
IRISH STUDIES AROUND THE WORLD – 2020

Maureen O'Connor (ed.)

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Introduction

Maureen O'Connor

The vivacity and resilience of Irish culture have been both challenged and proven by the year 2020, smack in the middle of which I was asked to take over the role of annual international Irish Studies chronicler. The resilience of hard-pressed academics thrown into unprecedented circumstances was also admirable, and I am extremely grateful to those kind souls who agreed to review a sample of some recent publications in Irish Studies for this issue, a sample size I hope to expand the next time around when it is greatly to be hoped we will no longer be working under emergency conditions.

The global coronavirus pandemic, which necessitated national lockdowns beginning in March and has now killed more than two million people worldwide, meant that several annual conferences, usually held in the spring and summer, were cancelled or postponed, including our own AEDEI. A year without AEDEI seems like a year best forgotten, even passed over in silence, but there were some truly fascinating, innovative developments in the virtual exchange of ideas and celebration of culture, as we will see. Other large, international Irish Studies conferences that cancelled or postponed their annual meetings included ACIS (American Conference for Irish Studies), IASIL (International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures), EFACIS (European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies), SSNCI (Society for the Study of Nineteenth-Century Ireland), and SOFEIR (French Society for Irish Studies); only BAIS (British Association of Irish Studies) managed the enormous task of transforming a physical Irish Studies conference, on the subject of “Global Irish”, into a virtual meeting, mid-stride, as it were, holding their annual conference online in May of 2020. The organisers used the unusual circumstances to extend the sessions, keynotes, and launches – including the launch of the six-volume series, *Irish Literature in Transition*, the momentously important publication from Cambridge University Press – over most of the month, rather than concentrating events in a few days. This flexible and open structure made last-minute contributions and worldwide participation possible in an unprecedented way, signalling one vision of the future for the academic conference. As disappointing, if not devastating, as these mass cancellations appeared at first, a lively online series of symposia, lecture series, webinars, and book launches, as well as podcasts, began to offer significant compensation for our losses (though nothing can take the place of the hugs, gossip, and laughs of an in-person gathering). To name just a few of the academic series that provided food for thought, inspiration, and even a form of camaraderie: EFACIS broadcast a podcast series, the “Irish Itinerary”; SOFEIR ran a webinar series, as did Irish College Leuven; Queens University Belfast Irish Studies held a virtual seminar series online, as did the New York City consortium of Irish Studies Scholars, Students and Artists, as well as Boston College’s Irish Institute, part of the college’s “Irish Influence” initiative. This last series features not only academics and writers, but also actors, journalists, filmmakers, musicians, and dancers, and it continues every Friday into 2021.

The Trinity Long Hub and Glucksman House New York continued to host events and talks online, as has the Moore Institute at National University of Ireland, Galway. In January of last year, Galway was preparing to fulfil its role as the 2020 European Capital of Culture, featuring a programme of activities to which the university was poised to contribute significantly. The February opening ceremonies were cancelled due to severe weather conditions, an augury of much more dire circumstances that would mean the cancellation of nearly all plans for the year-long celebration, though there were art installations around the city in addition to some online performances. The Moore Institute carried on as well, and hosted a number of events and talks as well as their own webinar series that discussed the COVID-19 crisis from numerous disciplinary approaches. They also supported and hosted

other events, conferences, and projects, such as the most recent presentations for the “Aging Masculinities in Irish Literature and Culture” project.

The memorable year 2020 is, of course, part of the decade of commemorations, which continued to be observed in virtual form by, for example, the Collins Barracks Museum in Dublin, and an interdisciplinary online conference at University College Cork in October marking the “Centenary of Terence MacSwiney and the Cork Men’s Gaol Hunger Strike”. The Century Ireland website, as always, features podcasts, virtual museum tours, video talks, and selected archival material. This online resource became an especially valuable one during lockdown. The ongoing commemoration of the Great Hunger of over 150 years ago has been carried on by the Strokestown Park and Famine Museum, which in 2020 conducted virtual Famine Walks and offered a virtual series of “Famine Voices”. Museums around Ireland made the switch to online access, when museums, galleries, libraries, and cinemas were initially closed to the public. The National Gallery site hosts websites and projects, in addition to making their exhibits accessible online. The National Gallery hosts the ESB Centre for the Study of Irish, a public archive of the arts in Ireland, which most recently promoted its oral history project, specifically its recordings of conversations with Irish artists. The Glucksman Gallery in University College Cork has maintained an online art-project-a-day challenge with #CreativityAtHome throughout the rolling lockdowns. The National College of Art and Design hosted an exhibit specifically designed for virtual engagement, “*Tongue the Sun*”, by artist Jonah King. According to the website, “The exhibition includes a streamed video artwork, an interactive digital sculpture, and a text piece aligned with a series of live-streamed discussions”. Belfast Exposed, a photography organisation, hosted an exhibit of two series by Tristan Poyser, “Street View” and “The Invisible In-Between”. The Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) screened an online series featuring film and video work from their archive, while the National Library has mounted an online exhibit on the life and work of William Butler Yeats. Around the world, celebrations of Irish culture continued regardless of physical limitations, from Russia to Poland and Mexico. The Ireland Canada University Foundation, with the support of the Irish Department of Culture, Heritage, and the Gaeltacht, for the first time, offered free, online Irish-language classes, an offer taken up by over 400 Canadians during the pandemic.

The seasons kept rolling forward, heedless of humanity’s struggles, and inventive ways of marking those changes emerged as we attempted to adjust to what was increasingly referred to as the “new normal”. Even before such celebrations moved online, the Irish embassy in Great Britain hosted a week-long virtual St Brigid’s festival celebrating the “creativity and talent” of Irish women. St Brigid’s Day, or Lá Fhéile Bríde, falls on the first of February, the first day of spring in the Irish calendar, also known as Imbolg. St Patrick’s Day was a fraught affair around the world, as various jurisdictions debated whether or not to have parades or other celebrations, as the pandemic began to take hold. In Ireland, bars and restaurants closed and parades were cancelled. The Bealtaine Festival of May, marking the beginning of summer, was observed in various online spaces, including the lighting of the Bealtaine Fire celebration, traditionally carried out on the Hill of Uisneach in Westmeath. “In ancient times, a great assembly would gather on the Hill to witness the fire being lit by the High King of Ireland”, the event’s website reports. In 2020, the lighting and burning of the Bealtaine Fire was livestreamed around the world.

Another seasonal tradition in Ireland is the summer school, most of which were cancelled or postponed in 2020. One notable exception was the Cork Midsummer Festival, the theme of which was the “Day of the Straws”, referring to the cholera epidemic of 1832. The online festival drew together familiar works by Margaret Clarke, Seán Keating, John Lavery, Daniel Maclise, Norah McGuinness, Edith Somerville, Mary Swanzey, and Jack B. Yeats, as well as lesser-known works. One annual summer event that managed to be robustly celebrated around the world was Bloomsday. The official virtual Dublin

Bloomsday hosted presentations and contributions from Trieste, Paris, and Toronto, including performances, exhibitions, workshops, and even a virtual breakfast. The Oxford Bloomsday event, which has been running for twenty-five years, moved online for the first time, featuring music and readings, both from *Ulysses* and from new work by living writers. Other sites of annual celebration that went online included the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles and the Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia, but virtual celebrations were conducted across the US, from New York to Seattle, and around the world, from China to Bulgaria. Back in Ireland, the national broadcaster, RTÉ, ran a thirty-hour reading of Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Music and performance are, of course, central to Bloomsday celebrations, while the cultural workers hit hardest by the pandemic have been those in theatre and music, both of which crucially require in-person attendance. Even when cinemas opened over the summer, live theatre spaces and music venues have remained closed in Ireland since March. Theatres offered a mix of limited live productions and recordings from their archives. Previous recordings made available online included The Irish National Opera's 2019 production of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Druid Theatre's 2005 ground-breaking cycle of all of J.M. Synge's plays. The Abbey Theatre staged a number of innovative and inclusive works under their "Engine Room" programme. Over the summer, *The Great Hunger*, a dramatization of the Patrick Kavanagh poem, was performed to small audiences in the IMMA garden, while other projects like *14 Voices from the Bloodied Field* and *Dear Ireland* were livestreamed. *Songs from an Empty Room* was broadcast by RTÉ in July, a fundraising performance by Irish musicians and artists, for Irish musicians and artists. The National Opera House in Wexford maintained an impressively full schedule of online performances, but the most elaborate and ambitious cultural programme of the year was RTÉ's *Illuminations*, an "online digital gallery", part of which included a televised concert. Thirty artists were commissioned to create an archive of works to capture the experience of COVID-19. Visual art, photography, film, music, poetry, essays, and spoken word pieces, by established and emerging artists, are all represented. The work aimed "to capture how people are feeling during the pandemic and to help foster solidarity and build resilience". An especially striking element of the project is the diverse range of artists now confidently identifying as Irish. A more inclusive Ireland is slowly, painfully emerging. The "Black and Irish" podcast that began in 2020 is one sign of this, as is the LGBT History Club and the LGBT Heritage Project, which is run in collaboration with the Linen Hall Library in Belfast. Established in 2019, in 2020 the project featured a presentation by Sara Phillips on trans visibility in Ireland.

The "new" Ireland is still a shock to some, which brings me to *THE* cultural event of the lockdown in Ireland: the television adaptation of Sally Rooney's 2018 novel, *Normal People*. Last April, this series was all anyone was talking about in Ireland, including outraged viewers who called into daytime radio programmes to object to the sex scenes, of which there were plenty. Other Irish pop culture news from 2020 includes: Saoirse Ronan's nomination for an Academy Award for her role in *Little Women* (she did not win); Sinéad O'Connor's inclusion in *Time* magazine's 200 women of the year in March; Paul Mescal being nominated for an Emmy for his role in *Normal People*; the Irish-poetry-loving, Irish-American Joe Biden winning the US presidency; Julien Temple's release of the documentary, *A Crock of Gold: A Few Rounds with Shane McGowan*; and the release of *Wild Mountain Thyme*, a Hollywood film set in Ireland, in which the accents are so laughable that the movie spawned hundreds of memes (and thousands of groans). All of this also potentially provides material for future Irish Studies conference papers and publications, as does the bumper crop of new Irish fiction produced in 2020, much of it written by women, both established and upcoming authors, including *Actress*, by Anne Enright; *After the Silence*, by Louise O'Neill; *The Searcher*, by Tana French; *Strange Hotel*,

by Eimear Mc Bride; *Big Girl, Small Town*, by Michelle Gallen; *Oona*, by Alice Lyons; *The Pull of the Stars*, by Emma Donoghue; *The Wild Laughter*, by Caoilinn Hughes; *A Ghost in the Throat*, by Doireann Ní Ghríofa; *The Tainted*, by Cauvery Madhavan; *Little Cruelties*, by Liz Nugent; *As You Were*, by Elaine Feeney; *Exciting Times*, by Naoise Dolan; and the short story collection edited by Sinead Gleeson, *The Art of the Glimpse*.

The difficult year closed with an event viewed around the world, the winter solstice sunrise, livestreamed from within the chamber of the Neolithic passage tomb in Newgrange. This alignment of the celestial and the human marks the lengthening of days for six months, a moment of hope and inspiration, which reached and united a much larger international audience in 2020 than ever before possible. The work that Irish Studies scholars do is also hopeful and forward looking, while at the same time preserving the beauties and lessons of the past. The authors and reviewers included here are part of that optimistic and generous effort, and in closing, I thank them once again.

Maureen O'Connor lectures in the Department of English in University College Cork. She is the author of *The Female and the Species: The Animal in Irish Women's Writing* (2010), co-editor, with Derek Gladwin, of a special issue of the *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, "Irish Studies and the Environmental Humanities" (2018); with Kathryn Laing and Sinéad Mooney, of *Edna O'Brien: New Critical Perspectives* (2006); with Lisa Colletta, of *Wild Colonial Girl: Essays on Edna O'Brien* (2006); and, with Tadhg Foley, of *Ireland and India: Colonies, Culture, and Empire* (2006). Her latest book, *Edna O'Brien and the Art of Fiction*, is forthcoming from Bucknell University Press in 2021.

Maureen.OConnor@ucc.ie

Cultural Memory in Seamus Heaney's Late Work

Joanne Piavanini

Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. 225 pp.

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Reviewer: Charles Armstrong (University of Agder, Norway)

Over the last two decades, the field of literary theory has gradually changed. There have been few new theories of the classical type inaugurated by Russian Formalism, with specific definitions of literariness and interpretative methodologies of their own. While some of the directions introduced before the turn of the millennium still have a certain vitality, the more obviously different and new developments are coming from other quarters: interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary uses of literary texts in the light of broader prisms are characteristic of for instance Digital Humanities, Ecocriticism, and Disability Studies. Memory Studies is one of the key fields in this new landscape, and is one in which literary texts can be studied alongside history and collective memories, as well as in dialogue with everything ranging from popular culture to the hard sciences' theories of how the brain works.

Joanne Piavanini's new monograph on Seamus Heaney places itself firmly within this relatively new field. Both in the title of the book and throughout its pages she refers to "cultural" memory, thus signalling that her approach to Heaney is strongly indebted to a

strand of Memory Studies coming out of influential scholars such as Aleida and Jan Assmann, as well as Astrid Erll. Drawing upon the precedents of sociologist Maurice Halbwachs and historian Pierre Nora, this approach has a particularly close link to the Social Sciences and tends to focus on a diverse range of collective narratives that straddle the traditional divide between academic, written history, and less official forms of oral memory. Although the borders are hardly impermeable, this strand of Memory Studies can be distinguished from that of Trauma Studies, where Cathy Caruth and other scholars made use of Freudian theories in a way that tapped into post-structuralist literary theory and methodology. Yet even if Piavanini largely (and somewhat surprisingly) shies away from the latter paradigm, this does not mean that she has a narrow focus, as can be gleaned from the inclusive statement of intent made at the onset of this book: “I aim to show how Heaney’s poetry creates personal, familial, regional, national and global memories that ‘travel’ across and beyond borders and time periods, oscillating between these different frames of memory” (2).

The global or transnational dimension of the later stages of Heaney’s career is particularly important to this book. Piavanini defines Heaney’s “late work” as that which comes after his winning the Nobel Prize for literature in 1995, an event that she interprets as ushering in a movement from a predominantly Ireland-centred to transnational phase in his writings. This monograph includes analyses of his last four poetry collections: *The Spirit Level* (1996), *Electric Light* (2001), *District and Circle* (2006), and *The Human Chain* (2010). In addition, Heaney’s translation work of this period – including *Beowulf* (1999), *The Burial at Thebes: A Version of Sophocles’ Antigone* (2004), and the posthumously published translation of book VI of Virgil’s *Aeneid* (2016) – is also addressed, and the obvious crossing of linguistic and temporal borders effectuated by Heaney’s translations is well suited to illustrate the author’s underlying premise concerning the globalism of his work. The final chapter of the book is a coda devoted to how the poet’s memory has been mediated after his death, supplementing the primarily textual focus of earlier chapters by scrutinizing new editions and institutional engagements, and with particular focus on the Seamus Heaney HomePlace that was opened in Bellaghy in 2016.

All in all, this is an interesting and well-conceived study, which provides a useful addition to Heaney studies. One might quibble with the fact that the poetry volume *Seeing Things* (1991) is just ruled out from Piavanini’s conception of the “late” Heaney, even if it in many respects can be read as a key ushering in of some of the tendencies focused upon in this monograph. The author’s desire to contrast the later Heaney with the earlier one would have been more convincing if there were a fuller account of the internationalism of his earlier writings, which includes persistently strong links with the U.S. after an initial stay at Berkeley in 1970-1, the exploration of “the netted routes of ancestry and trade” in the mythopoesis of *North*, and his turning to Eastern European exemplars in the 1970s and ’80s. Still, the decision to focus on a delimited, and in some respects not heavily researched, phase of Heaney’s career is a wise one, and important tendencies in, and comparisons between, his late writings are deftly handled here. The late Heaney often recalls the works of his earlier years, and conceiving of this as a form of memory (rather than, say, mere intertextuality) is a fruitful approach. Piavanini makes particular use of Svetlana Boym’s concept of reflective nostalgia, which is distinguished from restorative nostalgia in that it is less concerned with reconstructing a lost past than in dwelling “in the ambivalences of human longing and belonging” (164). While drawing upon Boym and other theorists of memory, Piavanini’s close dealings with Heaney’s works also engage with the established Heaney criticism of scholars such as Neil Corcoran, Michael Parker, Richard Rankin Russell, and Helen Vendler. Although closer attention might have been given to formal issues, there is much commendable work done on individual poems: the interpretation of how Heaney’s elegies for his father in his final volume, *Human Chain*, build on earlier

poems is particularly insightful. Memory is of course at the heart of Heaney's many elegiac poems, and a separate chapter of the book is devoted to the transnational and self-reflective dialogues opened up by his late elegies to fellow poets Joseph Brodsky, Ted Hughes, Robert Lowell, and Czeslaw Milosz.

The Nobel Prize committee famously praised Heaney's works "of lyrical beauty and ethical depth", and we are here presented with worthwhile reflections on the ethical dimensions of Heaney's career in a time when he gradually turned to look at the Troubles as a receding phenomenon of the past. Recent developments in Memory Studies have led to a questioning of the simplistic binary opposition of victims and perpetrators, and Piavanini uses the reflections of Debreti Sanyal and Michael Rothberg to good effect in reflecting on how Heaney, particularly in *The Spirit Level*, broached feelings of complicity and implication. This is a perspective that promises to also further the future understanding of Heaney's earlier works. With his concept of multidirectional memory, Rothberg has also been a key proponent of a view of cultural memory as a complex phenomenon, where different historical events are interpreted in light of one another. Piavanini's chapter on *The Burial Thebes* is one of the strongest contributions in this book, and it homes in with good effect on how Heaney's version of *Antigone* "blends the nationalist collective memory of the 1981 hunger strikes" with a reaction to 9/11 that amounts to a "transnational critique of the 'war on terror'" (79). In this reading Heaney's connection with the Bellaghy-born hunger striker Francis Hughes is key to the play. While here the recourse biographical knowledge provides an essential lead, elsewhere this dimension might have been put to more sophisticated use. Towards the end of her study, Piavanini refers all too briefly to Heaney's "collaboration with Dennis O'Driscoll to produce *Stepping Stones*, which is something greater than a series of interviews, and more like a form of life writing" (203). This is an apposite reflection on a very interesting book, which deserves more attention as a form of authorial control emulating the highly choreographed biographies of Victorian predecessors such as Hardy and Tennyson. One can also read much of Heaney's poetry as a form of life writing. As such, the connection between the literary text and remembered life is so pervasive and fundamental to the whole enterprise, that it deserves closer and more principled attention than it is given in this book.

Published the same year as new books on Heaney by Roy Foster and Rosie Lavan, *Cultural Memory in Seamus Heaney's Late Work* comes at a time where the appraisal of the poet's work is evidently entering into a new phase. The book's coda, which scrutinises the memory of Heaney after his death, asks some questions that will be key for this phase: "Will his work fall out of favour within a few decades, or is his place in the canon secure? In his poetry there was a fluidity to time and space; he was able to cross borders and create folds in time. Will Heaney's legacy be as a Northern Irish poet of the Troubles, or a cosmopolitan poet with a broad and varied *oeuvre*?" (201). While these are crucial questions, I am not convinced that Piavanini's book answers them convincingly. This passage might appear to suggest – and the general focus of the book as a whole points in the same direction – that Heaney's "place in the canon" can only be ensured by a reception that emphasises his cosmopolitanism. This ignores the fact that much literary commemoration and canonisation is facilitated by institutions that have a strong local, regional, or national investment. Furthermore, while one might allow that a too parochial or nationalist interpretation ultimately would short-change Heaney's contribution, I find it hard to agree that this is the sole – or perhaps even the most pressing – challenge to Heaney's reputation.

Through his thorough immersion in the precedents of W.B. Yeats and Patrick Kavanagh, Heaney's writings show ample awareness of the fact that cosmopolitanism is a complex and, in some versions, quite problematical phenomenon for writers, and that there can – according to a logic of the symbol Heaney never really renounced – be a virtue in finding an *omphalos* in the places closest at hand. In political terms, one might also add that

global capitalism and the Roman and British empires also are less than simply salutary phenomena, and that it can be hard to unpack insidious currents of transnationalism (hardly mentioned in this book) from more commendable ones. Along a different tack, one might also question whether Heaney's powerful record as a "Northern Irish poet of the Troubles" represents more of a danger to his future reputation than the temptation to interpret him as an author whose primary strengths and allegiances were domestic. While Heaney is a remarkable poet of home, marriage, and family, and his consistent focus upon these themes can be read, in part at least, as salutary symptoms of a twentieth-century redefinition of masculinity, his poetry does of course have many other virtues. Inadvertently, Piavanini's account makes clear how the final *Human Chain* volume, in its strong thematic emphasis on Heaney's closest family ties, prepared the ground for a similar focus in the later remembering of the Seamus Heaney HomePlace, the posthumously published selection of *100 Poems* (2018), and the BBC documentary *The Music of What Happens* (2019). In a similar vein, a 2015 RTÉ poll led to "When all the others were away at mass", a poem from his "Clearances" sequence of elegies to his mother, being voted Ireland's favourite poem of the last century. The poem is part of a thematic nexus in his oeuvre that creates close links between poetry, kin, and geographic origins. When Piavanini worries that the "cosmopolitan Heaney who used his work to move across time and space has been anchored, albeit in the place that shaped him" (2011), this overlooks the fact that such a process to a large degree has been encouraged by Heaney himself. Ultimately, though, the most important factor determining Heaney's future reputation will be the quality of his work, and in this respect any championing of the late Heaney demands circumspection, given that much of his most innovative and bracing work arguably was behind him by the time he was awarded the Nobel Prize. Nevertheless, readers of poetry have reason to be thankful for the entirety of Heaney's oeuvre, and this monograph furthers our understanding of one of the most accomplished and cherished poets to come out of Ireland.

Charles I. Armstrong is a professor of English literature at the University of Agder. He is the author of three monographs, including *Re-framing Yeats: Genre, Allusion and History* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). He is the co-editor of five volumes of essays, including *The Legacy of the Good Friday Agreement: Northern Irish Politics, Culture and Art after 1998* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) and *Terrorizing Images: Trauma and Ekphrasis in Contemporary Literature* (De Gruyter, 2020). Among his recent publications are the essays "Trauma and Poetry" (in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, 2020) and "Trauma in Michael Longley's War Poetry of the Troubles" (in *Partial Answers* 17.2, 2019). He is currently co-director of the Yeats International Summer School, vice-president of the International Yeats Society, and president of the Nordic Association of English Studies. A visiting fellow at Wolfson College, Cambridge, he is also a member of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters.

charles.armstrong@uia.no

Fine Meshwork: Philip Roth, Edna O'Brien, and Jewish-Irish Literature

Dan O'Brien

Syracuse University Press, 2020. 277 pages.

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Reviewer: George Bornstein (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor)

“It is an epic of two races (Israel-Ireland)”, wrote Joyce to his translator Carlo Linati in 1920, “and at the same time the cycle of the human body as well as a little story of a day (life)”. It was not a stray comment, but rather the result of a lifelong search for parallels between Irish and Jewish material. Something similar could be said for the work of Edna O'Brien, who quotes the letter to Linati in her own 1999 monograph *James Joyce*, in the Penguin Lives series. The American novelist Philip Roth and O'Brien first met in the late 1960s through their mutual English publisher Jonathan Cape. They shared a wariness toward universal “truths”, and distrusted ideologies and propaganda, which often put them at odds with received notions, including those of nations and ideologies. “What race or what language can ... boast of being pure today?” asked Joyce in a passage also quoted by O'Brien. After a loosely biographical chapter confronting notions about how the two writers undermine false cultural notions of “purity”, in *Fine Meshwork*, Dan O'Brien proceeds through their works in roughly chronological order, addressing first moral purity, then gendered identity, followed by their views on upward mobility through social access, William Faulkner's contention that history and the past are “never dead”, and, finally the mass displacements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. That's a lot of ground to cover, and for the most part Dan O'Brien here covers it well.

The bulk of the book marches steadily and often illuminatingly through its chapters, pointing towards its persistent questioning of false notions of purity, whether satire of Jewish hegemony in Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959), of O'Brien's opening trilogy *The Country Girls* (1960) followed by *The Lonely Girl* (1962) and the ironically titled *Girls in Their Married Bliss* two years after that, with its demolition of Irish notions of sexual or historical purity. That and her next two volumes were banned by the Irish Censorship Board in a paroxysm of political correctness. She also met a number of Jewish writers in America, including Joseph Heller and J. D. Salinger. Brendan Behan wittily quipped that “Other people have a nationality. The Irish and Jews have a psychosis”. O'Brien also met the young Jewish writer Erica Jong, then known as the author of *Fear of Flying* (1973), who in a letter wrote her that “you and I, and certain other women writers, are daring to write about the female experience in a perspective that has never been used before”.

In 1962 the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, wrote to then justice minister Charles Haughey to denounce the publication of O'Brien's *Country Girls* trilogy as “a smear on Irish womanhood”. A similar charge had been made against Roth's *Goodbye, Columbus* in the United States and Ireland in regard to its treatment of premarital sex and contraception. Both works were judged to have transgressed against proper group boundaries. So, too, were the next comparable novels, Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* and O'Brien's *Night*, both of which question not only the allure of sex but also the enticements of nationalism. “Shame and shame and shame and shame – every place I turn something else to be ashamed of”, confesses Portnoy at one point. Despite his ethnic conditioning against gentiles, the growing Portnoy is fascinated by all things non-Jewish, especially the women and particularly if they are Irish Catholic. When he visits Israel for the first time he muses delightedly, “Here we're the WASPs!” He flirts with wedding the Jewish kibbutznik Naomi and wonders why he doesn't marry her and stay. In that way Roth manages to mock both the idealistic portrayal of American Jews and its then unquestioning support of Israel.

O'Brien wrestles with similar issues in *Night*, which, like her *Vogue* essay, "The Artist and his Country" (1971), echoes the earlier questions in Roth's essay a decade earlier, "Writing American Fiction", which argues that *Night* is "intimately engaged with 'the Irish Question,' looking as it does at the Irish in England, the English in Ireland, power relations, violence, xenophobia, and nationalism. [O'Brien] discreetly probes the anguished position of the Southern Irish writer and citizen, balancing dismay over IRA murders with a deeply rooted affiliation with downtrodden Northern Catholics". The protagonist Mary Hooligan exemplifies that split; the Free State's oppressive structures continue the patriarchal and exclusionary ones of pre-Independence Ireland along with O'Brien's particular animus toward men who reenact the country's subjugated history of Irish women. Both novels warn of the dangers of the confluence of masculinism and nationalism.

Roth's 1981 novel *Zuckerman Unbound* adds to his usual focus on the complex analysis of race by foregrounding the character of Caesara, called "the very heart of Ireland". As the niece of Noah in the Bible, the original "Cessair" in Irish myth marks the continuity between Jewish and Irish identities in the *Book of Invasions* and elsewhere, tracing as it does the imaginary migrations of the Tuatha De Danann and the Milesians into Ireland and thus providing yet another example against notions of Irish racial purity, followed as they were by Vikings, Normans, English, Scottish, French Huguenots, and Lithuanian Jews, among others. Zuckerman goes on to have a brief affair with Caesara after she becomes a movie star in Hollywood and just before he introduces a quite different Jewish Newarker, the embittered Alvin Pepler, a farcical embodiment of Jewish victimhood in the New World. Pepler ends his denunciation of the Black writer LeRoi Jones ("what he writes is not literature. In my estimation it's black propaganda") with racially charged hatred ("Newark is a nigger with a knife! Newark is a whore with the syph!"). Zuckerman himself comes perilously close to Pepler's view when he asks Caesara the seemingly innocent question, "How did you get into all this?" with the acidic reply "'All this, 'meaning what?' She said sharply. 'Showbiz? Masochism? Whoredom? How did I get into all this?' You sound like a man in bed with a prostitute".

Both O'Brien and Roth adopt Faulkner's formulation in *Requiem for a Nun* that "The past is never done. It's not even past" in their trilogies of the 1990s particularly in O'Brien's *The House of Splendid Isolation* (1994) and Roth's *American Pastoral* (1997). Back in 1984 O'Brien had declared that "Any small, claustrophobic ingrown community resembles another. The passion and ignorance of the Deep South of America and the West of Ireland are the same". *The House of Splendid Isolation* is narrated by Josie O'Meara, an elderly Irishwoman born at the turn of the last century who emigrates to America during the Irish War of Independence but then returns to Ireland and marries into the rising Catholic large-farmer class only to find that her new husband is alcoholic and violent. She manages a then-illegal abortion, and consummates a late-life affair with a visiting priest after which James beats her into a brief madness. Following her lapse into sanity, James allows an arms dump on his land and is killed by the Gardai. McGreevy, a Provo assassin on the run, turns out to be an intelligent man of principles. O'Brien invokes Faulkner's Quentin Thompson as an analogue to show how current and past troubles can mask horrific deeds.

Similar questionings mark Roth's otherwise disparate *American Pastoral*, with its ambiguous hero Seymour ("Swede") Lvov hero, a former schoolmate and athletic star who has inherited a large glove manufacturing business from his uneducated Jewish immigrant father and moved to the well-to-do Jewish suburb of Old Rimrock with his Irish Catholic wife Dawn. Swede's inability to question anything about his own success in America leaves him blind to the subjugation of women and African Americans to explore how Jews became white in America by using the Irish as a model. His second wife also appears to be a non-Jew, implying unwillingness to query the white male privilege by which he lives. The novel closes with a garden party thrown by the Lvovs in 1973. There Swede re-encounters the

daughter whom he finds has killed three more people in service of her "revolution". Dawn takes an opposite attitude. Now Blacks were making the same migration from Newark as the Jews.

The Plot Against America (2004) is a muted post-Orwellian novel that offers an alternative history set in a reimagined 1940s America where a young Roth and his lower middle-class Jewish family confront a society in which fascist forces have come to power under the presidency of Charles Lindbergh and the tirades of Father Coughlin, the anti-Semitic Detroit priest and his Christian Front clubs. Lindbergh founds the benignly-named Office of American Absorption led by the equally anti-Semitic automotive baron Henry Ford, who subsidized publication of the four-volume *The International Jew: the World's Foremost Problem (1920-22)* and the United States publication of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a 1903 Russian anti-Jewish forgery in 1903. An aunt's husband, Rabbi Bengelsdorf, who succeeds Ford as head of the Office of American Absorption, offers little improvement, while Roth depicts the principled and often courageous if also hot-headed broadcaster and journalist Walter Winchell as "a Jew of the coarsest type". Roth went on to deny obvious parallels today between his alternative history and current politics: "It is easier to comprehend the election of an imaginary President like Charles Lindbergh than an actual President like Donald Trump".

O'Brien sent draft chapters of her 2015 novel *The Little Red Chairs* to Roth as she wrote them, a sign of their growing intimacy. The enigmatic title refers to the beleaguered Yugoslavian city's commemoration on April 6, 2012, to set out 11,541 red chairs on the high street, one for every Sarajevan killed during the 1425 days of siege, together with 643 small chairs, one for each child killed as well. The novel tells the story of Dr. Vladimir Dragan who arrives at the West of Ireland village of Cloonoila. There he begins an affair with the childless protagonist Fidelma. It turns out that he is hiding from the consequences of his role in Yugoslav war crimes, for which he is arrested and then imprisoned in The Hague. Meanwhile Fidelma suffers a brutal rape by three of Dragan's former henchmen who betray him for a reward. She moves to London where she finds work as a cleaner and comfort in Dragan's later trial for war crimes. The novel suggests that hybrid identities, cultures and ideas can ameliorate the excesses of berserk patriotism.

Dan O'Brien generally handles the complex ideas of *Fine Meshwork* well though occasionally hides behind efforts to pull his punches. For example, in chapter four, "A Harp in the Hallway", he writes that "A Jewish version of Horatio Alger has become a point of entry for some mainstream Jewish organizations to adopt a racist attitude against African Americans especially and to oppose affirmative action for people of color" without giving a single example in his main text (and only a brief mention in the notes). A few lines later he adds in light of the shifting scales, "The novel's closing scene can be reread in light of the shifting scale of racial Otherness", again without an example. Of course, many things can be read as something else, but one wishes for one or two more instances here. Again, the very next chapter informs us that Thomas "Sutpen's insolvency following the Civil War can be taken as a moral judgment on the moral bankruptcy of the plantation class", again without any argument *why* it should be taken that way. Despite such occasional lapses, *Fine Meshwork* remains a strong first book by a promising young scholar.

George Bornstein sadly died in early February, before this issue went to print. He was professor emeritus of English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan. Professor Bornstein was one of the most distinguished and admired scholars of Modernism in his generation. For decades, he devoted himself to the study of the literature and culture of the later 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries. He authored seven scholarly monographs and edited twelve books. He has published close to fifty articles as well as

numerous reviews and has given talks at conferences, colleges, and universities throughout the United States, and in Ireland, England, and Germany.

Irish Women Writers at the Turn of the 20th Century: Alternative Histories, New Narratives.
 Edited by Kathryn Laing and Sinéad Mooney
 Edward Everett Root Publishers, 2019. 150 pp.
 ISBN: 9781911454182

Reviewer: Deirdre F. Brady (University of Limerick, Ireland)

Irish Women Writers at the Turn of the 20th Century: Alternative Histories, New Narratives, edited by Kathryn Laing and Sinéad Mooney, is a welcome addition to the field of Irish literary studies, opening up new avenues for current and future research and re-imagining existing scholarship with an angled lens. As the subtitle suggests, this book follows in the trajectory of recent developments in feminist historiography, with new ways of thinking and interpreting women's writing that connects past recovery projects with the present. This includes the Irish Women Writers (1880-1920) Network, whose launch precipitated this volume of essays and started the process of fermenting, distilling, and expounding new ideas that interweave within this volume.

This book takes us along a literary voyage which disrupts received notions of women's writing. The interspace in which literary criticism takes place unsettles old narratives and introduces new ones. It addresses ideas such as the occlusion of women's voices, silences in famine literature, esoteric philosophies of the pacifist mind, "green sensibilities" of the first-wave feminists, vegetarianism, masculine degeneracy, intellectual journals, spiritualism, and literary networks, among other themes. These alternative histories and multi-angled perspectives continuously challenge the reader to view the fissures, cracks, and silences in literary history that have characterised canonical works in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

As the first in a series in "Studies in Irish Literature, Cinema and Culture", edited by Dr Pilar Villar-Argáiz, this collection of essays provides a critical axis between the revival of less-known writers such as Elizabeth Priestley and Hanna Berman and the reconsideration of works from established writers such as Katherine Cecil Thurston and Edith Æ Somerville. The book is organised in two sections, "New Perspectives" and "Recoveries", with sixteen chapters in total. The first part of the book consists of nine essays that focus on recreating new narratives of existing critical scholarship in a manner which is intelligent, focused, and academically robust. The intention is to provide the reader with a keen sense of the "palpable energy that is currently driving scholarship in this field", demonstrating the insightful and imaginative skills of the editors. The collection underscores the progressive nature of late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century thinkers and writers negotiating the rough terrain of a gendered landscape.

The editors, Laing and Mooney, are well-regarded for their work in recuperating women's histories and bring this expertise and intelligence in their choice and layout of the essays. The cover, artfully designed, speaks to its readership evoking a sense of contemplation and reflection. The volume begins with the topic of vegetarianism and animal advocacy, exploring connections between Irish feminists and writers, Eva Gore-Booth, Alice Stopford Green and Margaret Cousins. In this essay, Maureen O'Connor expertly considers her subjects through the lens of new feminist materialism, evoking new histories of the links between vegetarian and suffrage movements and their associations with anti-

imperial sentiment. New narratives in feminist criticism can also be gleaned in subsequent chapters. Seán Hewitt looks to recent developments in ecocriticism to illuminate the “innovative” writing skills of Emily Lawless as she negotiates the natural world through the figure of a child. Similarly, Lia Mill’s re-reads the pacifist writings of Gore-Booth through the prism of esoteric principles and posits that Booth “stood her ground against injustice no matter how unpopular the cause”.

The collection includes new readings of the period which will be of interest to feminist scholars and those concerned with Irish print culture. Gendered concerns are the focus of two of Somerville’s and Martin Ross’s texts, *French Leave* (1928) and Somerville’s “Little Red Riding-Hood in Kerry” (1934), interpreted by Julie Anne Stevens and Anne Jamison respectively. These two essays are the subject of a critique which delves deep into the material. They reveal the influence of international relationships in fictional women’s artwork, alongside the “multiple intertexts” and manipulation of European fairy-tales to represent gendered social concerns. Matthew Reznicek’s excellent essay on Thurston’s novel *Max* (1910) explores the fluid identity of feminist geographies that re-imagines spaces and gender in a transnational framework. The bold and risky strategy of including two essays from canonical writers pays off. In the next chapter, a fascinating perspective on the writings of Thurston by Sinéad Mooney sheds light on the deranged and diseased characters in her work and its focus on discourses of degeneration in the *fin-de-siècle*, illuminating new perspectives in Irish literature. Christopher Cusack’s paper provides an original narrative of women’s contribution to famine literature, disrupting the “myth of silence” which has cloaked the topic. He pinpoints one hundred and thirty examples of literary fiction, which has been elided by the canonical process, post revivalism, suggesting new areas for future investigation. So too, Aintzane Legarreta Mentxaka explores the symbolism of silence in women’s fiction and its use as a literary technique to suggest intellectual thought in New Woman literature. These alternative perspectives underscore the shifting nature of critical debates in literature while evoking the primary aim of the book to consider “initial recovery work” and “established names” in multiple contexts.

New scholarship drives the second part of the book. Entitled “Recoveries”, it focuses on the excavation and recovery of forgotten or neglected writers and the retrieval of their biographies, publishing histories, literary networks, and texts. With each essay, new conceptual pathways reveal hidden histories, opening-up areas for interdisciplinary study. The reconsideration of the period necessitates new forms of cultural recovery and new modes for conceptualising women writers. It seems fitting that it begins with the exploration of the role of women writers in intellectual journals such as the *Nineteenth Century*. In this essay, Heidi Hansson puts forward a persuasive argument calling for renewed attention to periodicals as a “genre of its own”. The call for a reappraisal of literary scholarship is reinforced in subsequent chapters with appeals to further honour the achievements of women writers who have been forgotten or neglected. This includes the writings of Ethel Colburn Mayne, which Elke D’hoker notes is neglected in literary histories. She argues for renewed interest in Mayne as a writer of the short-story form, and precursor to subsequent Anglo-Irish writers.

Evoking the spirit of the intellectual and thinker Hannah Arendt, who advises us to “look on the past with new eyes, unburdened and unguided by any traditions”, this intelligent and thought-provoking volume provides new modes for conceiving cultural production and recuperating lost histories. Mary Pierse’s interrogation of the life and work of Elizabeth Priestly provides a blueprint for how to “do research”. Examining publishing records, biographical data, and Priestley’s significant contribution to feminist recovery projects, Pierse presents us with “a story that must be retold”, that embodies much of the aims of the editors, in mapping out new foundations for future scholarship. These include exciting new insights into the role of less well-known women journalists, novelists, and

chroniclers of their time. Examples include the literary journalism of correspondent and fiction writer McDougall. This essay by Lindsay Janssen underscores the courageous achievements of professional writers operating against the constraints of women of the period. Writing for the Canadian newspaper, the *Montreal Daily Witness*, McDougall's newspaper reports straddle the "reality boundary" of the conditions during the Land Wars, yet remain as a critical eye-witness account of the evictions and poverty in Ireland during the late nineteenth century.

The importance of networks and connections to cultural production and their influence on literature is a growing area of interest in Irish studies. Patrick Maume and Barry Montgomery offer a sensitive portrayal of the works and artistic connections of Ermina Rentoul Esler and Hannah Berman, respectively, thus underscoring recent scholarship on the dynamism of literary life in Ireland seen through the prism of coterie culture. Furthermore, Lisa Weihman's analysis of Theodosia F. W. Hickey's novel *Easter Week* (1933) highlights how Hickey used her family connections (her father was the well-known writer George Birmingham), correspondences, and contemporary newspaper reports to construct her historical fiction. These essays capitalise on this rapidly increasing field and offer a starting point for educators, scholars and those who are interested in this area.

Overall, this edited collection of essays showcases how the excavation of women's cultural production does not follow a linear line. As a snapshot of the direction of scholarship in Irish studies, it is an inspiration for future research. For the editors, Laing and Mooney, this was not an easy task, but one which they achieved successfully. The women portrayed in these essays were not a homogenous group with one-directional thinking and writing. They were diverse, politically driven women writers' intent on equalising the literary field with their stories. They continue to inspire us. As O'Connor reminds us earlier in the book, "The women discussed here defy mere chronology, continue to be our contemporaries and our educators".

Deirdre Brady currently teaches at the University of Limerick. Her research focuses on Irish female writers and intellectual networks of the mid-twentieth century. Her forthcoming monograph, *Literary Coterie and the Irish Women Writers' Club* (1933-1958), is due for publication by the Liverpool University Press in July 2021. Other publications include "The Gayfield Press" published in MAPP, the digital Modernist Archives Publishing Project (2020); "Writers and the International Spirit: Irish P.E.N. in the Postwar Years", published in *The New Hibernia Review* (2017); "The Road to Cuzco: An Irish Woman Writer's Journey to the 'navel of the world'" published in *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America* (2018), and "Modernist Presses and the Gayfield Press" published in *Bibliologica* (2014).

deirdre.brady@ul.ie

English Language Poets in University College Cork, 1970-1980

Clíona Ní Ríordáin

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Reviewer: Lucy Collins (University College Dublin)

In Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's evocative foreword to *English Language Poets in University College Cork, 1970-1980*, we gain insight into the rich potential of the generation of poets that emerged in Cork during this decade, taking advantage of Ireland's rapid modernisation and increasing literary cosmopolitanism. Ní Chuilleanáin's clear-eyed judgment is especially fitting for a book that explores an important phase in Irish literary history from a unique perspective, and offers an opportunity to examine a group of hitherto neglected poets. Their ties of friendship and literary affinity shed new light on their development as writers, and prompt us to think more deeply about the role of such relationships in the formation of cultural value.

This study is chiefly concerned with the work of seven poets: Greg Delanty, Theo Dorgan, Seán Dunne, Thomas McCarthy, Gerry Murphy, Gregory O'Donoghue, and Maurice Riordan, though it touches on a number of other figures with Cork associations, including Patrick Cotter, Patrick Galvin, John Montague, and Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin herself. It makes a case for considering these poets as a generation and examines the rich textual heritage of the group, as successors to a Munster tradition and also as poets deeply engaged with other languages and cultures. The comparatively small size of Cork city, together with its maritime history, renders it at once a space of intimacy and creative independence. Ní Ríordáin describes this particular generation – who came to UCC “at the end of the golden Lemass period” – as “carefree and unfettered by vocational concerns” (27). This outlook may also have reflected the experimental freedoms of post-1960s American culture which were a significant influence on these poets.

The opening chapters situate the study within the existing critical landscape, drawing particular attention to the overlapping groups of English- and Irish-language poets that flourished in UCC at this time. The issue of regionalism is explored, and aspects of the social and cultural context of Cork delineated, before Ní Ríordáin moves on to offer some biographical detail on her chosen poets and to consider their relationship with the city and with one another. Though introductory, this material is richly suggestive in drawing together a range of diverse circumstances and in considering the many ways in which a future creative life can be heralded. All of these poets arrived in UCC with a sense of purpose as readers and writers, bringing their knowledge and enthusiasm to the collective experience. These energies were reciprocal: the role of the university and its writing community in supporting wider creative developments is potentially a far-reaching one, and more could be made here of its influence on the evolving literary culture of 1970s Ireland.

By choosing a university focus Ní Ríordáin raises important issues about the relationship between the campus and its hinterland, as well as discussing the role of lecturers and curriculum in galvanising discussion and changing the literary landscape in fundamental ways. The wider college context is equally significant: we see how workshops and magazines functioned to bring like-minded students together and to forge a sense of shared identity, if only for a time. Particularly striking here is the role of the teacher outside the classroom, and the importance of dynamic figures such as Seán Lucy and John Montague in supporting student initiatives and introducing new influences into the Cork poetry scene. The interdisciplinary character of these networks is also apparent in the connections between poet John Montague and composer Séan Ó Riada, as well as in the wider cultural networks of Cork that took in the Crawford School of Art and Design, the

Cork Choral Festival, and the Irish National Ballet, which was based in the city. Comments on print cultures form an especially welcome dimension of this analysis. Newspapers and magazines offered opportunity and encouragement to these poets at the start of their careers, while bookshops became meeting places, as well as modes of education in themselves. Ireland's publishing scene had recently experienced a renaissance, with the emergence of Dolmen Press (with which Montague was associated), and of the Cork-based Mercier Press, signalling a commitment to finding readers for Irish work.

Despite the suggestive detail in the initial analysis of Cork's literary scene, the arrangement of chapters in this book speaks to a deeper engagement with textual concerns than with contextual ones. This is acknowledged – and explained – by the author in her comments on the limited source material available for the study. None of the poets has an archive and a detailed account of student activities is notoriously difficult to capture in retrospect. This is a significant constraint, and has no doubt determined the scope of the book, as well as its emphasis on key thematic and aesthetic concerns, rather than biographical or social analysis. The greater part of the study engages with shared processes and subject matter: translation, the influence of myth and history, and, finally, politics. Nonetheless, the judicious use of interviews – some conducted by the author herself and some drawn from published material – adds texture to her recapturing of this period. The entanglement of Irish-and English-language work is a key aspect of this book's originality, as it builds on earlier critical work on the INNTI poets and the important developments in Irish language poetry associated with figures such as Michael Davitt, Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, and Louis de Paor. The study also treats the ways in which the history of the language shadows the work of a number of these poets, examining this in subtle ways and considering too the important influence of other linguistic and cultural force fields. This international context is an important consideration from the start: Ní Ríordáin notes a specific interest in European and American poetry among these poets – what David Wheatley has called a desire the turn “‘home’ into a form of abroad” (49-50). These cross-cultural affinities yielded poetry of subtlety and purpose: the close reading of Seán Dunne's work, and the influence of Eastern European texts on it, is one of the most rewarding parts of this study.

Perhaps owing to his early death, Dunne's oeuvre has been unjustly neglected, but this book raises thought-provoking questions concerning our definitions of centre and periphery in the context of the Irish literary tradition. Despite the fact that such issues are often invoked, the extent to which ties of friendship within this college community excluded those at the margins – especially women – is touched on only briefly. Much has been written, by Anne Mulhall and others, about the strong male bonds that created and affirmed literary and publishing cultures for much of the twentieth century in Ireland. This book's concentration on close textual analysis, and on how shared themes are developed in the work of this group of writers, allows these dynamics to pass largely unremarked. Nonetheless, this book is important for its alertness to the role of writing workshops and fugitive publication as a way of confirming the creative commitment of these young men and of offering them an outlet for their earliest writing.

The relationship between reading, scholarship, and writing emerges strongly in Chapter 3 of this study. This builds on the earlier examination of language and translation and roots these more securely in the treatment of the Irish past. It is at this point in the study that these poets become loosened from their network, and we begin to see them as detached figures with shared interests but unique creative processes. In this chapter, Thomas McCarthy's work comes to the fore, and Ní Ríordáin's engagement with translation in *Merchant Prince* (2005) and *The Last Geraldine Officer* (2009) is especially illuminating. “The Italian Question”, from the first of these two collections, weaves Italian- and Irish-language references together, drawing on Nuala ní Dhomhnaill's “Ceist na Teangan” and transforming the INNTI poets into Italian characters. Though McCarthy persistently draws

attention to Munster literature and its creative potential for contemporary writers, this study stops short of making a case for a distinctive tradition in the province. Dissenting voices seem more memorable, such as Peter Sirr's contention that, rugby aside, a Munster identity has little contemporary relevance. Yet this question of regional affinity and attachment to place could be interrogated further, not only because these poets were writing at a time when emigration was on the rise, but because these same issues have become especially pressing today.

The emphasis on close reading that characterises the greater part of this study removes the focus from these social and political concerns but by concentrating on a range of individual poems the book offers instead a deeply rewarding engagement with some of the chosen poets. Extended analysis of the more recent work by McCarthy and Theo Dorgan allows us to form a strong sense of diversity in style and influence and, though this trajectory brings us further from their early Cork association, it offers a truer picture of their unique development as writers. The conclusion is something of a missed opportunity, however. Given the perceptive analysis of less familiar poems, and the clear and purposeful critical voice heard throughout, this book deserves a bolder finish, one that would make greater claims for the early influences on these poets, and the lasting impact of their university experience on such varied creative lives.

Lucy Collins is Associate Professor of Modern Poetry and Director of the MA in Irish Literature and Culture at UCD. Her research interests are in poetry and poetics, with a particular focus on gender and ecocriticism. Her publications include *Contemporary Irish Women Poets: Memory and Estrangement* (2015), and a co-edited anthology, *The Irish Poet and the Natural World: An Anthology of Verse in English from the Tudors to the Romantics* (2014). She is co-founder of the Irish Poetry Reading Archive, a national digital repository.

lucy.collins@ucd.ie

The Theater and Films of Conor McPherson: Conspicuous Communities

Eamon Jordan

Critical Companions, London, 2019. 248 pp.

ISBN: 978-1350178724

Reviewer: E. Guillermo Iglesias-Díaz (Universitat de Les Illes Balears, Spain)

The “Conspicuous Communities” in the subtitle of Eamon Jordan’s *The Theater and Films of Conor McPherson* (Critical Companions, London: 2019) deserve a chapter of its own (Chapter 6), mostly devoted to *Weir* which, apart from being the “best known of the plays”, according to Jordan is also a compendium of the recurrent types (those “conspicuous communities”) that populate many of McPherson’s works. In this sense, *Weir* acts as some sort of summary to return to some of the arguments the critic has dealt with in the previous chapters, namely, McPherson’s ability to both embrace and subvert recurrent images of romantic, pastoral Ireland; the uncanny as destabiliser of realistic settings; the deconstruction of male narratives by a female character; or McPherson’s tendency to make his characters “violate or refuse to abide particular norms” (146) in relation to gender roles and/or neo-liberal ideals. For all these reasons, the chapter may be understood as some sort of conclusion which, bearing in mind it is the last chapter as far as the critic’s analysis is

concerned (Chapter 7, “Critical Perspectives”, is a group of articles by several authors, plus an interview with McPherson by Jordan himself), fits perfectly well in the overall structure of the text.

Jordan’s work is highly recommendable for those with an (academic or otherwise) interest in theatre in general or in McPherson’s artistic production in particular, and worth appraisal for several reasons. In terms of form and structure, the well-cared edition by Critical Companions offers a balanced and structured text, not only among the different chapters, but also inside each one of them, with an Introduction advancing concisely the issues developed throughout the following pages and a Conclusion summarizing with precision the main ideas of interest in each case. In the same way, it is very useful, too, the Index in the final pages, where you will find easy access to the different topics, although, just to mention some minor black spot in terms of design, the location of the endnotes at the end makes it a little cumbersome when you want to consult them.

In the general Introduction, Jordan offers an overview to McPherson’s work and what the author considers some of his peculiarities as, for instance, the fact that he is an Irish writer born, reared and still resident in his native land, an unusual case for an author (allegedly, one of the most successful playwrights in the world) whose work has been “adapted/translated into many different languages” (200). According to the critic, it is also noteworthy the fact that McPherson “has directed the first production of every other new work”, assuming all the risks of staging them, “in the highly competitive London theatre scene”, where there “is little tolerance for anything less than the highest production standards” (2) and the public is very demanding, even in the case (or more even so) of successful, reputed writers.

The appeal of McPherson’s plays worldwide is celebrated and Jordan explains it in terms of the relation of Irish locations and characters whose circumstances and experiences are consistent with those of “many who live in urban centres elsewhere” (8). In this sense, despite his “refusal to be pigeon-holed as an Irish writer” and his intention “to resist his categorization as an Irish writer” (8) in order to be considered a cosmopolitan author, McPherson’s work is undoubtedly Irish and signalled internationally as such. In this sense, having into account that the author “sees spectators as co-creators [...], affording audiences ownership of the works” (7), I miss in Jordan’s analysis more references to the reception of McPherson’s productions in Irish media or by the general public, especially, having into account some harsh criticisms in his plays about, for example, the Celtic Tiger era or stereotypes related to (and, to a certain extent, naturalized by) the Irish people.

Balanced as the work is, attending to the number of pages of the different chapters, one can notice there are three questions of particular interest to Jordan: McPherson’s use of the monologue as narrative form; the uncanny and supernatural in a good number of the plays; and the relation of the individual within the family or community.

In Chapter 1, “Monopolies of Self/Terms of Endearment”, Jordan praises McPherson’s success with the monologue form, present in his earliest plays, an enthusiasm the critic is not shy to show when he points out that these works are considered “exceptional achievements by anybody’s standards” (10). The chapter follows the structure already commented and, in the “Introduction: Stories and their telling”, the author focuses on the importance of the narrative act for both the community and the individual, quoting for instance Richard Kearney when he states that “telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating” or even more important, because “while food makes us live, stories are what make our lives worth living” (19). Jordan’s brilliant, if only too brief, analysis of the fundamental role of narratives in any given community goes on to show how it is through narratives that our experiences are remembered, configured and shaped, “coordinating, linking and consolidating events”, but also preparing ourselves for “future possibilities” (19). Class issues play a significant role and the Celtic Tiger, neoliberal policies and the people who

suffer the consequences are recurrent topics in most of McPherson's plays: in this sense, Jordan's class approach is sharp and thought-provoking. What I miss, however, is a deeper analysis on some other issues which, in my opinion, deserve attention, such as gender relations or McPherson's bitter criticism to some of what can be defined as ready-made tropes attributed stereotypically to the Irish, namely, the role of Catholicism in the shaping of their individual and collective identities; Irish alleged irrational behaviour and certain tendency to outbursts of violence (with the Troubles as the maximum expression of it); serious troubles with alcoholism; or Irish "natural" talent for and enjoyment of music.

Nevertheless, truth is that in Chapter 3 Jordan includes one of those aspects Irish people are so often related to, the world of "Convergent Realities: Ghosts and the Uncanny" (65-90). As the critic points out, "no Western tradition of writing seems to be as obsessed with the uncanny and the paranormal as the Irish", a statement I would totally agree with if we leave aside the oral and literary tradition in South America. In any case, the analysis of the plays is preceded, once more, by a wonderful introduction, making a summary of the common fears we all suffer from as individuals, "fears about the dark, failure, attractiveness, adequacy, motivation, disorder, even success" to smoothly transition in the paragraphs below to some of McPherson's plays, such as *Eclipse*, *Girl*, *Alive* or *Shining*, where the author treats illness and accidental death, mental health issues or car crashes. I've found particularly interesting the relevance of the chapter to the present moment, with mentions to successful TV series as *Stranger Things*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *The Walking Dead* and the link it is established between, on the one hand, the supernatural and the horror as a film/literary genre and, on the other, moments of socio-economic crisis (see Note 1, 211), a connection that specialists have already pointed out in relation to the Warner golden years in the 1930s (after the economic Crack) and, later, during the years of the Cold War and the popularity of science-fiction and horror films. There are in this chapter, too, some in-depth analyses of the films by McPherson (81-90), although, occasionally, there is too much plot-telling (82-4) and I miss, once again, a sharper focus on gender issues.

Chapter 4, about "Apocalyptic Dispossessions", deals with the relation of home to identity formation, self-discovery, inheritance or belonging; but McPherson also relates home to conflict, rivalry, rejection and/or repression. In the case of Ireland, all these questions are marked both by British colonial rule for eight centuries and the processes of Irish self-determination and national re-construction, too. The four plays analysed in this section are set in Ireland and in the USA and, in one way or another, the four of them deal with how "asset strippers, financial predators or vulture/ventures capitalists pick over the bones of a vulnerable economy" (94): in *The Veil*, the action takes place in Ireland, during the "big economic crash following the Napoleonic wars", with the Lambrokes' dire situation at the centre of the narrative; *The Night Alive* takes us to the first decade in the 21st century, when Ireland suffered the consequences of the excesses of the 90s and the Celtic Tiger; *The Birds* is a re-reading of Daphne Du Maurier's novella, the one adapted to film by Alfred Hitchcock, although McPherson's play "has little in common with either the novella or the film" (92), described by Jordan as some sort of alternative dystopia: while the usual proposal is a "return to pre-industrialized societies in the aftermath of some devastation" (92), in this case there is no possible coming back to a blissful past; finally, in *Girl from the North Country*, McPherson uses the title of Bob Dylan's 1963 album to portray the lives of several characters during America's Great Depression, showing a deep "understanding of Dylan's ability to shift focus, amalgamate rival perspectives or coalesce worlds in unusual ways" (114). The analysis of *Girl* seems to me a wonderful finale to this chapter, with a precise dissection of the songs, the process of selection followed (not all of songs come from the album which gives title to the play) and the characters they depict, all of them suffering in one way or another "apocalyptic dispossessions", from the owner of a boarding house facing bank repossession, to the guests in the boarding house or the African-American

adopted daughter who “experiences blatant, rampant racism” (106).

Appreciating as I do Jordan’s work as a whole and, in particular, his concise and detailed analysis of the plays from a class perspective, I must confess my favourite is Chapter 7, where the author includes an interview with McPherson and “Critical Perspectives” by two different authors (and a brief review which I find of little relevance, beyond the fact it was published in the *New York Times*). In the conversation between Jordan and McPherson, we can read about acting and the different roles in his plays, the writing process, the playwright’s opinions about the inclusion of straight references to Irish politics in his plays or the “biblical echoes in the names” of some of the characters (161) although, once again, despite the relevance and prominence of women in his plays, the question of gender roles is hardly touched. It is here where I find the first of the “Critical Perspectives” most enlightening: Lisa Fitzpatrick does an excellent job analysing the “representation of haunted and haunting female characters” (164) in *The Weir*, *The Veil* and *Paula*. By relying on Freudian theories, the author links in the introduction of this subsection the women in McPherson’s plays to the uncanny, to that which “ought to have remained hidden and secret, and yet comes to light” (165), pointing out how “from some of his [McPherson’s] earliest works the focus of a male character’s grief and regret takes the form of a girl or a woman” (165). Given the space constrains, this is not the place to deepen in the thought-provoking ideas introduced by Fitzpatrick: suffice to say here I found in these few pages many of the issues in relation to gender that I missed in Jordan’s analysis throughout the previous pages, from “significant or troubling experiences” (166) between the men and women in the plays, to episodes of straight violence against women, or “child sexual abuse” (167). It bears repetition that I would have loved to read more about McPherson’s plays from a gender perspective but, as consolation prize, I find Fitzpatrick’s analysis really original and insightful.

All in all, I believe Jordan’s work on McPherson’s theatre and films is rigorous, thoughtful and honest, approaching the “conspicuous communities” inhabiting the fictive world from different perspectives, in a delightful edition and with a style which makes the act of reading a pleasurable experience, something which is not the rule when reading a piece of critical work.

E. Guillermo Iglesias-Díaz teaches at University of Illes Balears and is a member of “BIFEGA: Estudios Culturales y Literarios, Traducción e Interpretación” at University of Vigo. His research focuses on the interaction between post-/transmodernism and postcolonial theory in film, paying special attention to the role of cinema in European discourses on nationalism and gender constructions. He is currently part of the international research project “Bodies in Transit” and Deputy Editor in *Indi@logs: Spanish Journal of Indian Studies*. Some of his publications are: “Alternative Modernities and Othered Masculinities in Mira Nair’s *The Namesake*” in *Narratives of Difference in Globalized Cultures. Reading Transnational Cultural Commodities* (Palgrave Mcmillan, 2017); *Cine, espacio urbano e identidades (trans)nacionales: The Commitments y Trainspotting*, (Arcibel Editores, 2013); “A New Tree from the Same Wood: Parody and Self-Reference in a Film by Indo-Canadian Deepa Mehta” in *India in Canada, Canada in India* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013); “*Slumdog Millionaire*: (Hyper)modern Tales of India’s Glocalized Economy” in *Screening and Depicting Cultural Diversity in the English-speaking World and Beyond* (Peter Lang, 2013); “Contemporary Re-constructions of Family Life in Irish Films” in *Precarious Parenthood: Doing Family In Literature and Film* (LIT Verlag, 2013).

guillermo.iglesias@uib.es

The Language of Paul Muldoon

Ruben Moi

Brill Rodopi, 2020. 419 pp.

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Reviewer: Anne Karhio (National University of Ireland, Galway)

A number of phrases from reviews written over several decades have been repeated so often that they have become almost clichés in subsequent Muldoon scholarship. One of them is from John Banville's discussion of the 1990 collection *Madoc*, which according to the novelist, "demands that the reader work in ways that seem inappropriate to the occasion: one pictures work details of Ph.D. students already setting to, tracking down the references, preparing glosses, grinding keys". While many have quoted Banville's review to justify their own reservations towards Muldoon's writing, for Banville it was the necessity of the scholarly process itself that seemed dislikable, as it would "kill Muldoon's poetry", and taint the efforts of "an artist of great gaiety and of high seriousness".

For many, that same process that Banville felt would "kill" the poet's art has been what jolts it to life. Perhaps the divide between those who enjoy, and those who feel disconnected from Muldoon's poetic style is often also a divide between those who feel invigorated by such sleuth work, and those who see it as a tedious or unworthy distraction. It is not difficult to see on which side of the line Ruben Moi and his *The Language of Paul Muldoon* stands. The fifth monograph-length study on Muldoon's poetry revels in the eccentricity, encyclopaedic exuberance, and crafty irreverence of his writing, and relishes the challenge of possible interpretations and textual traps that seem to multiply with each densely referential collection. There is a detectable enjoyment of the chase itself in Moi's tracking of the connections in and between Muldoon's poems, as well as a fondness for the likely and less likely contexts informing the poet's writing.

Similarly to the three general introductions to Muldoon's work by Tim Kendall, Clair Wills, and Jefferson Holdridge, Moi's volume is organised around the poet's major collections published by Faber and Faber, beginning with *New Weather* (1973) and concluding with *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* (2015). What is different, however, is not only Moi's focus on Muldoon's language in particular, but also an awareness of how phenomena specific to the twenty-first century culture, society, and philosophy call for a revisiting of earlier work. Ecological and posthuman perspectives, and questions related to technology feature more prominently in Muldoon's most recent writing. However, Moi's awareness of such developments in Muldoon's latest collections also prompts him to adopt an alternative approach to examining many early poems, including, for example, "The Radio Horse" or "The Electric Orchard" (*New Weather*). Such a refreshed perspective highlights how many of these poems already anticipated much later transformations in media technology, natural and material environments, or everyday and global communications.

Moi has a distinctive taste for scholarly risk-taking, and he does not shy away from meandering among the forking paths of the literary, historical, and cultural connections that might, or might not, inform specific poems. This inevitably means that some readings and arguments are on firmer ground than others, but also that the study covers genuinely new ground. Whether one always agrees with Moi's views and propositions or not is less important than how his willingness suggests alternative ways of looking. Similarly to Muldoon's own at times cryptic trails in poetry and his equally peculiar critical prose (in *To Ireland, I* and in *The End of The Poem*, based on his Oxford lectures), Moi also appreciates the intersection between truthful uncertainty and deceptive precision. The more and less likely threads between Muldoon's literary allusions and their origins are approached as

invitations for unexpected discovery rather than obstacles to be explained – and crossed. For Moi, uncertainty and unknowing, scholarly as well as poetic, seem to provide the thrill of the journey, provided one accepts that one only has limited control as to the exact destination.

Moi's volume is equally attuned to other recognisably Muldoonesque peculiarities: the fascination with neologisms and hybrid words, the alphabetic as well as encyclopaedic structures and lists disturbing narrative progression, and the revelling in slippages, puns, and various errata as creative devices. The study is drawn to what Moi terms the poet's "*alphaphilia*" or the development of the "author's lust for letters" from one collection to the next; his "*audiofetishism*" as a "sense of insouciant sounds and perfect prosody"; and his "*adlinguisticism*" or the "reconstellations of syntactic structures and grammatical order" (16). More neologisms and unconventional figures of speech can be encountered throughout the volume.

For the more cryptic elements in some of Muldoon's poems Moi also adopts a more daringly unconventional approach. The best example is in his discussion of "Yarrow", which becomes almost like a homage to Muldoon's penchant for lists and Oulipian structures. Rather than an established paragraph-by-paragraph discussion and analysis, the reader is offered more than six pages of possible meanings of, and associations arising from, the letter "S" in response to the poem's cryptic female character "S—". These vary from "S — shimmers with the secrets of syntax, semantics and shy self" (221) to "S — slithers like a snake in the grass" (222), and from "S — sums up several of the stances in critical approaches to Muldoon's poetry" (223) to "S — surveys the catalogue of scandalous strumpets and strong and superior feminine figures in Muldoon's collections" (225). The individual, Moi writes, behind the unnamed name is "irrevocably absent" (228) – but it is the process of filling such gaps and absences, or missing connections, to which Muldoon's readers, too, are often drawn – or from which they sometimes recoil.

Unlike most monograph-length studies on Muldoon's work, Moi's volume is also a thematic study rather than a general introduction. Yet its theme is in itself somewhat expansive: one could argue that focusing on language as a specific aspect of poetry narrows down the perspective about as much as examining the elements of sound in music, or manifestations of visual aesthetics in paintings. But while Moi's study does not commit itself to any one stated perspective on language, the fact that several critics have, as John Carey phrased it in his rather scathing and also frequently quoted 1987 review of *Meeting the British*, felt that Muldoon's language fails "to return us from words to things", demonstrates a very distinctive manner in which Muldoon queries habitual relations between verbal and non-verbal domains (Carey, cited in Moi 319). When engaging with this volume, the reader might find the best way forward if they stop worrying about narrow definitions and learn to love its exuberance. Perhaps most importantly, Moi alerts us to Muldoon's approach to language as patterned, as arrangement of semantic units into structures and entanglements that question the borders used to identify these units themselves. To explore such processes, Moi at times zooms in to the smallest one, highlighting Muldoon's attention to "the importance of the single letter", even if it is "not the most obvious one, and disconnected from its alphabetic order or lexical function", like the repeated letter "B" in the poem titles of the sequence "Horse Latitudes" (312). From the letter Moi zooms out to the word, which for Moi, as for Muldoon, is "a suspect device" (*The Annals of Chile*, 143). It is also a slippery one. In examining the title word "Quoof" of one of Muldoon's best-known sonnets, Moi is less interested in an in-depth analysis of the unfamiliar "family word", and instead connects it with a long list of others: "quiff quaff quim quad quag quack queen queer quern quest queue quiche quick quid quill quilt quince quote quip quire quite quit quirk quist quiz quod quoit qursh quat", and so forth, at some length (118). Such slippage is akin to how Muldoon is not only preoccupied with that

relation between “word and thing”, as Carey, as well as more sympathetic critics like Edna Longley have observed (cited in Moi 274), but between word and word, between word and sound, and their connections to almost infinite number of other things at the precarious border of the sayable. Words, then, interact with each other within the grammatical unit of sentence, much less discussed among Muldoon scholars to date but perceptively addressed by Moi in his reading of *Moy Sand and Gravel*, a collection which plays with “many implications of sentence”: “moral, existential, philosophical, linguistic” (279). Within the linguistic domain, the “[scrutiny] of the sentence also involves such intricacies as word order, start, length, rhythm and prosody of the separate linguistic unit, and, of course, how the particular sentence relates to the preceding and succeeding sentences” (278). And it is through the units of meaning-making specific to poetry, including line and stanza breaks, or metrical components, that the grammatical “sentence” can be employed to resist the dangers of becoming a “sentence” as confinement and disciplinary act. This tension also aligns Moi’s reading of Muldoon’s formal play with those scholars and critics for whom questions related to aesthetic, linguistic, formal, and geographical boundaries and border crossings are also always profoundly ethical and political.

Moi’s own concerns and preoccupations are perhaps most visible in the context of Muldoon’s recent engagement with media and technology, where he sees the poet’s approach to language as a possible, if endangered antidote to techno-determinism. Information technology in particular, as something that “originally organised our knowledge”, he suggests, “has, as Fredric Jameson argues, become the historical model for the cognition and language of our time” (376). One cannot help but detect a tinge of melancholia in Moi’s comment that “Google and online dictionaries and encyclopaedias have also facilitated the interpretation of Muldoon’s poetry” (376). For facilitated, read diluted? It is a topic for another discussion to what extent Muldoon’s approach to technology and the network society considers them as antithetical to poetry. But inasmuch as Muldoon’s poetic language cherishes the illusion of accuracy, immediate access and instant knowledge that are also the fanciful dream of the information age, his writing has also been quick to appropriate the idiom of the network society (of digital storage, online forms, and errors in code) to reveal such illusions. Be that as it may, it is hard to disagree with Moi’s reading of *One Thousand Things Worth Knowing* as an investigation of how “the knowable and unknowable relate to each other”, and committed to a search for “types of language that might articulate the gradations between the two, and the realm of the unknown” (387).

Muldoon’s writing also displays a heightened awareness of poetry and the printed word as media technologies among others, similarly engaged in the complex “process of data capture” or organising (disorganising?) “data, albeit incomplete”, as Muldoon writes in “Dirty Data” (*One Thousand Things Worth Knowing*, 106, 107). Of all literary forms, poetry seems perhaps best equipped to adjust to the new media environment. Brian Reed considers poetry “a language-based art with a penchant for reflecting on its channels of communication” (cited in Reed). And as Muldoon’s own career demonstrates, poetry’s suspicion of language as merely denotative of functional, or as simple information transfer pre-dates the digital information age. Modern poetry is thus already well positioned to tackle the challenges arising from the changing media and technological environment. So when Moi worries about the possibility that “Muldoon’s way with language [may] disappear in the new models and formats of language and thinking in the continual unfolding of the IT-revolution”, his own study also shows how the poet’s writing is in no immediate danger of becoming a virtual museum piece.

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Anne Karhio is a graduate of the University of Helsinki and the National University of Ireland, Galway. She is currently an Irish Research Council Laureate Project Fellow at the Moore Institute for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences in the project "Republic of Conscience: Human Rights and Modern Irish Poetry". She has studied and worked in several universities in Finland, France, Norway and Ireland, and also contributes to the ERC-funded research project on Machine Vision at the University of Bergen. Her previous research project Virtual Landscapes: New Media Technologies and the Poetics of Place in Recent Irish Poetry was co-funded by the Irish Research Council and the European Commission via Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions. She has published widely on contemporary Irish poetry, the poetics of place and space, and digital literature and aesthetics, and is the author of *'Slight Return': Paul Muldoon's Poetics of Place* (Peter Lang, 2017) and co-editor of *Crisis and Contemporary Poetry* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).

anne.karhio@nuigalway.ie

The History of Marriage Equality in Ireland: A Social Revolution Begins

Sonja Tiernan

Manchester University Press. 192 pp.

ISBN: 9781526145994

Reviewer: Ed Madden (University of South Carolina)

On May 22, 2015, Ireland made history as the first nation in the world to legalize same-sex marriage by popular vote. While marriage equality has been achieved in other nations either through judicial decision or legislation, Ireland held a national referendum to change the language of the constitution, which they did by a 62 to 38 percent vote. The Thirty-fourth Amendment to the Constitution of Ireland added one sentence to Article 41, the section on marriage and family: "Marriage may be contracted in accordance with law by two persons without distinction as to their sex". Soon after, pundits and scholars began to explain and analyse the vote. They pointed to the huge voter turnout, especially young voters and migrant voters returning home to vote. They noted as well the significant decline in the Catholic Church's political and cultural power – in part a result of the recent and overwhelming revelations of an institutional culture of emotional and sexual abuse – as well as the not-unrelated decline in church attendance. The campaign for marriage, Yes Equality, also seemed to be very much a people's movement. Even as the measure was endorsed by celebrities, national leaders, and the political parties, the movement was driven by door-to-door campaigns and the insistent use of personal stories.

The Irish referendum remains a singular historical event, and now, five years later, we have its history in Sonja Tiernan's *The History of Marriage Equality in Ireland: A Social Revolution Begins* (2020). Although there have been any number of public referenda around the world to ban same-sex marriage, and though Australia held a non-binding postal survey on same-sex marriage in advance of the passage of marriage equality legislation in 2017, Ireland's referendum remains the first and only instance of marriage equality enacted by popular vote. It is worth noting that the vote was, in some way, simply about equality – equal citizenship for gay and lesbian people, their families and children. With a series of laws banning many forms of discrimination, civil partnerships in place since 2010, and legislation protecting the rights of same-sex families and their children in early 2015, many of the appeals that drove marriage equality campaigns elsewhere (hospital visitation and medical issues, custody and family recognition, inheritance and tax status, indeed all the benefits and rights that accrue to two people when they are legally married) were in some ways beside the point, even as they remained part of the personal stories that saturated campaign messaging. Tiernan points out that the passage of the 2015 Children and Family Relationship Bill – even though problems with its executive would be revealed the next year – made the referendum question simple, a yes or no vote on equal marriage.

The steady if not always stirring story of legal reform and legislative process is one of the important themes threading Tiernan's history of Ireland's marriage movement. Indeed, despite that revolutionary subtitle, the strength of this book is not a portrait of social revolution but the author's careful and almost methodical representation of the movement and its legal and political contexts. I emphasize *political movement* because this book leans toward a statist and organizational history of change. This makes sense, of course, since marriage is a legal and legislative issue and a political campaign is a political campaign. Though the introduction asks readers to imagine "a new wave of social reform in Ireland" that begins with the marriage referendum and leads to the Repeal of the Eighth Amendment in 2018 (2), when it gets going, the book is doggedly and effectively focused on the legislative and the legal, and on the political campaign that shaped public discourse. There are more citations from Seanad Éireann debates than from *Gay Community News*. What discussions there are of cultural context or cultural production – the 2009 Pride, where speakers savaged civil unions as second-class citizenship; the 2015 Pantigate controversy; the brief but important analysis of the 2009 campaign video *Sinead's Hand* – are always in the service of Tiernan's careful analysis of the campaign and its strategies for persuasion and mobilization. This focus is the book's strength and, perhaps to some readers, its limitation. It is about a change in public policy and the political movement that made that possible, more than it is about the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) community, and more than it is about cultural and social evolution.

Tiernan frames her history with useful paratextual materials and with critical context. She opens the book with a global timeline of marriage equality, 2001-2019, and with a chronology of key events related to the Irish campaign, beginning with the 1993 decriminalization of male homosexuality and concluding with the 2019 extension of marriage equality in Northern Ireland, effective on 13 January 2020. You won't see a Pride March or Emma Donoghue's 1995 novel *Hood* or the 2009 Ryan Report. You will see every relevant legal or legislative step, including the foundational lawsuits of Ann Louise Gilligan and Katherine Zappone, who had married in Canada and sought recognition in Ireland, and to whom Tiernan devotes an early chapter. Indeed, I would highlight those first two chapters on Irish historical contexts and the Zappone and Gilligan court challenges as critical historical context for the campaign. The book closes with a short account of the campaign for marriage equality in Northern Ireland, and two appendices: a message on the referendum from Ireland's Archbishop Eamon Martin, released on May 2 and read in churches the next day, and a May 15 *Irish Times* opinion piece by Ursula Halligan, political editor at TV3, in

which she came out as lesbian in support of the referendum. These are valuable examples of the messaging of both sides, as well as historically important, given their prominent appearance in the closing days of the campaign.

Tiernan's attention to context includes the 2012-2014 Constitutional Convention, during which the citizens' assemblies met to reassess the 1937 Constitution as a vision for the nation, the change in marriage only one – albeit a massively visible one – of a number of recommendations made to the government. Tiernan is careful to trace the viability, at times fragility, of legislation as it was grounded in the strength of political parties and the rise and fall of coalition governments. She is also quite good at recognising how certain elements or issues emerge from particular contexts, some obvious, some not, though she does not always explicitly signal the connections she is making. She marks how the group LGBT Noise emerged from reactions to a failed 2008 civil unions bill; how children's charity endorsements countered the No campaign's fictions about the damaged or deprived children of same-sex parents; and how, less directly, the emphasis on personal stories in the campaign might be linked to the influence of Zappone and Gilligan's personal story in Irish media. Tiernan is also careful to note how one of the major tools of religious opposition – complaints about “unbalanced” coverage – developed in response to the media's embrace of personal stories, and how despite resistance in the LGBT community to civil partnerships as a second-class version of marriage and citizenship, the resulting visibility of lesbian and gay inevitably helped to shape the shift in public opinion.

Tiernan is clear from the beginning about tensions in the movement between those who sought incremental (or in early years *possible*) change in civil unions and those who insisted on full equality – a tension prominent in one of the early books on the marriage movement in Ireland, Una Mullally's *In the Name of Love: The Movement for Marriage Equality in Ireland* (2014). Though these community rifts became less visible (and less relevant after 2010), Tiernan recalls their importance to the formation of the campaign. Tiernan is also clear from the outset that this is not simply a celebratory narrative of inevitable progress. She will not gloss over the negative elements; they are part of the story. In addition, she devotes some attention to the work of the anti-marriage campaign, primarily their messaging and the prominent organisations, though I honestly wanted more. In a discussion of the conservative organization Mothers and Fathers Matter, Tiernan also smartly reminds us that, in Ireland, the same key figures keep showing up in both the LGBTQ campaigns and in those that oppose them. (I know better, but every time I saw MFM, I kept thinking it the acronym in personal ads for a three-way!).

Although much post-election analysis focused on the Catholic Church's waning power, Tiernan points instead to a growing difference between Catholic hierarchy and the local priests and congregations who supported the campaign, contrasting stories of protesting parishioners and supportive clergy with the Church's effective manipulation of media in the closing weeks for the campaign – especially the statement from Archbishop Martin, released on May 2 to be read to parishioners the next day, and perfectly timed for the evening news. Even though Tiernan does, at times, mirror the Yes campaign's own claims about the success of their strategies, her refusal to fall into the usual easy explanations and attention to the nuances and effects of arguments strengthens the book's analysis. Though, as a campaigner for marriage equality in South Carolina, I was familiar with many of the general arguments for and against, I found a couple of arguments of political reciprocity and historical analogy specific to Ireland instructive – and maybe a little surprising. In early debates about civil unions, the Irish Human Rights Commission argued that Ireland was required to introduce civil union legislation under the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which stipulated that Ireland was responsible for guaranteeing human rights equivalent to those in Northern Ireland, where civil partnerships for same-sex couples had been available since 2004. In 2013 in an address to the Dáil, then Minister for Justice Alan

Shatter compared the ban on same-sex marriage to the restrictions of the Penal Laws, which prohibited religious intermarriage and refused recognition of marriages performed by Presbyterian ministers.

What complaints I have are minor. As a literary scholar, I wanted more cultural context, but it is clear that is not the book Tiernan set out to write. As an American reader who thinks a tabled motion is a *postponed* not a proposed one, I kept stumbling on the repeated reference to motions being tabled. Though I liked the almost breathless drive of incident and fact and the short chapters, particularly as the book entered the campaign proper, I did find some of the chapter titles a little much – “Meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century” (on the Constitutional Convention) and “Preparing for a revolution” (the Children and Family legislation and Pantigate) – when most titles were descriptive and deft (“The path to the High Court” or “The campaign in action”). Maybe, though, in the narrative drive of historical detail, these chapter titles are meant to remind us that these facts add up to something bigger than names, incidents, dates, places. These are the signposts reminding us that this singular referendum is part of “a new wave of social reform in Ireland”.

Tiernan’s useful and important book joins a small list of books about the marriage campaign: Mullally’s *In the Name of Love* (2014), published before the referendum; *Ireland Says Yes: The Inside Story of How the Vote for Marriage Equality Was Won* (2016), by Yes Equality campaign organizers Gráinne Healy, Brian Sheehan, and Noel Whelan; journalist Charlie Bird’s beautiful coffee table tome or portraits and personal stories, *A Day in May: Real Lives, True Stories* (2016); and *Crossing the Threshold: The Story of the Marriage Equality Movement* (2017), a collection of essays from various organisers and community leaders, edited by Healy. To this list we should add Susan Parker’s pamphlet, *The Path to Marriage Equality in Ireland: A Case Study* (December 2017), a pamphlet report available online and published by Atlantic Philanthropies, one of the critical early funders of marriage equality work in Ireland. I would also include the 2015 edition of *Woman in the Making* (2014), the memoir of Rory O’Neill (alter ego of drag queen Panti Bliss), with its prologue added to the paperback edition describing an Ireland “drunk on yes” and “changed utterly” by the referendum.

And now we can add Sonja Tiernan’s careful and rich historical account to this little bookshelf of radical change.

Ed Madden is a professor of English and gender studies at the University of South Carolina. He is the author of *Tiresian Poetics*, a study of modernism and sexuality. His essays on queer Irish cultures have appeared in *Éire/Ireland*, *Irish University Review*, *Breac*, and elsewhere.

edward.madden@gmail.com

The Irish Buddhist: The Forgotten Monk Who Faced down the British Empire

Alicia Turner, Laurence Cox, and Brian Bocking

Oxford University Press, 2020. 320 pp.

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Reviewer: Brendan McNamara (University College Cork)

This is an extraordinary story deftly told, the fruit of ten years' work by three distinguished scholars. It succeeds in being a triumph of innovative investigation as well as an academic history of real quality. U Dhammaloka is the forgotten, fully-fledged, Irish Buddhist monk who made a notable contribution to Buddhist revival in Burma (Myanmar) and surrounding countries at the turn of the twentieth century. He was probably the first Westerner to be so ordained (136). Feted and celebrated wherever he went, Dhammaloka built an international reputation for his work, promoting education and countering Christian missionary efforts amongst Buddhists. Given the intersection of Christian missionism and the colonial enterprise, it is no wonder he drew the ire of the authorities, especially since he took delight in exposing the wrongdoings of the ruling class. He was at one time described as “a terror to evil-doers” (1), employing a “three-part critique of the missionary (the Bible), the problems of alcohol (the bottle) and the British military presence (the Gattling gun)” (5). Such was the vehemence and effectiveness of his preaching that he found himself in January 1911 before the Chief Court in Rangoon appealing against a conviction of seditious libel handed down in a lower court. The courtroom drama introduces us to the enigmatic Dhammaloka in the opening chapter of the book and is reprised at the conclusion to draw the curtain down on this fascinating treatment.

Dhammaloka's early life is shrouded in mystery. Hailing from a working class background in Dublin, he had little formal education and spent his early adulthood as a “hobo” in the United States. A sometime sailor and “self-educated radical” (9), he fetched up amongst “poor white” beachcombers in Burma, where he was attracted to Buddhism and eventually took higher ordination as a monk in the year 1900. He considered the public rejection of Christian missionaries as chief amongst his priestly duties, while abjuring racial boundaries propagated by colonialism. Dhammaloka employed a deep knowledge of the Bible to rail against the hypocrisy of the missionaries, propagating a religion of “peace” while fully supporting colonial over-lordship. He castigated Christian teaching as unscientific and backward when juxtaposed against his Buddhist atheism and “freethinking”. These arguments were bluntly and directly advanced by the bhikkhu in countless addresses delivered to large audiences across Burma, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Singapore, Indonesia Thailand and India. (He also made forays into Japan and Australia but to less acclaim).

Adept at attracting publicity for his efforts – indeed a skilled self-publicist – he circulated his views widely through the agency of his Buddhist Tract Society which published thousands of pamphlets (not all penned by himself) which went round the world. His influence was such that the great Buddhist modernist, Angarika Dharmapala, enlisted his support in effort to re-invigorate what he considered moribund practice amongst Buddhists in Ceylon. In 1909, Dharmapala funded a speaking tour for Dhammaloka, travelling with him across the country. Addressing audiences of hundreds, and in some instances thousands, Dhammaloka spoke at over forty-eight separate engagements. Titles of his talks included, “What has Christianity Done to the World?” the “Falsity of Christianity”, and “Slavery under Christianity” (201-4). More is known of his travels in Ceylon than earlier tours in neighbouring countries but it is clear that he received a similar warm reception wherever he went throughout his missionary career, especially from working class people.

His popularity as a speaker and his lampooning of Christianity were not the only reasons for his fame. In close collaboration with those who underwrote his work in promoting Buddhism, he became a champion of education and was instrumental in the founding of schools in a number of countries. Dhammaloka is undoubtedly a figure of importance in the history of modern Buddhism, its articulation both in the East and its migration to the West. That he is mostly forgotten is complex and perhaps one of the most intriguing aspects of an altogether intriguing story.

At all turns during his eventful public life, and as per the title of the book, Dhammaloka's Irishness is particularly remarked. Honorifics ascribed to him include "priest", "reverend", and even "Lord Abbot" (107), but he is almost always referred to in newspapers and reports as "the Irish Buddhist". Deployed by his detractors, the ethnic qualifier may have been an effort to demean, as in who could possibly take an "Irish" Buddhist seriously. His supporters may have wished to highlight his nationality to reflect how rare and remarkable it was that a white European could rise to such prominence in service to an "Eastern" religion. Whatever the reasons, the ubiquity of the descriptor does tend to oppose Dhammaloka's missionary and anti-colonial work against the significant influence of Irishmen within the colonial civil service where many were employed at all levels. For a brief period, the Chief Commissioner of Burma (1889-1890) was the eminent Sir Antony MacDonnell, a Catholic and sometime Irish nationalist from Mayo. Other less prominent figures from the home-country populated the various echelons of control. In effect, Dhammaloka was a foil to those Irishmen who were involved in running the colony on behalf of the British. Dhammaloka's radical oppositional activism was very much a minority position (at least in this period) when it came to Ireland's involvement in Empire. This juxtaposition of Irishness and Empire reached a climacteric when Dhammaloka, the Irish Buddhist, appeared in January 1911 before Chief Court Judge, Daniel Twomey, one of Burma's best-known judges and a native of Carrigwohill, Co. Cork. Dismissing his appeal, Twomey sided with the Crown prosecutor, seeing in his fellow countryman a dangerous and effective agitator, if uncouth and uneducated. The occasion presents as a *tableau vivant* encapsulating all the fascinating intersections of race, religion, and identity represented in this complex drama.

Given that most of Dhammaloka's "output" was delivered during appearances at mass meetings (and in his contributions to tracts and newspapers), the content of his presentations, how he spoke, indeed how he sounded when delivering his plebeian down-to-earth discourse, are of real interest. His legacy depends on fragments (there are no books or diaries) and he has left few literary traces. Though criticised (by a detractor) for being a "vulgar and unstable character" (289), and by another as endowed with the gift of the "gab" (213), the "Buddhist celebrity" (69) proved a very popular orator amongst the Buddhist and non-Buddhist populations of Burma and neighbouring countries. The authors have rightly taken the decision to translate into readable English the exaggerated "stage-Irish" rendition of published interviews. If the caricature has been elided we might still imagine Dhammaloka declaiming in a distinctive "Hiberno-English" accent. That he shrouded his pre-Buddhist life in mystery (O'Rourke, Colvin or O'Carroll?) further piques our curiosity. In his time, many Irish people moved chameleon-like through the intersections of race, religion, and empire, appearing in different guises with different affinities and mixed loyalties, but for the most part in service to the colonial overlord. Dhammaloka's is a unique case of an Irish person "constructing" a new identity abroad.

Thomas Tweed makes the point that "plenty of working class men and women without formal education did plenty of thinking" for which records are scant and their influence left un-appraised. He suggests the term "vernacular intellectualism" to characterise "rationalist freethinkers and itinerant labourers" (284) like Dhammaloka, in some cases people renown in their own lifetime. The authors in their summation coin the phrase "a plebeian cosmopolitanism" to locate his contribution against the usual "literary, intellectual, or middle-class" types associated with the Buddhist revival (247). Not simply celebrating another "white hero", they argue cogently, Dhammaloka crossed boundaries and disrupted hierarchies and was instrumental in facilitating local agency. Considered alongside political developments concerned with the unwinding of the colonial enterprise (when Burmese nationalist efforts no longer had utility for an Irish Buddhist icon), it is all the more remarkable that we have here such a rounded appreciation of his life and work.

One final point of note concerns how we might locate Dhammaloka within the context of the history of religions in Ireland, particularly as the subject of religions in the pre-independence period has been little examined. Most histories of the era focus on Catholic or Protestant concerns from a confessional perspective. If Christianity in America and Europe garnered some attention, very little work has been produced on connections to other religious traditions of the world, and then only with respect to how they relate to Christianity. But this was not always the case. Recent research highlights the interactions of Irish people and religions outside of Christianity as a result of involvement with empire and, as with Dhammaloka and Buddhism, taking leading roles. Shackle and Bocking (2013) list several Irish figures besides Dhammaloka who made significant contributions in the area of religious activism or studies in Asia during this period, most of whom are now obscure. They include Max Arthur Macauliffe for Sikhism, Charles Pfoundes for Buddhism, Margaret Noble (Sister Nivedita) for Hinduism, and Annie Besant, John Bowles Daly, Charles Johnson, and Margaret and James Cousins for Indian/Sri Lankan Theosophy. Two other figures of substance who remained in Ireland, they note, were the Bahá'í writer, George Townshend, and Mir Aulad Ali, the nineteenth-century Dublin orientalist who taught in Trinity College for many years and was a well-known figure in Dublin in his day. Perhaps Dhammaloka studies, so ably given life by Alicia Turner, Laurence Cox, and Brian Bocking, can be seen as the begetter of a new and wider genre within the study of religions in Ireland. Their contribution here is unique and to be celebrated.

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Brendan McNamara teaches at the Study of Religions Department in UCC Cork. His research interests include East/West religious encounters before the First World War in Britain, scholarship on religions within the colonial context, and the religious landscape in Ireland prior to Independence. His recently published book is, *The Reception of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Britain; East Comes West* (Brill: Leiden, 2020).

info@normac.ie

Nature and the Environment in Nineteenth-Century Ireland.

Edited by Matthew Kelly

Liverpool University Press, 2019. 231pp.

ISBN 978-1-78962-032-0

Reviewer: Marie Mianowski (Université Grenoble Alpes, France)

As announced in the title, the ten chapters assembled in the very stimulating volume *Nature and the Environment in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, edited by Matthew Kelly, all address the issues of nature and the environment in nineteenth-century Ireland. In the introduction, Matthew Kelly explains that the aim of the book is to fill a gap in Ireland's environmental

history. And even if not all the contributors of the book work in the environmental humanities, each chapter opens fresh perspectives and identifies new areas of research. The originality and the excellence of this book reside precisely in the diversity of the fields investigated by the contributors who, in their individual areas of research, show how nineteenth-century Irish history and literature can be reassessed and better understood when the issue of the environment becomes the central critical focus.

In the introduction, Matthew Kelly explains very precisely both the role of the book in scholarly work on the environment, and the paradox it aims at solving in Irish history. Although the Land Acts, agrarian reforms, as well as the Great Famine have been the object of a great many scholarly works over time, the nineteenth century has never been researched from the perspective of nature, the environment, and the complex fabric of the human and non-human. It seems all the more paradoxical as land, crops, and soil were at the heart of crucial events and political arguments during that century.

Strikingly, all the chapters of the book show acutely how political all environmental questions become, when examined in the context of nineteenth-century Ireland. In particular the authors reveal how apparently benign events become politically meaningful if approached through the perspective of the environment, not only with regard to the Land Acts or the Great Famine, but in relation to many other aspects of the nineteenth century, including language and discourse on nature and the environment. The agency of the human and the non-human, and the choices made in relation to the environment in nineteenth-century Ireland prove that nature was not only the backdrop of events but an active part of agential relations with social and judicial factors. The contributions not only shed light on the environment in nineteenth-century Ireland, but they help reassess the notions of place and landscape within a broader critical approach of nature and the environment in that century and hence in our present day.

The book opens with four chapters dealing with various social issues and portraits of politically committed people in nineteenth-century Ireland. The first chapter on “The Nature of Improvement”, by Helen O’Connell, shows how the notion of “improvement” itself was instrumental in blending or blurring the limits between the social and the natural and how the discourse on improvement tended to prove that nature was culturally determined. O’Connell demonstrates how the “excess of naturalness”, which characterised discourse about Ireland and was contrasted with the “more improved” condition of England, meant that the whole country was perceived as under-developed. Chapters 2 and 3 showcase the actions of two men in relation with the environment, tying the knot between environmental factors and political actions and discourse. In David Brown’s chapter “Palmerston and the Conquest of Sligo”, Viscount Palmerston’s (1784-1865) actions are described as key factors in social, economic, and environmental change. In chapter 3 “‘A Voice for Ireland’: Isaac Butt, Environmental Justice, and the Dilemmas of the Irish Land Question”, Colin W. Reid explains how Isaac Butt (1813-1879) defended Irish tenants because he thought that the Union should benefit Ireland and not just the imperial power, since, in his opinion, land reform should lead to environmental justice.

The three following chapters focus on aspects of life and events in nineteenth-century Ireland which were directly concerned with the environment and which, for that reason, open new perspectives for the present day. In “Therapeutic Environments in Nineteenth-Century Ireland: Hybrid Spaces and Practices”, Ronan Foley defines hybrid spaces and practices as the consequence of the blurred relations between culture and nature. He studies how the two combined together can co-produce healing and stresses how making sense of those hybrid spaces might influence our understanding of present-day ecologies. In “On Why the UK’s First National Park Might Have Been in Ireland”, Matthew Kelly raises questions about the role of the state in safe-keeping places of natural beauty in nineteenth-century Ireland and its connection with present-day policies, while Juliana Adelman

explains the place of animals in Dublin in the nineteenth century in a chapter entitled “Towards an Environmental History of Nineteenth-Century Dublin”, showing how the River Liffey divided the city of Dublin into four quadrants which defined different relationships between humans and non-humans. She shows how the sociology of Dublin and the organisation of human life are related to the presence of living nonhuman animals.

Finally, the last three chapters address environmental studies through the perspective of singular publications. Mary Orr’s chapter deals with a very specific aspect of natural history and shows how essential an inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary history of the natural sciences is, in order to understand the colonial history and geography of Ireland. In “Mainstream or Tributary? The Question of ‘Hibernian’ Fishes in William Thompson’s *The Natural History of Ireland* (1849-56)” Orr argues for the need to historicise the terminology and systems of classification in the middle of the nineteenth century, because those frames of reference are often different from those in use today, and because they had consequences in the shaping of intercultural relationships. Finally, *Nature and the Environment in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* concludes with considerations of works of fiction and poetry. Patrick Maume examines two novels by Emily Lawless in chapter 9, “The Ocean of Truth: Atlantic Imagery in Emily Lawless’s *Major Lawrence, F.L.S.* (1885) and *Grania: The Story of an Island* (1892)”, where he explains how Lawless navigates the quandary between the anti-teleological views of the Darwinian tradition and the need for scientific explanations of natural phenomena. In the last chapter, Seán Hewitt writes about the poems of Seumas O’Sullivan and their power to re-enchant the world. In “Seumas O’Sullivan and Revivalist Nature Poetry”, Hewitt explains how a relatively unknown poet used scientific knowledge as a way of re-enchanting nature, all the time trying to find a balance between the material, the spiritual, and the natural, making nature agential to both the material and the spiritual. Through its three final chapters, *Nature and the Environment in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* concludes by emphasising the necessity for the entire spectrum of research on nineteenth-century Ireland to revisit that century of Land Reform Acts, Catholic Emancipation, and famines in the light of nature and the environment, not only to reassess and refine our understanding and our knowledge of that period, but to update the critical tools, the vocabulary, and the concepts used to understand how natural spaces, landscape, and place were intricately woven within a fabric of human and non-human agents, of material, spiritual and natural elements which all influenced political decisions in ways that need to be explored anew. This exemplary and very welcome book fulfils wonderfully its goals to spark new ideas and clear fresh grounds as every chapter invites readers to explore various paths across the nineteenth century, including ones thought to be already well-trodden.

Marie Mianowski is Professor of Anglophone Literature and Irish Studies at Grenoble Alpes University. In 2012, she edited *Irish Contemporary Landscapes in Literature and the Arts* (Palgrave Macmillan). She is the author of *Post Celtic Tiger Landscapes in Irish Fiction* (Routledge, 2017). Her research focuses on the representations of place and landscape in Irish contemporary literature, especially representations of the processes of home-making in contexts of displacement. She also studies the politics and representations of hospitality and homelessness, as well as the representations of Jews in Irish literature. She has published many articles on the works of Colum McCann, Colm Tóibín, William Trevor, Anne Enright, Dermot Bolger among others.

marie.mianowski@univ-grenoble-alpes.fr

New Cartographies, Nomadic Methodologies: Contemporary Arts, Culture, and Politics in Ireland

Edited by Anne Goarzin and Maria Parsons

Peter Lang, Reimagining Ireland series, 2020. 181 pp.

ISBN: 9781788746519

Reviewer: Sylvie Mikowski (University of Reims, Champagne-Ardenne)

The title of this book claims newness, innovation, novelty, and it relies on a theory which equally aims at renewing critical discourse on literature and the arts. As indicated in the introduction, the volume stems from an international research group on “New Materialism”, a set of terms which in itself raises a number of questions. In what ways is new materialism new, and what is the exact meaning of materialism? The volume gives several answers to the question, first, by providing references to the main theoreticians in the field, second, by giving examples of how the theory can apply to different artistic practices in the context of contemporary Ireland. The authors in the volume refer to the same set of thinkers and authors, including, among others, Karen Barad, Donna J. Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, Jane Bennett, and Stacey Alaimo. These theorists are responsible for coining such intriguing and important concepts as nomadism, diffracted reading, vibrant matter, situated knowledge, trans-corporeality, “OOO” (for “object-oriented ontologies”), and sympoeisis. Many of these “neo-materialists” straddle the fields of science and the humanities: Barad is a physicist, Haraway a historian of science and technologies, Jane Bennett is an environmental studies scholar and philosopher. As opposed to the Hegelian or Marxist emphasis on materialism in its relation to idealism, new materialism relies on the claim articulated by Karen Barad that “matter matters”. According to Anne Goarzin and Maria Parsons in their introduction, “New materialism draws on combinations of feminist theory, science, environmental studies, queer theory, posthumanism, philosophy, cultural theory, biopolitics, critical race theory, and other approaches” (3).

This “mash-up” of theories sounds very much like an invitation to follow unbeaten tracks and to unashamedly cross frontiers and borders that delineate and constrain not just categories of the human and the nonhuman, races and nations, but basically all the binary oppositions that Jacques Derrida already claimed needed to be deconstructed. Indeed, one of the images favoured by new materialist thinkers is that of the zigzagging line, which goes together with diffraction and nomadism. The zigzagging in this volume appears in the deliberate emphasis placed on other forms of artistic expression than literature, traditionally positioned at the top of the hierarchy meant to separate language and representation from “matter”, as denounced by new materialism. One of the basic notions implied by new materialism is indeed the return to embodied or “vibrant” matter – the nonhuman, as in the animal, the rock, the tree, or the rain – as opposed to the single and excessive reliance on language and representation. Thus the volume gives voices to several visual artists and one jazz musician; what’s more, the chapters are not all presented in the form of critical analyses, but also include interviews or reports of lived experiences. Art here is regarded as a doing, and not just the production of a critical discourse on these practices. The critic is also challenged to put his/her subjectivity at play, speaking in his/her own name and speaking TO someone instead of ABOUT someone, while holding on firmly to the theoretical background which underlies the whole project.

The first part of the volume is thus entitled “intra-actions”, so as to stress the deliberate effort to escape the traditional position of superiority that critical discourse adopts towards artistic production, considered as a mere object that needs to be dissected, described, and labelled. Intra-action also points to the collaborative nature of both the works of art referenced and the production of the discourse on those works, in the shape of

conversations – one chapter is even a conversation among the artists who collaborated on the same project. Visual artists – painters, photographers, sculptors – are the most liable to demonstrate a special relationship with “matter”, whether “embodied”, or “vibrant”. What is more, those interviewed here share the same concerns as theoreticians of New Materialism, in particular about ecological and environmental issues.

Such is the case for instance for Siobhán McDonald, “whose practice is engaged with understanding how to frame the narratives that lie at the heart of the Anthropocene”(16). Another aspect that connects McDonald to the main theoreticians of New Materialism is the way her work is “at the intersection between art and science” (26): she was involved in several scientific experimentations, including a trip to the Arctic to observe the melting of the glaciers, and collaborated with the European Space Agency. McDonald’s practice is also characterized by “a collaborative collision between art and science”, according to Maria Parsons, who led the interview with her. McDonald is an intriguing artist who was involved with a group of people labelled the Hack Circus, and defines her work as “autobiography, speculative writing and speculative making” (31). But her life and work were also deeply altered by the death of her second child, an experience of grief and mourning which she tried to “regurgitate” in a series called *Pellet*, a word which usually applies to birds.

Labels and definitions get mixed up as in a bird’s pellet as well in the next chapter, which gives voice to a set of artists working in architecture, landscape designing, and film-making, and collaborated on a project called “Contagion” – an ominous term if there was ever one, now that the COVID pandemic has broken out. However, the common point between the three artists is their interest in maps and borders, or, rather, the possibilities of trespassing them. Like the other artists included in the volume, Rachel Gallagher, Jack Hogan, and Moira Tierney have gathered a multiplicity of experiences of journeys and travels abroad, thus evading, even ignoring, the constraints of national identity which for decades loomed so large in Irish culture.

The limitations of constricting definitions of Irish identity are further undermined by the next artistic project analysed by its own promoter, called “The Plurality of Existence in the Infinite Expanse of Space and Time”. Clodagh Emoe’s project was about the system of Direct Provision in Ireland which, according to her, creates a “liminal state”. The project encompassed several disciplines and was meant to give a space where asylum seekers could have a positive experience and contribute to Irish culture. The refugees were invited to plant a garden, to write poems which were exhibited at VISUAL Art Center in Carlow, and to produce audio-works which were displayed in several Irish towns.

Part II of the volume, entitled “Bodies, Performance, memory” contains a piece by Anne Karhio on the relevance of dirt and matter in some recent Irish poetry, sometimes termed “Irish neo-modernism” or “Irish Neo-Avant-Garde”, and which has turned its back to the representational mode. Drawing on an essay by Jussi Parikka, “New Materialism as Modern Theory: Medianatures and Dirty Matter”, Karhio explores the works of emerging poets Trevor Joyce, Randolph Healy, Billy Mills and Catherine Walsh, taken as examples of the rising interest in Irish poetry in the “politics and poetics of materiality” (87). However, Karhio insists that ecological concerns, as well as an awareness of the threats of new media technologies, are also illustrated by more “mainstream” Irish poets such as Paul Muldoon, Paula Meehan, and the late Derek Mahon, who developed a rich imagery of rubbish, waste, dirt, junk, etc. (89). Critics have stressed Meehan’s environmental sensibility, while Muldoon, in his poem “Dirty Data”, uses the idea of “dirt” to describe the processes of information networks and storage. In keeping with the general questioning of borders underlying the volume, part of Karhio’s article crisscrosses with another chapter as she comments on *Crocsmia*, Clodagh Emoe’s art-project summarised above.

Issues of embodiment, environment, and memory are central to Lisa Fitzgerald’s

reading of three “performances”, a “living” one by Dorothy Cross called *Chiasm*, in which the artist traces “memory and its connection to the physical landscape” (99). The second, a video piece by Nigel Rolfe called *Into the Mire*, explores the central Irish motif of bogland. The third piece is a dance called *Walking Pale*, by Junk Ensemble, commissioned by An Post for the GPO in Dublin, and which investigated the idea of the “radical female” (103). Fitzgerald’s chapter is one of the most theoretically informed of all in the book, as she tries to demonstrate new materialism’s ability to re-think the relation between the body, memory, and the environment in performance studies.

Fiona McCann returns to the all-important notion of borders in her study of Mia Gallagher’s “unwieldy” novel *Beautiful Pictures of the Lost Homeland*, which, according to McCann, illustrates the idea of fluid, shifting boundaries not just from a geographical and historical perspective, but also from the point of view of sex and gender. McCann responds to Gallagher’s entangled novel by deploying an equally intricate and interdependent network of theoretical approaches, including quantum physics, diffraction, the decolonial, and queer theory. She describes Gallagher’s aesthetic in the novel as “a new materialist border poetics” (110), but reads it also as a critique of heteronormativity, of the traditional family, of colonialism, of neo-liberal economy, and even of the ideal of perfection, in the way that the novel flaunts “deliberate imperfection” (122).

McCann’s insistence on liminal spaces in the novel links her reading to other chapters of the volume, including Part III, entitled “Shared Places and diffracted Voices”, in which Eva Urban-Devereux analyses two productions by Kabosh Theatre Company as displaying a “fractured sense of liminality” (127). Liminality, defined as “a state of flux between two different states of being” (127), is central both to *Green and Blue*, by Laurence McKeown, and in *Lives in Translation*, by Rosemary Jenkinson, two community-based performances. *Lives in Translation* has in common with Clodagh Emoe’s *Crocoshmia* a focus on asylum-seekers in Ireland, while *Green and Blue* tackles the topic of borders which underlies much of the contents of the volume. If the difficulty of bridging divisions through the plurality of languages and cultures is obvious among the refugees in *Lives in Translation*, misunderstanding and failures to communicate also loom large between the RUC officer and the Garda officer on each side of the Irish border in *Green and Blue*, miscommunications they eventually overcome. This understanding is of course threatened by the prospect of the return of a hard border as a consequence of Brexit. Hard borders can only entail traumas, as is the case for the refugees in *Lives in Translation*, who had to cross numerous frontiers before arriving to Dublin or Belfast. The play is based on real testimonies, gathered by Jenkinson, an artistic choice proper to Kabosh Theatre Company, who “humanize political and social information by creating protagonists and situations on stage based on real people and real-life issues that people can empathise with” (142).

This search for empathy is echoed by Marie Mianowski’s report of her experience with Narrative 4, the association founded by novelist Colum McCann and based on story exchanges between two partners, with a view to engineering social change. Mianowski argues that Narrative 4, as a performative methodology, not only potentially revitalises our experience of social relationships but also our experience of reading, teaching, and writing fiction. As most authors in the volume do with their subject, Mianowski analyses Narrative 4 through her lived experience of it, as she herself has become implicated in the association.

As noted, the volume is untypical in that it does not foreground literature as the most accomplished artistic expression and gives a voice to other kinds of artists. Thus, the last chapter, a conversation between Fabrice Moulon and Northern Irish jazz musician David Lyttle, continues to foreground interaction and interplay as well as the involvement of the academic’s subjectivity and empathy. Lyttle, like other artists in the volume, has travelled extensively, bringing jazz to such unusual parts of the world as China. He hates routine and seeks the most unusual places to perform, including some Irish islands where jazz music has

never been heard before.

One of the most rewarding benefits of reading the volume is to understand the relevance of the concepts of nomadism, fluidity, or diffraction as deployed by New Materialism to issues currently at stake in Ireland, such as the situation of asylum seekers under the rule of Direct Provision, the threat of the return to a hard border after Brexit, the destruction of natural resources, and, more largely, the various ills engendered by the Irish state's full conversion to neo-liberalism: homelessness, bad housing, growing social inequalities, and uneven access to health facilities. More than ever, at a time of successive crises – economic, social, environmental, and now sanitary – new ways of understanding the world around us are needed, through empathy, situated knowledge, intra-actions, and return to what “matters”.

Sylvie Mikowski is Professor of Irish and English Studies at the University of Reims-Champagne-Ardenne (France). Her main interests are the contemporary Irish novel and popular culture. Her main publications include *Le Roman irlandais Contemporain*, *The Book in Ireland*, *Memory and History in France and Ireland*, *Irish Women Writers*, *Ireland and Popular Culture*, *Popular Culture Today*, *The Circulation of Popular Culture between Ireland and the USA*, *Ireland: Spectres and Chimeras*. She has also published numerous book chapters and articles on various contemporary Irish writers, such as John McGahern, William Trevor, Colum McCann, Patrick McCabe, Roddy Doyle, Deirdre Madden, Sebastian Barry, Anne Enright, etc. She served as literary editor of the French journal of Irish Studies *Études Irlandaises* and is currently President of the SOFEIR, the French Society of Irish Studies. A member of the board of EFACIS, she is also review editor for RISE (Review of Irish Studies in Europe).

sylvie.mikowski@univ-reims.fr

Five Irish Women: The Second Republic 1960-2016

Emer Nolan

Manchester University Press, 2019. 232 pp.

ISBN: 9781526136749

Reviewer: Sinéad Mooney

As I write, RTÉ radio is relaying a *Drivetime* debate about the voting down by Cork City Council, on the grounds of lack of female representation, of a proposal to erect statues on Patrick Street of Michael Collins, Terence McSwiney, and Tomás MacCurtain, to commemorate Cork's contribution to the struggle for Irish independence. Appropriately, the introduction to *Five Irish Women* recounts how Edna O'Brien in her memoir *Country Girl* recalls her first sight of O'Connell Street in terms of its macho commemorative architecture and statuary – Nelson's pillar, the GPO “where the men of the 1916 rebellion proclaimed the Irish Constitution, and raised the Irish flag, but were soon overwhelmed and summarily executed”, and the statue of Daniel O'Connell – before going on to proclaim on her own behalf, drunk with the excitement of being a modern young woman abroad in the metropolis, “But I was finished with all that, with history and martyrs and fields [...] being, as I believed, on the brink of daring emancipation”. It is this “daring emancipation” and its extended cultural moment (even if neither in fact leave history behind, and are, rather, best

understood precisely in relation to that history), encapsulated in the life and work of Edna O'Brien and of four other celebrated Irish women, that are the topic of this suggestive, thoughtful book.

Five Irish Women consists of five chapter-length portraits of Irish women across the fields of politics, music, literature, and journalism, who have made their names since around 1960 and after: Edna O'Brien, Sinéad O'Connor, Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, Nuala O'Faolain and Anne Enright. Nolan makes it plain from the outset that these women are in no way intended as a "representative sample of accomplished Irish women", but neither are they an entirely random sample chosen from among Irishwomen who have had exceptional careers in the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. Nolan's focus is on the ways in which these women have understood their formative influences as Irish people, and how they in their turn have been received, understood and construed as figures whose lives and work have mounted a pointed critique of modern Ireland, and in whom, as Nolan terms it, "certain liberating aspects of modernity in Ireland have been realised" (1). The recurrent presence of Mary Robinson in several of the chapters almost figures her as a sixth woman, as are the Irish feminists whose activism both facilitated the careers of the five, whose work and personae in turn have made crucial contributions to a feminist analysis of Irish culture.

None of Nolan's five women would declare, with Virginia Woolf, that "As a woman I have no country". All engage inescapably, albeit in complex ways, with the entwined conditions of Irishness and femaleness, and negotiate on their own terms with entrenched cultural stereotypes and inherited and commodified ideas of female identity. The vexed relationship to national territory and the discourses of national identity, as well as a direct inheritance from first-wave Irish feminist-nationalists, is perhaps most directly relevant to Bernadette McAliskey, one of the founders of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland, giving a voice to marginalised Catholics, and an MP in Westminster at a critical moment in Northern Irish history. All five, however, are to a greater or lesser extent influenced by, while also resistant to, stereotypes of Irish femininity and the persistent woman-as-nation trope which has been key to both romantic and realistic visions of modern Ireland. Sinéad O'Connor, Ireland's most successful female musician, has infused the male-dominated and often misogynistic cultural form that is rock music with an Irish female musical identity which has, over a career encompassing everything from *sean nós* to reggae, responded to Irish nationalism and Catholicism in ways that involve ferocious critique but not, ultimately, disaffiliation. With the combination of a singing voice of distinctive beauty, a drawing attention to female sexuality in complex and non-commodified ways, the public negotiation of a difficult private life, and a stubborn clinging to an Irish identity that often comes, for Nolan, "perilously close to stereotype" (50), O'Connor's work has often been understood as experimenting with and expanding on the trope of the female voice as expressive of the suffering of the Irish nation, as in the *aisling* tradition. Nolan's argument is that the success of McAliskey, O'Connor and the other three women, like that of other prominent female figures in Ireland in recent decades, is linked to their "capacity to draw on both archaic and contemporary ideas about women and on their having found the means to express these through media images as well as in their own more specialised fields".

One of the strengths of the book is its intelligent attentiveness to the personae of these women where it overlaps their work: the contrast between the young McAliskey's childlike appearance and "electrifying" rhetoric, her reception by Irish-Americans as a latter-day Cathleen Ní Houlihan, the ancestral homeland in revived youth and beauty; iconic moments such as Nuala O'Faolain's searingly honest radio interview for RTÉ after she had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, her undisguised fear and despair described by John Waters as a "piercing" piece of broadcasting that forced an examination of "the condition of human existence at a frozen moment in Irish life" (121); Sinéad O'Connor ripping up a photo of John Paul II on *Saturday Night Live* in 1992, or Nolan's acute analysis

of her face in close-up in the video of “Nothing Compares 2 U”; Bernadette Devlin crossing the floor of the House of Commons to strike Reginald Maudling when denied her right to speak in the aftermath of Bloody Sunday, to mention only a few.

Despite this attentiveness to public image, however, and to the nuance of O’Connor’s singing, and to McAliskey as orator, Nolan makes a convincing case for her as “by far the most notable female contributor to the tradition of Irish political oratory” (83). *Five Women* is ultimately a book most comfortable when focused on the written word. Nuala O’Faolain reflects on the proclivity of Irish people to deploy the written word as a tool of self-fashioning, likening women “who use journals to assert the fact of their existence” to a nation “forming itself around the experience of looking back so as to escape the experience of being unvalued by its colonial masters” (149). It is this, for me, that makes the core of Nolan’s book consist of her comprehensive analysis of the three prose writers, with Devlin the politician-activist and O’Connor the musician as outliers, to an extent.

O’Brien, O’Faolain and Enright have successively taken up the position of national storytellers in an artform dominated throughout the twentieth century by the male modernists whose faces dominated the iconic all-male Irish Writers poster, James Joyce, Samuel Beckett, and others. Edna O’Brien, in Nolan’s analysis, is “the first iconic Irish Woman Author” (17). A media star, beautiful and outspoken, often conceived of in terms of an incarnation of the colleen or “wild Irish girl”, Nolan’s O’Brien, with her taboo-breaking narratives about women’s lives, sex and marriage, became a herald of a new Ireland apparently poised to overcome its joyless, misogynistic, and repressive past, even as her work, poised between popular romance forms and intense realism, delineated the cost of that past to women. Nolan is acute on O’Brien’s persistent, even troublingly essentialist attachment to ideas of national community and aspects of conventional femininity, and rightly stresses the extent to which she introduced an entirely new idiom into the national narrative.

Concerned to counter her sidelining in Ireland, long after the censorship of her work and smearing of her as an individual ended, Nuala O’Faolain and Anne Enright have been eloquent on what they owed, as women writers, to Edna O’Brien. O’Faolain lamented that no one but O’Brien had ever captured the specificity of Irish women’s experience – no woman was prepared to “accomplish a description of us” – and set about addressing that gap in her own writing, judging finally that she had in fact succeeded in being “more candid than any Irish woman had yet been, outside the less direct forms of poems or novels”. In a sense Nolan’s O’Faolain takes up O’Brien’s baton. Her intensely intimate memoir *Are You Somebody?* (1996) depended for its effect to a large extent on its power as an Irish female confessional narrative emerging at a time of national confrontation with the scandals of child abuse and female incarceration that could no longer be hidden or denied. O’Faolain’s type of fame was not that of the often pernicious cult of youth, beauty, and celebrity which surrounded her near-contemporary Edna O’Brien or, later, Sinéad O’Connor. After a career combining journalism and TV production, she had her biggest impact on the Irish public when she was already, in her own words, “that specially unloved thing in a misogynistic society, a middle-aged woman with opinions”. Far more uniformly kindly received than the output of O’Brien or O’Connor, O’Faolain’s era-defining work emerged as a unique combination of confessional self-revelation and cultural authority, but also, as Nolan puts it, the oeuvre of “someone who had been [...] taken into public ownership by her audience” (121).

Despite this warm response there remained in O’Faolain, as in Sinéad O’Connor, the marks of a vividly remembered traumatic childhood of material and emotional deprivation, whose analysis was key to her reflections on the lives of Irish men and women, and the prevalence of institutional misogyny and child abuse in twentieth-century Ireland. This engagement with trauma is shared by all five women, while the question of how a traumatic

national history figures in the imagination of Irish women writers, singers and speakers, irradiates *Five Women*. If Edna O'Brien's status as a banned woman writer gives her in a sense the status of a first exemplary victim of church and state, the careers of Sinéad O'Connor, Bernadette McAliskey or Nuala O'Faolain cannot be understood outside the context of national traumas and their exposure, and these women's positioning as truth-tellers of various kinds.

The achievement in fiction of the final of the five women, Anne Enright, the first Irish female winner of the Man Booker prize in 2007 and the inaugural Laureate for Irish Fiction, at first seems somewhat different in its relationship to national narratives of trauma and exposure. A public intellectual in a very different style to the other women discussed in *Five Women*, in no way is she a confessional artist in the style of Sinéad O'Connor or Nuala O'Faolain. Nolan's attempts to view Enright's own early life in terms of trauma constitute one of the more strained and unsuccessful moments in the book, while in earlier interviews, Enright was frequently impatient with questions about gender and Irishness. However, if her early surreal novels indicated, for her contemporary Colm Tóibín, a "waning of national themes in Irish writing", Nolan views her later work, beginning with *The Gathering* (2007), as a conscious attempt to take part in a national conversation, employing more realist modes, and engaging with familial and historical narratives of trauma against the backdrop of the Ryan report and the Celtic Tiger. *The Gathering*'s self-reflexive narrator, Veronica Hegarty, who cannot settle to her satisfaction whether or not her dead brother was abused as a child by her grandmother's landlord, represents a challenge to the way in which the recall of traumatic memories or the exposure of abuse have been viewed as necessarily therapeutic and liberatory; no such easy resolutions are possible.

Suggestive echoes and cross-pollinations, meetings – literal and metaphorical – between the five, echo across the separate chapters: Sinéad O'Connor's *Throw Down Your Arms* and Bernadette McAliskey's engagement with the protest songs of the US civil rights movement at the Folk Music Society at Queen's; Edna O'Brien's fictional depiction of the abuses of rural Irish homes while McAliskey fought for the housing for working-class Catholics which would allow them to vote in local elections; Nuala O'Faolain and McAliskey at loggerheads at a Derry Guildhall conference over O'Faolain's assertion that the men of Sinn Féin were "just another layer of patriarchs" (85); the scandal that dogged Edna O'Brien and Sinéad O'Connor's public lives; the intense topophilia shared by O'Brien and O'Faolain, two emigrant writers, particularly for rural Clare, where O'Faolain eventually returned to live; the ways in which O'Brien, O'Connor, Enright and O'Faolain all engaged with the revelations of child abuse which, for O'Faolain, "change[d] everything" in Irish society. Ultimately, this book's value lies in the fact that it is not amenable to paraphrase, and in its specific, granular interest in the particularities of these uncommon lives.

Sinéad Mooney is the author of *A Tongue Not Mine: Beckett and Translation* (OUP, 2011), which won the ACIS Robert Rhodes Prize, and the editor, with Kathryn Laing and Maureen O'Connor, of *Edna O'Brien: New Critical Perspectives* (Carysfort, 2006), and with Kathryn Laing, *Irish Women Writers at the Turn of the 20th Century* (EER, 2020), and of numerous essays on Beckett, and the work of Mary Lavin, Elizabeth Bowen, Edna O'Brien and Molly Keane. She is co-founder of the Irish Women's Writing Network (18880-1920), and is a series editor of two new series, Key Irish Women Writers and Irish Women Writers: Texts and Contexts (EER). She has taught at NUI Galway and De Montfort University, Leicester.

drsineadmooney@gmail.com

Revolutionary Ireland, 1916-2016: Historical Facts and Social Transformations Re-Assessed
 Edited by Constanza del Río and José Carregal
 Edward Everett Root, 2020. 234 pp.
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Reviewer: David Pierce

Revolutionary Ireland, 1916-2016: Historical Facts and Social Transformations Re-assessed has its origins in an AEDEI conference held in Zaragoza in 2016 to commemorate the centenary of the Easter Rising. In her Foreword, Gerardine Meaney remarks that at the heart of this collection there is “a dialogue between Ireland and Spain”. Dialogue implies a two-way process, but the focus here is not so much on the two countries as on Ireland itself. Meaney’s comment, however, is suggestive, for a potential dialogue informs this whole collection, not least because of the presence and alignment of contributions from the two countries. The book attests to something else, which is not immediately apparent, that is an underlying unity and sense of purpose that makes it more than the sum of its parts.

If any one sentence carries the burden of this book it comes in the closing pages when the contemporary Galway poet, Sarah Clancy, declares that “No generation has yet existed in the Free State which has not had a system of quasi-legal incarceration of people whom the state did not approve of flourishing alongside it”. The comment is consciously provocative if slightly severe, and yet on reflection it manages to draw into it all the essays which precede it. For whether it is the historical record or the literature which that history spawned, people in Ireland, and especially women, have repeatedly faced actual incarceration or the system of oppression designed to control them or their bodies. As Amor Barros-del Río underlines in an accomplished survey of Edna O’Brien’s novels, what we repeatedly witness in her work are protagonists negotiating with “the concept of womanhood, motherhood, and identity”. Indeed, the whole of her work, Barros-del Río forcefully argues, “focuses on the (im)possibilities of female emancipation in the Republic of Ireland, from the mid-twentieth century to the present”. The system is also on view in the most compelling recent account of incarceration. This is the diary which was written by Vukasin Nedeljkovic when he was seeking asylum and which is reproduced in this volume. Terrible voices constantly surround the author, threatening exclusion and even the little pleasures in life: “You didn’t earn this coffee, someone says”. Fortunately, asylum centres are now being replaced, but, as Nedeljkovic reminds us, sixty-two asylum seekers have died in Ireland since 1990.

The book is divided into two sections, one on the historical record or so-called facts and the other on the various responses by writers such as Colm Tóibín, Edna O’Brien, and Evelyn Conlon, by film-makers such as Thaddeus O’Sullivan and John Forte, or in contrasting television documentaries on the Easter Rising. But it begins with a survey of the history of modern Ireland and an explanation of “revolutionary” in the title. The choice of the word is deliberate and not to be considered ironic or romantic. Rather, it is designed to insist on two things: a rupture between a colonial and postcolonial history and a continuity between past and present, how what happened with the Proclamation in the General Post Office triggered a revolution which still has meaning or whose effects continue to this day. The editors, Constanza del Río and José Carregal, cite Hanna Arendt and the assimilation of “revolution with liberation, with the restoration of lost liberties and privileges marking a new beginning”. The dark side is never far away in this account but, equally, never all-enveloping. So, even as the stress falls on the shortfalls of revolution and on those missing from the traditional story, we are also reminded of the continuing need to attend to what went wrong in “revolutionary Ireland” and never to avoid asking difficult questions. This book, then, affords a nicely-timed engagement with a country that has never stopped being an inspiration and a disappointment. Or as O’Brien once inimitably expressed it at the onset of her memoir, *Mother Ireland* (1999),

her native land is “a woman, a womb, a cave, a Rosaleen, a sow, a bride, a harlot, and, of course, the gaunt Hag of Beare”.

In the first essay, which focuses on the newly-released findings in the Military Service (1916-1923) Pensions Collection, Cécile Gordon and Robert McEvoy provide some useful insights into a range of material: the Irish Citizen Army during the Easter Rising, the fate of James Connolly’s dependants and the financial hardship they endured in subsequent decades, the role of women who took an active part whether in the Rising, the War of Independence, or the subsequent Civil War, and how some of these women were refused a pension because they were not men. As the authors suggest, the continuing release of these documents is enabling a re-examination of the historical record, challenging official narratives, and reminding us of the role of collective memory in understanding the past.

In “Ireland’s Revolutionary Years 1916-1923: An Oral History Record”, Maurice O’Keeffe drills down into material from his remarkable Irish Life and Lore Archive of interviews associated with those years. He stresses the importance of the lived experience of ordinary individuals, how memory is both a source and a subject, and how memory should not be confused with history. Thus, when an episode near Tralee in the Civil War produces opposing accounts in interviews, the author pauses judgment and simply draws attention to the frequently contested legacy of oral history. O’Keeffe’s intriguing account can be read alongside Thomas Earls FitzGerald’s sobering essay on violence against women in Munster and Connacht in the War of Independence. What stands out is the intimidatory use of hair-cutting by both forces of the Crown and the IRA and, equally, how they mirrored each other in their cruelty.

The witness statement made by Brigid Lyons in 1949 about her experience during the Easter Rising is the subject of an intriguing essay by Mariana Vignoli Figuera. Lyons, a medical student from Galway, was a member of Cumann na mBhan, who was captured and taken to Kilmainham Gaol. While there Lyons met Constance Markievicz and witnessed the executions of the leaders of the Rising. Listening to her recorded statement from that key period of modern Irish history, Lyons comes alive again for us in a surprisingly vivid way. From the vantage-point of contemporary linguistic theory, Figuera has shone a light on what is significant in cross-cultural terms and, indeed, for non-native speakers, on what might slip between the lines. Her conclusion might not surprise those familiar with traditional Irish singing. However, using Appraisal Theory, she shows how, while the affect terms were low, Lyons was emotionally affected by what she witnessed.

An echo of all this violence can be heard in O’Sullivan’s 1995 Troubles thriller, *Nothing Personal*, a film which Stephanie Schwerter in “Northern Irish Revolutionary Cinema: From Thriller to Comedy” contrasts with *Mad About Mambo* (2000). What all these accounts from different periods underline is a struggle for control of the narrative. That struggle takes centre stage in Paul O’Mahony’s discussion of two television documentaries of the Rising, shown in 2016, one produced by the BBC, *Easter 1916: The Enemy Files*, and the other with an Irish-American inflection, *1916: The Irish Rebellion*. With very different audiences and agendas, the documentaries remind us a legacy that is still contested and that reveals little by way of common ground, at least for the program-makers.

In his essay “The Changing Status of Wounded Masculinity in Colm Tóibín’s Ireland”, which concentrates on two of Tóibín’s stories and a novel, José M. Yebra outlines a case for seeing Tóibín as a transitional rather than a transformational figure. He describes *The Blackwater Lightship*, a novel set in 1993, the year when homosexuality was decriminalised in Ireland, as “an allegory of painful (if peaceful) evolution”. Masculinity in the guise of Declan, who is dying of AIDS, provides an example of wounded masculinity. Something similar can be said of Molly’s son, Frank, in “The Priest in the Family” (2004), Frank being the “holy” priest accused of abusing boys. At the centre of both these narratives the tension derives in part from how women in the family respond. Frank is largely offstage but his mother’s first question when she learns from another priest of the impending court case is “Does anyone else know

this?” According to Yebra, Frank suffers from what Marie Keenan calls “Perfect Celibate Clerical Masculinity”, the burden in other words of not living up to his high calling.

Tóibín reserves judgment and allows his narratives to tell the story, at times quietly and at other times less so. In “The Pearl Fishers” the sexual relationship between the narrator and Donnacha as schoolboys is one the latter wants to forget now he is nearly twenty-five years married. Gráinne, his wife, on the other hand, is intent on speaking out about being abused by a priest in her teenage years. Grainne, a star journalist on a provincial newspaper, is determined to tell her story to the world, but the narrator wants to get away from “the high drama of Gráinne’s life” (80). His line of questioning is telling. ““Are you still in daily contact with the Virgin Mary?” I asked before we rang off”. This is followed by another cutting remark when they meet up: “What is the truth?”.

Tóibín’s narratives explore gay identities and experience and the destructive secrecy in Irish life. With regard to pre-1993 Ireland, Yebra describes secrecy in Tóibín’s writing as “a metaphor for the pleasures it hides”, which is a point well-taken, but, arguably, secrecy is, if not more complex, certainly more flexible. The writer, for example, who is often considered outspoken and at times outlandish, takes care to allow the shadows, the prejudices, to speak for themselves. Only after the shame of a hostile world gazing at them is diminished can Molly’s sympathies for her son be allowed. Similarly, with the women in *The Blackwater Light*. Family secrets in Ireland are not for sharing outside – or indeed at times inside – the home. So, if he is a transitional figure, Tóibín is more than this for his texts speak to contexts which don’t entirely define them. The narrator in “The Pearl Fishers” walks back alone through a “grim city” as if he were in a story out of Joyce’s *Dubliners*, but then he notices that “Dublin, no matter what remained, was new with gay men in twos and threes or hungry ones alone on their way to the Front Lounge or GUBU or some new joint that I have yet to hear about”. Another story or adventure beckons.

In a stimulating essay with an ambitious sub-title, “Revolution, Art and Memory Practices”, Melania Terrazas focuses on Evelyn Conlon’s story “What Happens at Night” (2014). The story first appeared in *Lines of Vision: Irish Writers on Art* (2014), an anthology of pieces by some fifty writers to paintings in the National Gallery of Ireland. The range of responses varied, some treating it as a stepping-point for personal reminiscence, some to a simple description in words of the canvas in front of them, and some to something more unusual. A complex layering is what Conlon achieves in juxtaposing two paintings by Sarah Purser and Edwin Hayes: *A Lady Holding a Doll’s Rattle* (1885) and *An Emigrant Ship. Dublin Bay. Sunset* (1853). Conlon imagines the upper-class woman in Purser’s painting pursuing a conversation with one of the women in the ship about to set sail. Across the social divide and the passage of time, the woman also comments on her own position vis-a-vis the audience: “And you think I sit here alone, bound by my frame.... You don’t think of me talking and sleeping and dreaming”. Her far-away gaze is focused on the fate of women both as emigrants and existing in a utopian future. Nothing is made by Conlon or Terrazas of the dedication in small letters on the canvas or the identity of the sitter. And that is right because the (female) gaze has its eye trained on elsewhere, the Other, and, as Terrazas suggests, on the need to breach “class and religious divides”. The story and the painting resonate against each other in a particularly evocative way, and we are left reflecting anew on the mediating role of the artist in revolutionary Ireland.

David Pierce is the author of sixteen books including *Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader* (Cork University Press, 1999), *Light, Freedom and Song: A Cultural History of Modern Irish Writing* (Yale University Press, 2005), and six books on James Joyce and three on W.B. Yeats. His recent books are *The Long Apprenticeship: A Memoir* (Troubador, 2012), *The Joyce Country: Literary Scholarship and Irish Culture* (EER, 2018)

and *James Joyce's Portrait: A New Reading* (EER, 2019). An enlarged paperback version of *The Joyce Country: Literary Scholarship and Irish Culture* will be published in May 2021. For the first five years of its existence Pierce was the literature editor of books in English for *Estudios Irlandeses*. His memoir contains a chapter on his Irish background, which is reprinted in

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eagerton.pierce@btinternet.com

Sacred Weather: Atmospheric Essentialism in the Work of John McGahern

Niamh Campbell

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Reviewer: Yen-Chi Wu (Academia Sinica, Taiwan)

John McGahern's "The Image" is often regarded as his artistic manifesto. The elusive way in which he describes the image in the essay and the extent to which this tenet may be applied to his writing have inspired much scholarly discussion that attests to the richness and complexity of the Leitrim writer's literary style. McGahern writes:

Art is an attempt to create a world in which we can live: if not for long or forever, still a world of the imagination over which we can reign, and by reign I mean to reflect purely on our situation through this created world of ours, this Medusa's mirror, allowing us to see and to celebrate even the totally intolerable. (7)

Certain images recur and echo in McGahern's *oeuvre*: the religious and devoted mother, the domineering veteran father; a broken gold watch, and the rural landscape of in-land Ireland. These repetitive figures and images, however, are given different significance in their contexts. They contribute to a recognizable McGahern world that seems to suggest the writer's debt to realism or naturalism; however, the visual quality and the re-purposed use of the images also imply a modernist twist. McGahern was often dubbed as a documentary realist by early critics, while recent commentators have paid increasing attention to the understated modernist sensibilities in his writing. To a certain extent, both realism and modernism prove to be restricted registers to account for McGahern's particular style – a *McGahernesque* quality – that defies the rigid characterization of any given literary sensibility.

Niamh Campbell's *Sacred Weather: Atmospheric Essentialism in the Work of John McGahern* (2019) does a brilliant job in proposing a new way of understanding the elusive *McGahernesque* quality – a term coined by the author herself. Placing McGahern's work in a dynamic framework that includes reader response, Irish socio-historical context, and the often-debated idea of Irishness, the author sheds new light on the way in which we may better understand the relationship between "The Image" and the quintessential McGahern style. She does this by way of proposing a new methodology of "atmospheric essentialism", which builds on affect theory, ecocriticism, psychoanalysis, and postcolonial cultural criticism. Theoretical reading of McGahern's work is not new; Eóin Flannery's ecocritical approach and Richard Robinson's examination of McGahern from a (new) modernist paradigm are admirable examples that use a theoretically-informed framework to tease out

the complexity of the Leitrim writer's deceptively simple style. But Campbell's incorporation of affect theory is not only new, it is a smart and apposite choice. It allows her to read the familiar McGahern images and landscape with a focus on their "profoundly ambient emotional afterglows" (1), as Campbell beautifully puts it. Her excellent employment of affect theory is *Sacred Weather's* singular contribution to McGahern studies as well as to Irish Studies. By directing our attention to affect, she underpins a missing link to understanding the *McGahernesque* style that is more than purely aesthetic: it is deeply reflective of the affective attachments associated with Irish culture and history.

The four main chapters pursue some of the familiar themes in McGahern's writing but examine them via a fresh theoretical lens. The introduction and the first chapter put forth the overarching ideas of "atmospheric essentialism" and "place-world" in the monograph. Campbell confidently and freely moves around different critical paradigms to make her own mark. Drawing from a diverse array of theorists and critics, such as Timothy Morton, David Lloyd, Jacques Lacan, Colin Graham, and many others, she proposes to understand atmospheric essentialism "as a constellation of affective phenomena bodying forth moods, responses and associations on different levels, and acting in both a personal and political way" (x). Understood in this framework, the elusive "Irishness" can be examined as a "consumable quasi-substance" (9). To demonstrate her point, Campbell uses "peat smoke" as a representative of Irishness: it is quasi-substantive, and it is able to elicit varied emotional purchase as a signifier. She declares: "Every comical, cynical, poignant and prosaic implication of the poetics of peat smoke is relevant and deliberate" (9). Reading McGahern's work in the guiding principle of atmospheric essentialism, Campbell impressively draws out an interesting dynamism between the Leitrim writer's minute evocation of local particularities and the affective associations with Irishness.

The framework of atmospheric essentialism also allows us to reassess McGahern's relationships with the Irish literary canon, as well as social and cultural history. For instance, Campbell reads McGahern alongside Joyce by looking at the mothers – May Joyce and Susan McGahern – "as figures for a strand of conflicted psychic and artistic symbolism" in their works, instead of mere representation of historical figures (46). She challenges the socio-historical approach to reading *The Dark* by using psychoanalysis to problematise the existing "narratives of comprehension and atonement which surround the biopolitical history of the Free State" (91). In the opening scene of the novel, old Mahoney threatens to whip his son for using the word FUCK. The reader's heart tightens as we witness young Mahoney lose bladder control in fearful anticipation of the flogging. But as Campbell reminds us, we never really hear young Mahoney utter the dirty word, and the whip never strikes the boy's buttock. In this sense, *The Dark* is not merely a documentary of the dark oppressive past in the Irish history, it is also a prime example of how affective associations with that past endow the novel with a new affective significance. These are both fascinating readings that engage McGahern's work with broader literary and social-historical paradigms. What is more impressive, perhaps, is Campbell's ability to tease out the affective attachments of McGahern's repetitive use of certain images and figures. In the fourth chapter, "Fascinating Francis: A Preposterous History", she complicates the reading of Francis McGahern as a configuration from the writer-son's memory that recurs in his fictions. Highlighting the historical figure of Patrick Pearse and the varied affective responses to him, Campbell draws out a big paradigm that alludes to Pearse's fictional reincarnations in the works by W.B. Yeats, Sean O'Casey, Jamie O'Neill, and photographic artist Billy Quinn, in addition to how Pearse's portrait is introduced to Irish students through state-imposed curriculum. According to her, much like Patrick Pearse, McGahern's parents are better understood "as enigmatic signifiers in themselves" (139). Their signified meanings and affective associations are varied, selective, and highly problematic. In this light, although McGahern tends to recycle certain images and figures in his work, they are

employed as unstable signifiers in their respective contexts. This creative use of the elusiveness of signifiers, Campbell points out, may provide us with a new way to understanding McGahern's contribution to Irish modernism. *Sacred Weather's* wide scope not only complements extant McGahern studies but also establishes a unique methodology for Irish Studies in general.

The theoretical richness of the monograph moves McGahern studies to a new critical terrain. For a monograph with such a great ambition, however, the preface to *Sacred Weather* is curiously defensive and almost apologetic in tone. One may surmise from such a tone that the author was trying to justify her approach in response to editors' and reviewers' criticism. This presumed editorial concern, however, is perhaps well warranted. Despite its brilliance, this monograph is very difficult to market to general readers. It is extremely erudite and theoretically dense. Campbell borrows from many heavyweight theorists to put forth the idea of atmospheric essentialism (for which she pre-emptively half-apologized in the preface). For readers who are unfamiliar with these theories, this heavy borrowing of academic vocabulary could be quite daunting. Campbell writes beautifully, a talent that is evidenced by the quality of her creative writing (her novel *This Happy* received rave reviews). But where theoretical lexicons are densely used, the clarity of sentence sometimes suffers and the flow of narrative stalled.

This quibble, however, is not a criticism of the book's quality. I am conscious that a book's difficulty is relative to the reader's bearing. It is therefore unfair for a reviewer to dismiss a book as "too theoretical" when it is precisely what the book sets out to do. It should, however, serve as a warning. Readers need to be prepared to be challenged by *Sacred Weather*, which puts forth ideas that are "original, risky, and intended to start conversation", as the book's blurb suggests. Above all things, the book certainly achieved what it promised.

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Yen-Chi Wu is Postdoctoral Fellow at the Institute of European and American Studies, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. He holds a PhD in English from University College Cork, where his project on John McGahern and modernity was funded by an Irish Research Council Government of Ireland Postgraduate Scholarship. His essays have appeared in *Irish Studies Review*, *New Hibernia Review*, and *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. He is currently working on a project that investigates Irish writers' connection with *The New Yorker* magazine in the mid-twentieth century.

113220153@umail.ucc.ie