
Feeling Irish Enough: Shifting Identities & the Advent of the New Irish in Roddy Doyle's *The Deportees*

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Résumé

Since 2000, Irish contemporary writer Roddy Doyle has published short stories in instalments for *Metro Éireann*, a weekly newspaper founded by two Nigerian journalists in April 2000 and focusing on news about Ireland's growing immigrant and multicultural population. The eight first 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. In the 'Foreword' to *The Deportees*, Roddy Doyle explains that it happened as if he "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." These stories are thus a way of appropriating this new reality, but also of questioning its side-effects and consequences: integration, identity, racism, acceptance or rejection. This paper will focus mainly, but not exclusively, on three of the stories: 'The Deportees', '57% Irish' and 'I understand'. 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, with the feeling of being watched and a desire to merge in the anonymous crowd, and above all with the unescapable 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 re-definition of the Irish national identity but also the definition of a new process: the process of becoming Irish. Echoing in turns the points of view, fears and hopes of the immigrant or of the native Irishman, these short stories attempt to express in an impressionistic fashion the construction of a new national unity through a multiplicity of voices, languages and experiences.

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