

Britta Olinder, Werner Huber (eds.)

PLACE AND MEMORY IN THE NEW IRELAND

Irish Studies in Europe

Edited by

Michael Böss, Werner Huber, Catherine Mignant, Hedwig Schwall

Volume

2

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IN THE NEW IRELAND**

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CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	7
<i>Britta Olinder (Göteborg)</i> INTRODUCTION	9
<i>Kerby A. Miller (Columbus, MO)</i> RE-IMAGINING THE IMAGINARY: A CHALLENGE TO REVISIONIST MYTHOLOGY	13
<i>Graham Davis (Bath)</i> RECONSTRUCTED MEMORY: IRISH EMIGRANT LETTERS FROM THE AMERICAS	27
<i>Valérie Peyronel (Paris)</i> URBAN REGENERATION IN BELFAST: LANDSCAPE AND MEMORY	37
<i>Yann Bévant (Rennes)</i> ANTICIPATING THE PEACE PROCESS: <i>IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER</i> AS A MYTH-BREAKING MESSAGE	47
<i>Thomas Walsh (Loughborough)</i> IRISH ANIMATION AND RADICAL MEMORY	57
<i>Harry Clifton (Dublin)</i> TWO POEMS	67
<i>Patricia Coughlan (Cork)</i> "CHIPPED AND TILTED MARYS": TWO IRISH POETS AND THEIR CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS	71
<i>Borbála Faragó (Dublin)</i> "WATCH ME WHEREVER I GO": AMBIVALENCE AND MISDIRECTION IN EILÉAN NÍ CHUILLEANÁIN'S POETRY	101
<i>Mary Pierse (Cork)</i> "OUT-AND-OUT WEARY OF EXCAVATING IN THE PAST": THE NEW IRELANDS OF CATHAL Ó SEARCAIGH AND DENNIS O'DRISCOLL	111

<i>Deirdre Madden (Dublin)</i> FROM <i>AUTHENTICITY</i> , CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE	123
<i>Martin Ryle (Brighton)</i> PLACE, TIME, AND PERSPECTIVE IN JOHN MCGAHERN'S FICTION	127
<i>David Clark (A Coruña)</i> MAMMIES, TROLLOPS, AND RE-CLAIMERS OF THE NIGHT: WOMEN IN PATRICK MCCABE'S FICTION	137
<i>Giovanna Tallone (Milan)</i> HERE AND THEN, THERE AND NOW: PLACE AND MEMORY IN ÉILÍS NÍ DHUIBHNE'S FICTION	147
<i>Joseph Long (Dublin)</i> FRANK MCGUINNESS AND ARMAND GATTI: PLAYS OF MEMORY AND SURVIVAL	157
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	165

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B.O., W.H.

INTRODUCTION

Britta Olinder

"Place and Memory in the New Ireland" was the theme of the Fifth EFACIS conference held in Gothenburg, Sweden, in December of 2005. The topic was related to the ongoing 'Memory Project' of the Nordic Irish Studies Network (NISN), which has since resulted in *Recovering Memory: Irish Representations of Past and Present*, edited by Hedda Friberg, Irene Gilsenan Nordin, and Lene Yding Pedersen (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007). One of the five sections therein explicitly deals with "Memory and Place," a nexus that seems quite natural, since these two concepts have to do with belonging and rootedness, both geographically and historically, representing two different dimensions. The question is what they mean today, in the new prosperous conditions of Ireland.

Beginning in the past, Kerby Miller's "Re-Imagining the Imaginary: A Challenge to Revisionist Mythology" explores different interpretations of Irish history including separate Protestant identities, causes, and consequences of Irish emigration, and Irish relationships, past and present, to empire and imperialism. His main argument is that Revisionist mythology has simplified and distorted the facts and that the Two Traditions paradigm does not promote full understanding, neither of the Irish past nor of its present situation. Hence, he claims that the long-suppressed voices of the Ulster Protestant victims of the Famine must be recovered and "in the process we may learn that the Two Traditions paradigm offers no more infallible guide to Ireland's future than it does to Ulster's past."

Continuing on an historical note in "Reconstructed Memory: Irish Emigrant Letters from the Americas," Graham Davis examines Irish emigrant letters to find how a culture of exile and individual development in the new-found context contribute to keeping the memory of Ireland "in aspic," while Irishness is being invented and reconstructed.

In her account of urban regeneration in Belfast since the late 1980s ("Urban Regeneration in Belfast: Landscape and Memory"), Valérie Peyronel points to the sectarian conflict between the two groups of inhabitants. The rebuilding of the city after the Troubles led to a rediscovery of the significance of place and its relation to a history of industrial distinction and memories of prosperity as well as of violence. The Victorian heritage as a non-divisive or neutral memory of place is promoted to make traces of more recent sectarian divisions disappear.

Another way of handling the memory of the conflict is seen in Jim Sheridan's film *In the Name of the Father*. In Yann Bévant's analysis ("Anticipating the Peace Process: *In the Name of the Father* as a Myth-Breaking Message"), it becomes a presage of the peace process as the main character learns to handle his memories by express-

ing them in words and committing them to a tape recorder, thereby freeing his own history, as he remembers it, from the interpretation by others. The historical myth of the Other – as seen both from an Irish and an English point of view – is shattered when prejudice, fed on memories of conflict in the colonial history of Ireland, is defeated by the correction of false representations or myths concerning both the past and the present.

The importance of demythologising tradition and nation is further emphasised in "Irish Animation and Radical Memory" by Thomas Walsh who also takes up the dialectic of old rural Ireland in contrast to its modern urban counterpart. His focus is on the independent Irish animation industry emerging in the 1990s along with the Celtic Tiger economy; his prime example is the animated short film *Give up Yer Aul Sins*, which splits the narrative between place and memory by making a child in urban Dublin retell a Biblical story in imaginary rural terms. This lack of connection is interpreted as a sign of globalisation and of a new Irish identity.

The literature section is opened by Harry Clifton, who read some of his poetry (including "Dag Hammarskjöld") at the conference reception in Gothenburg's City Hall. Later he sent us his memory poem of travelling through Sweden after the conference. We are happy and grateful to be allowed to print these poems here.

In "'Chipped and tilted Marys': Two Irish Poets and Their Contemporary Contexts," Patricia Coughlan sets the scene for poetry criticism by opening up the poetic worlds of two women poets, Moya Cannon and Vona Groarke, whose work, while not yet among the best known, marks "the development of a feminine aesthetic in Irish poetry." The "chipped and tilted Marys" of her title, sharing "a vital role with Mother Ireland in *her* various manifestations," become reference points for an ambiguous tradition. As far as memory is concerned, Coughlan particularly notes Groarke's sense of history, her "searching historical reflexivity" but also glimpses of haymaking as an individual memory and a thing of the past for the whole community.

While many Irish writers face the themes of place and memory head-on, setting their work in recognisably Irish places and memories, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, as Borbála Faragó shows in "'Watch me wherever I go': Ambivalence and Misdirection in Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin's Poetry," circumnavigates these themes by talking about their opposites: hidden spaces and subdued, silent memories, bringing the reader's attention to the liminal and the tacit. Her poetry creates a space for the expression of the unsaid, unearthing not only concealed memories, but also the double bind of remembering and forgetting within the psychic landscape of contemporary Ireland. Her liminal spaces and silent narratives stimulate a reading strategy which looks for interpretation within the context of both spatial and communicative latency.

In "'Out-and-out weary of excavating in the past': The New Irelands of Cathal Ó Searcaigh and Dennis O'Driscoll," Mary Pierse contrasts the "memorable images