theoretical approaches with close readings of Murphy's island and maritime poems, Collins defines Murphy as a 'poet of the archipelago'. The spatial and temporal transitions of seagoing allow Murphy to 'problematise notions of a secure community', dissolving fixed notions of both community and self. Her argument, that Murphy's engagement with the Western seaboard is 'neither nostalgic nor escapist...[but] speaks to the radical displacements of our age', is representative of the reinvigorated perspectives this volume provides.

That willingness to move beyond conventional approaches is exemplified by Tom Walker's innovative essay on Murphy as a radio poet. Focusing on *The Battle of Aughrim*, recorded in 1968 by Douglas Cleverdon for the BBC's Third Programme, Walker's essay contextualizes its experiments in 'dispersed narrative voice' as part of the technological and ideological affordances of broadcast poetry. Walker's essay thus effectively deterritorializes *The Battle of Aughrim* – an astonishing and liberatory move – while building a nuanced picture of an historical moment in which the radio was both crucial for poetics and a means of propagating art in post-war civil society. Eve Cobain's essay on Murphy's American influences and his scratchy attitude toward his transatlantic peers also recalibrates Murphy's place within transnational poetics. Reconstructing this 'transatlantic conversation through criticism and radio', Cobain's chapter usefully situates his formal experiment within strained homosocial relationships with Americans such as Lowell and Roethke. Revising Murphy's output through his metropolitan journalism and paid residencies in American academia helpfully provides a useful counterbalance to the image of Murphy as Aran-clad sailor turning to nature for an authentic voice.

Fresh approaches are likewise found in Tara Stubbs and James B. Kelley's essays, both of which focus on the 1985 collection, *The Price of Stone*. Murphy's use of the sonnet-form, Stubbs argues, exploits its capacity for ambiguity: its tight structure mediating subjectivity, subjugation, and materiality. Holding 'competing ironies' in balance, the sonnet suits Murphy's conception of poetry's power dynamics and his refusal to create works that demand the 'total subjection' of the reader. Thus, Murphy's artistic diffidence – often read as hamstrung or tricky formalism, or (by Edna Longley) as aesthetic failure – gains value from Stubbs's close readings. Her comments on Murphy's gendered politics dovetail with Kelley's reading of the collection's 'cruising sonnets': a sequence exploring anonymous same-sex

encounters in impersonal spaces. Reading Murphy's published work alongside the 'closeted' notebooks he kept throughout his life (housed in Tulsa University and under embargo for the next twenty-five years), Kelley's queer interpretation is deft and sympathetic. He is sensitive to the poet's representations of same-sex desire, the vacillations between the satisfactions and failures of both heterosexual and homosexual love, as well as Murphy's feelings of shame, and resistance to the category of 'homosexual' as 'a falsifying abstraction of who or what you are'. In sexuality, as elsewhere, Murphy refuses the comfort of the definitive for the vexed vitality of the uncertain. The centrality of the notebooks to poetic process, as well as to autobiographical self-representation, is unimpeachable. Kelley's chapter illuminates an area of great interest and genuine potential.

However, there are occasions where the volume veers towards literary tribute. Mark Wormald's chapter on Murphy's relationship with Ted Hughes presents illuminating interconnections between the two. Dismissing the public furore following Sylvia Plath's suicide as a 'fantasia', and deferentially omitting the suicide of Assia Wevill (who stayed with her daughter at Cleggan before their tragic deaths), such critical partiality detracts from a fuller understanding of the relationship between Murphy and Hughes. Wormald's all-too-evident admiration for Hughes means that the dynamic of this poetic dyad is idealized rather than analyzed. Plath's supposed heterosexual overture is redirected by Murphy into an intense (and arguably phobic) homo-social bond in ways that deserve more critical consideration. The gendered lines of poetic influence are not solely positive. Likewise, the volume is somewhat uneven in its treatment of Murphy's 'Anglo-Irish' background. Given that his lineage is Catholic Irish, Protestant Ascendancy, Scots, and colonial ex-patriate, the term provides at best a partial truth and at worst an inaccurate shorthand. Murphy's own avocation of self-consciously doubled identity is as much a means of creating aesthetic hybridity as an identity crisis. In literary criticism, at least, this hyphenated term frequently acts as a means of separating, of excluding, or quarantining, writers deemed insufficiently representative of a 'native' 'Irish' culture. Murphy's self-consciousness about his privilege, and the sense of personal dissonance, certainly seems to legitimate such terms. But 'Anglo-Irish' can act also less as a descriptive term and more as a pre-emptive disavowal of the claims – affective, stylistic, or ideological – that literature belonging to this supposed class can make. Seamus Heaney's pronouncement that Murphy cannot 'surrender his sense of caste' is much quoted in the volume, but frequently without modification or interrogation. Such a verdict suggests the Nobel Prize winner is beset by the same affliction. Yet essays here sometimes seize upon 'caste' as an analytic solution. In

her incisive contribution to the volume, Siobhán Campbell notes that Murphy's own work deconstructs the bounds of such terminology. She suggests that in *The Battle of Aughrim* Murphy implies 'that we should be able to address the material [of past conflict] outside the constraints of historical identities', and that "'Anglo-Irish" is seen here to outlive its usefulness, at least as a term which pertains to literary criticism ... this poem implies that the mixed and mongrel "Irish" of the island should acknowledge that we carry all of the past within our "blood", and by continuing to mythologise, rather than face up to consequences, we continue to enact the "bygone spleen"'

Elena Rasmusino's chapter on *The Kick* and the 'Anglo-Irish' genre of autobiography demonstrates how such categories can constrict rather than illuminate. Situating Murphy's work within the proliferation of early twenty-first century life-writing, Rasmusino's 'Anglo-Irish' framework blocks certain potential comparisons. Most pertinent is Hugo Hamilton's *The Speckled People*, a work published almost simultaneously with Murphy's. As George O'Brien has noted, Ireland has a particular need for autobiography since 'the national narrative is limited to the generic and the typical and has no room for individual identities and destinies, no room for difference. In one way or another, all autobiography proposes to redraft public memory'. Hamilton's description of his dual German-Irish parentage, his childhood affinity for Connemara, and the ways in which his father's hunger for an 'authentic' national identity warped and dislocated his son's experience of language and self all resonate with the sense of difference, deracination, and disappointment that also haunts Murphy's work. *The Kick* and *The Speckled People*, like Nuala O'Faolain's *Are You Somebody?*, all 'redraft' twentieth-century Ireland through hybrid, discomfiting narratives. A more catholic sense of genre would have deepened Rasmusino's otherwise acute account. Indeed, her fine articulation that Murphy's 'deep sense of inadequacy and risk of failure' gives rise to a 'personal and poetic integrity' would be contextualized – and depathologized – by a sceptical approach to the very notion of harmonious national belonging. At its most problematic, then, 'Anglo-Irish' short-circuits analysis. As Tara Stubbs notes, in Murphy's poetry, 'unease is at the centre of things'.

At its most exciting, *Making Integral* indicates avenues for future research. In his introduction, Keatinge notes how Murphy's review of W.S. Graham's *The Nightfishing* indicates a 'path of influence between the two poets'. Keatinge is surely right that Murphy's affinity with Graham might help us further understand his relationship with the varied terrain of post-war British poetry. As a Scot transplanted to Cornwall for the majority of his poetic career, Graham's purposeful marginality might be merely a parallel to Murphy's peripatetic lifestyle

(both somewhat bohemian lifestyles), but the review suggests further connections. Graham's *The Nightfishing* is concerned with 'issues of identity, loneliness, and relationship', as Edna Longley notes: preoccupations which also distinguish Murphy. There are further thematic and stylistic resonances between the long form of *The Nightfishing* and Murphy's experiments with narrative verse throughout the 1960s. Keatinge's own contribution, on the later Sri Lanka poems, points to fertile ground for post-colonial readings of Murphy's writings. Keatinge argues that in Murphy's *The Mirror Wall* poetry both subverts and colludes with imperial strategies of representation, approximating a post-colonial hybridity. Ecocritical frameworks illuminate Murphy's delicate delineation of the relations of culture, place, and fauna. The self-deprecating playfulness of 'Song for a Corncrake' aligns the poet with a once-common bird whose Irish population is increasingly endangered by mechanical harvesting. In his slight, deft lines artistic preoccupations (the weft of epic; lapidary verse; home-building; the inevitable destruction of transient edifices) converge with precarious nature. The solitary bird bathetically seeking a mate for species survival echoes and ironizes the artistic drudgery of the poet hammering out a beleaguered posterity. Murphy's sensitivity to lived insecurity and the interconnections between nature and humanity deserves revisiting in this era of Anthropocene crisis.

Not simply introducing Murphy's work to new audiences, then, *Making Integral* suggests by extension the ways in which 'Irish' poetry is already intrinsically (to use that ugly word) 'glocal'. It shows how literary criticism is reinvented by decoupling it from strictures of identity, sect, ethnicity, and sexuality. Such work makes it possible to recognize, and celebrate, the ways in which poetry is always networked to elsewhere, always contingent and provisional even when lyrically invested in land, or place, or person. Reading Murphy beyond the parameters of Irish interest confirms his contemporaneity and the opportunities afforded by reading across circles of meaning. This might allow us not only to read his work alongside that from Britain and Ireland, but to place his poems beside those from further islands, and to find the contrast and conversation in the textual flotsam and jetsam produced and polished by the ocean drift. Though Murphy apparently never learned Irish, he is conscious of English's falsifications of self, the dual creative pleasures and expediencies of any language's power. The reconstructive surety of the title *Making Integral*, thus comes apart in the context of the full poem 'Little Hunger', where the speaker's constructions are predicated on collapse. Ownership enables creative 'dismemberment' but is inextricable from an awareness that new builds of words or stone are equally precarious. Keatinge notes that Murphy's 'formal mastery ... [coexists with] a barely concealed anxiety and

restlessness'. The repeated application of self to word is perhaps not a hallmark of mastery, but the compulsive labour of insecurity. Such poetry suits our uncertain times.

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Eleanor Lybeck, *All on Show: The Circus in Irish Literature and Culture*. Cork: Cork University Press, 2019. 240 pages.

Eleanor Lybeck has written an intriguing, diverting, somewhat challenging but also somewhat overstated study of how a number of Irish writers in all the major genres have availed of the idea of the circus in their work, either in passing or more centrally. The aim of doing so is to demonstrate 'how the circus has become an icon – often a frustrated and disruptive icon – of certain normative ideas of Irishness', beginning with *Ulysses* and concluding with the Seamus Heaney poem 'Wheels within Wheels.' And like the circus, the book's claims come with a certain hectic coloration and extravagance of argument, together with some high-flying displays of theory, features which while adding intensity and verve also, at time, cannot avoid the circus's primary and most essential gesture, the stretch.

Three related though different avenues of approach explore imaginative sites of 'the circused' and 'circusing' – character, community, and culture – with the third of these the most nearly contemporaneous and the most wide-ranging, indicating that the circus has greater appeal to late twentieth-century Irish artists than to earlier generations. Paradoxically, it is while the actual traditional circus is in decline during the '80s and '90s that it becomes a framing resource for the restless revisionism of those years. In addition, *All on Show* contains a good deal of Irish circus history, highlighting the careers of individual performers – most notably the nineteenth-century clown and songster Johnny Patterson, whose central role in Stewart Parker's *Heavenly Bodies* is thoroughly analyzed, as is his probably hitherto unknown relevance to reflections on 'Joyce's situation of dubious male authority in circus settings'.

'Joyce's Family Circus' opens the book's explorations proper, with the 'Calypso' and 'Circe' sections of *Ulysses* providing the essential textual occasions. 'Home life is circused at 7 Eccles Street', it is said, and one major result of this is the expenditure of much expository and exegetical energy in discussing the use in 'Calypso' of *Ruby: the Pride of the Ring*,