

Heinrich Böll's *Irishes Tagebuch* in Context

Gisela Holfter (ed.)

IRISH-GERMAN STUDIES  
DEUTSCH-IRISCHE STUDIEN  
LÉANN NA GEARMÁINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN

5

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*Editor/Herausgeber/Eagarthóir*

Gisela Holfter

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# Contents

*Gisela Holfter*

Irish-German Literary and Cultural Connections as Context  
for Heinrich Böll's *Irishes Tagebuch* 1

## I.

*Martin Mansergh*

Heinrich Böll and Ireland. 50 Years *Irishes Tagebuch*:  
Political Connections and Developments in Comparison 9

*Eda Sagarra*

Heinrich Böll, Father of German Tourism in Ireland 13

*Derek Scally*

Berlin is the New Achill 19

*Edward King / John McHugh*

The Work of the Achill Heinrich Böll Association  
and the Heinrich Böll Residency Programme 23

*Jeong In-Mo*

Zur Heinrich-Böll-Forschung in Korea 27

## II.

*David Donoghue*

Heinrich Böll and a Changing Ireland 33

*Seán Ó hUiginn*

Heinrich Böll's *Irishes Tagebuch* Fifty Years Later 37

*Hermann Rasche*

Böll's Ireland Revisited 43

<i>Jochen Schubert</i> Zur Poetik des <i>Irischen Tagebuchs</i>	55
<i>Thorsten M. Pöplow</i> New Perspectives: Heinrich Böll's <i>Irish Journal</i> as Intertext	63
<b>III.</b>	
<i>Patrick O'Neill</i> <i>Kennst du das Land?</i> Ireland and the German Literary Imagination	79
<i>William O'Keefe</i> Western Approaches: Heinrich Böll in Normandy and Ireland	89
<i>Anna Fattori</i> Ireland as a 'Better Elsewhere' in Heinrich Böll's <i>Irishes Tagebuch</i> and Margrit Baur's <i>Alle Herrlichkeit</i>	99
<i>Eoin Bourke</i> Hagena, Joyce and the Sea	115
Selected Bibliography on Heinrich Böll's <i>Irishes Tagebuch</i>	123
Notes on Contributors	131

# Irish-German Literary and Cultural Connections as Context for Heinrich Böll's *Irishes Tagebuch*

Gisela Holfter

Readers of this volume will quickly realise that the articles here are reflections of the immense influence of one book – Heinrich Böll's *Irishes Tagebuch*, or *Irish Journal* in the English translation. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2007 of the publication of *Irishes Tagebuch* was the focus of the 9<sup>th</sup> Limerick Conference in Irish-German Studies in the autumn of that year. Selected contributions have been collected and are presented here in edited form.<sup>1</sup> As we have done before (in vol. 2 of the *Irish-German Studies* book series) we have included essays and personal recollections in this volume, acknowledging the fact that Böll's book has strong personal, emotional, even sentimental appeal for many readers and for anybody active in Irish-German relations in particular. From a personal point of view the organisation of the conference was almost an obligation given my ongoing interest and research activity since the early 1990s into the relationship of Heinrich Böll with Ireland.

The aim of the conference was to go beyond the academic sphere, and this challenge was taken up by academics, authors, politicians, diplomats, musicians, journalists, archivists, artists and Heinrich Böll's son, René Böll. The participants hailed from Ireland, Germany, Great Britain, Canada and Korea, and all came together to provide a truly multi-faceted perspective. A number of aspects of the conference could not be captured in this collection – such as the art exhibition of works by René Böll ('Islands in the sea') and Günter Beckers ('Works inspired by the *Irishes Tagebuch* and Ireland') or the guided tours of the *Heinrich Böll Life and Work* exhibition with specially commissioned additions introduced by Markus Schäfer of the Cologne Böll Archive. Then there was an impromptu musical event with Irish Chamber Orchestra director John Kelly as well as Gareth Cox's contribution, Head of Music at Mary Immaculate College, both of whom studied music in Germany. Irish-German artist Imogen Stuart's introduction to her art was another highlight as was the reading by Hugo Hamilton, the most prolific Irish-German writer of our times and author of a congenial homage to the *Irishes Tagebuch* – his timely *Die redselige Insel: Irishes Tagebuch* (2007). A poetry performance in Irish and German by Gabriel Rosenstock (whose father was

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1 One additional article is included: Anna Fattori's 'Ireland as a 'Better Elsewhere' in Heinrich Böll's *Irishes Tagebuch* and Margrit Baur's *Alle Herrlichkeit*', providing a comparison with Swiss portrayals of Ireland.

one of the critics and friends of Böll) and Hans-Christian Oeser was followed by the launch of Gabriel Rosenstock's German edition of his latest poetry collection, *Ein Archivar großer Taten*. Germany was represented officially both by the then Ambassador to Ireland, Christian Pauls, as well as by Rolf Stehle, Director of the Dublin Goethe Institut, one of the main supporters of the conference. Possibly the most fascinating contribution that unfortunately cannot be captured by an academic book publication such as this was René Böll's personal recollections which transported the audience back to the Böll family experience of long summers on Achill and insights into family life in Ireland supported by a slide show of family photos. While that experience was one to be savoured in the moment it is hoped that at least the essence of the conference and the wealth of perspectives and insights not only on Heinrich Böll's *Irishes Tagebuch* and its legacy but also on Irish-German literary and cultural developments in the last fifty years will be reflected in this volume.

The contributions of leading Irish diplomats and politicians of different political hues is proof of the importance of literature beyond the arts; they place literature and especially the *Irishes Tagebuch* at the centre of mutual political awareness and interest and emphasise their considerable importance in terms of tourism and economic development. Contributors here included the Irish Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and TD for the Green Party, John Gormley, as well as Martin Mansergh, Fianna Fáil TD, who some months after the conference assumed the portfolio of Minister of State at the Department of Finance with special responsibility for the Office of Public Works, as well as Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism with special responsibility for the Arts. For both TDs links to Germany and indeed German literature played a role in their political development and personal life, the latter eloquently documented in Martin Mansergh's paper. His insights into the political world of Germany were gained through first hand experience as a staff member at the Irish Embassy in Germany. Eda Sagarra who has been a guiding light in German studies in Ireland for many decades gives an insight into her personal journey into German studies. She also highlights Heinrich Böll's huge cultural and economic impact by calling him the father of German tourism to Ireland. Derek Scally, the current *Irish Times* correspondent in Germany, continues this theme in a novel way – he argues that while Achill was a refuge for Böll who consequently made Ireland so popular for Germans, nowadays it could be seen the other way around – that Berlin has the potential of becoming a magnet for Irish travellers in search of more congenial surroundings, whether in order to escape the Celtic Tiger or, one should add after its demise, offer a potential chance for a new beginning elsewhere. Location is also the theme of the chap-