

Juan José Delaney, *What, Che?: Integration, Adaptation and Assimilation of the Irish-Argentine Community through its Language and Literature*, Ediciones Universidad del Salvador, Buenos Aires, 2017, 192 pp.

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No study of the Irish diaspora in Argentina can be complete without referencing Juan José Delaney, whose fiction and non-fiction narratives are often cited by researchers from Argentine literature and Irish studies. This book is part of his corpus of reference publications. The title, *What, Che?: Integration, Adaptation and Assimilation of the Irish-Argentine Community through its Language and Literature*, reveals not only the topic of this work, linguistic in essence, but also the informal tone and the author's love for, and use of, words. The book is based on Delaney's doctoral thesis at the School of Modern Languages, Universidad del Salvador, Buenos Aires, presented in October 2015. His supervisor, Laura Patricia Zuntini de Izarra, also lends the book additional authority, considering her international profile in the study of Irish diasporas, particularly in Argentina and Brazil.

The book is written in English and contains five chapters. Delaney lays out the originality and scope of his research in the brief introduction, which makes clear that the study is concerned primarily with language. In an attempt to make his project multigenerational in scope, Delaney opts to analyse language in fiction and non-fiction narratives from the late 1800s to the end of twentieth century. The narratives chosen are *Tales of the Pampas*, by William Bulfin (1900), *You'll never go back*, by Kathleen Nevin (1946) and four short stories by Rodolfo Walsh (1964-1970). Delaney affirms that this study can also be seen as a project of ethnography, as it aims to learn about people, communities and institutions, resulting in a descriptive and interpretative narration. His references to Marcel Mauss, Margaret LeCompte and Jean Schensul appear to inform the theories behind this work; however, the work avoids jargon or heavy theorisation, making it more accessible to a general audience.

Chapter 1, "The Irish in Argentina: Historical Context", offers a brief overview of Ireland as a country of migration, and how this issue relates to language. The problematisation of language subsequently provides the core theme that runs through the entire work. What emerges in these pages is the history of the Irish language since 1541 and the attempts to annihilate it, which resulted in the use of Irish being limited to rural areas and/or the peasantry. Gradually, the use of English was seen as an opportunity for social mobility; therefore, Irish began to be associated with poverty. What follows is an account of Irish migration to Argentina, particularly from 1806, and of the role of English, Irish and Spanish languages in the new land. This is developed further in chapter 2, where the author discusses languages and the Irish community in Argentina: Irish, Hiberno-English or Irish-English, Hiberno-Argentine and Irish-Porteño. Aware of the differences in social status amongst the Irish community, Delaney affirms that his study focuses on the majority of Irish migrants who lived and worked in the countryside, as it was here where their particular relationship with language emerged. It is in this context that an Irish-Argentine lingo emerged, created by the Irish migrants and their descendants in the new country. A study of oral texts enabled the author to compile a glossary of Irish-Porteño brogue, Irish-Argentine lexicon, idioms, statements and transferred errors.

Chapters 3-5 expand on processes of integration, adaptation and assimilation to the host country respectively, and their representation in linguistic and literary forms. Integration is studied in private letters, the newspaper *The Southern Cross*, and the novel *You'll never go back* (Kathleen Nevin, 1946). According to Delaney, the death of Fr Anthony Fahy (1804-1871) and the *SS Dresden* Affair in 1889 can be seen as two events that marked the end of an era and the beginning of the adaptation process (Delaney 2017:98). During this period, the author affirms in chapter 4, language serves as a living testimony of the Irish adaptation to their host country and its language by incorporating new words that, at the beginning, were part of the working life of Irish migrants in the countryside. With references to books, private letters and local newspapers *The Hiberno-Argentine Review*, *Buenos Aires Herald* and *Fianna*, Delaney emphasises the writers' "conscious or unconscious determination to become Argentines" (103). An introduction to William Bulfin and his literary work is provided in chapter 4, together with a review of Bulfin's collection of short stories titled *Tales of the Pampas* (1900). Approaching the stories through a linguistic lens, Delaney confirms that "Mainly referred to camp activities and gauchos, their sayings and habits, a range of about forty Spanish words (sometimes misspelled) contribute to enrich the linguistic melting pot" (112). The author makes use of footnotes to provide the reader with a glossary, as he reveals that the characters in the stories become bilingual and bicultural, just like the Irish community in Buenos Aires. The chapter is completed with a brief analysis of interviews with Irish-Porteños between sixty-five to ninety years of age that "feel more Irish than Argentine" and "have not yet assimilated into the new culture" (116). An addendum closes the chapter—a note concerning a diary written by John Brabazon in 1845 and published in Spanish translation by Eduardo Coghlan in 1981 with the title *Andanzas de un irlandés en el campo porteño (The Customs and Habits of the Country of Buenos Aires from the year 1845, by John Brabazon, and his own adventures)*. In this diary, language is also pointed out as a serious problem, allowing "[p]recise descriptions and comic or tragic situations" (122).

The final chapter addresses "the new generations", or the third and subsequent generations of the Irish diaspora, and their perceptions of identity and belonging to the Irish community. They are characterised as deserting the traditional social spaces within the community, such as schools, churches and other various institutions, as they began intermarrying. The period of Argentina's most recent military dictatorship, also known as the Dirty War, in the 1970s, also contributed to the division of the Irish community, as Delaney explores through the so-called "St. Patrick's massacre".¹ The chapter offers another selection of interviews that "convey the attitudes of speakers in relation to their Irish-Argentine identity" (129). Two of the interviewees reveal surprise at the fact that the interviews were to be conducted in English, affirming that Spanish was their mother tongue. The next section introduces Argentine writer Rodolfo Walsh, third-generation Irish, and his negative perception of the Irish community in Buenos Aires.

¹ On 4th July 1976, a community of five Pallotine priests and seminarians in the Parish of *San Patricio*, Buenos Aires, were massacred, accused of poisoning the minds of the young. Two of the priests were of Irish descent, Fr. Alfie Kelly and Alfredo Leaden. In 2007, Argentinians Juan Pablo Young and Pablo Zubizarreta directed *4 de Julio: La masacre de San Patricio*, in an attempt to keep alive the memory of the community and the impact of the event, for which no one has, as yet, been brought to justice.

An appendix is added to the book, containing a series of maps, documents, photographs, newspaper clips, and the transcripts of the original ten interviews. These are all elements that can be useful to the general reader and researchers alike. Unfortunately, sources are generally missing, making it difficult for a researcher to use it for reference, such as the first page of the original diary of John Brabazon (159) which does not offer place, date, or photographic credit. The bibliography offers interesting local sources (Devoto:2009; Landaburu:2006; Steiner:2009); however, some may suggest it is rather short, considering the high volume of information contained therein. It should be noted that there are more references that can be found in footnotes that are not included in the bibliography section, as seen on page fifteen, for example. Regrettably for the researcher, there are also a few citations that are not referenced at all.

The interviews are indeed interesting, as they provide researchers with a variety of content that can be approached from many disciplines. However, more information could have been given here in terms of theoretical framework. Some references to scholars are provided throughout the book, but the aim(s) and methodology of this work are missing. The speakers chosen are between sixty-five and ninety years of age, which places them as third and fourth generation Irish; why is English then used to conduct the interviews, even though English is not their first language? In some cases, it was only acquired in school and clearly not used in everyday life; in others, the interviewees repeatedly affirm that Spanish is their mother tongue. If the aim is to assess the attitudes of speakers towards their Irish-Argentine identity, would it not be more insightful to give the speaker a choice of language? Also, although these are interviews, the questions are missing in the transcripts. More information on interview style and use of English would have been helpful. The same could be said about the glossaries and linguistic varieties. However fascinating, one cannot help but wonder why a glossary of language used in the Argentine countryside is referred to as Irish-Porteño, when historically *porteño* has been used to address the people from the port (and later the city) of Buenos Aires. For clarification purposes, a definition and contextualisation of these terms would have been beneficial considering that this study is, as the author puts it, linguistic over literary.

At a glance, the book could appear overwhelmingly saturated with information for the reader as both linguistic and literary studies of oral and written texts are provided, but a close reading would reveal abundant references and ideas that can act as preliminary sources for future research projects on this topic. For example, while the study is centred primarily on the Irish community in Buenos Aires province, the Irish also settled in other provinces, a topic which is still pending further investigation. As the study of contact linguistics and bilingualism is the focus of this book, it could become a useful point of departure for further, comparative studies that incorporate other countries where the Irish found the same “problem” throughout Latin America and the Caribbean.²

What, che? is a work that fuses history, literature, and sociolinguistics. There is a great deal of information about the history of Ireland and Argentina, and also about Irish, English and Spanish languages with a multigenerational approach. This seems to be a study of languages from a sociocultural perspective, despite the lack of theoretical references. Integration, accommodation and assimilation concepts were included in this work, although decontextualized. Other theories,

² There are many studies on migration and bilingualism that could serve as inspiration for this potential project. In a sociocultural study of bilingualism and migrant experiences in the United States, (where over 300 languages are present, apart from English) Lucinda Pease-Alvarez (2002) explains that native language loss occurs by the third generation, and that bilingualism can be seen as a bridge that links two monolingual generations.

such as Communication accommodation theory by Howard Giles, have been used to study “ethnolinguistic vitalities” (Giles and Hogan 2007:299). Likewise, contact linguistics can provide the framework to the study of code-switching, borrowing, and creole, all addressed in this study.

What, Che? is a testimony of Delaney’s passion for the study of the Irish diaspora in Buenos Aires, and he succeeds at proving that this study is far from over. This book is an open invitation to continue exploring this topic from many disciplines: Cultural Studies, Irish Studies, and Spanish Linguistics in Argentina to name but a few.

Works Cited

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