

Werner Huber, Sandra Mayer, Julia Novak (eds.)

IRELAND IN/AND EUROPE:
CROSS-CURRENTS AND EXCHANGES

Irish Studies in Europe

Edited by

Werner Huber, Catherine Maignant, Hedwig Schwall

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**IRELAND IN/AND EUROPE:
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Vienna, July 2012

Werner Huber
Sandra Mayer
Julia Novak

INTRODUCTION

Werner Huber, Sandra Mayer, Julia Novak

“Hibernicise Europe and Europeanise Ireland”¹ – this apocryphal quotation from James Joyce seemed a good motto for an EFACIS (European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies) conference precipitating a volume of essays on Irish-European cross-currents and exchanges. Vienna as the venue for that conference (University of Vienna, 3-6 September 2009) and the editors’ home base also evinced its potential as a place of exchange and negotiation. Ever since the fall of the Iron Curtain, Austria in general and Vienna in particular have been branded and promoted as the hub, cross-roads, and marketplace of a redefined Central Europe.

Incidentally, James Joyce nearly made it to Vienna, but not quite – as he did not take up the invitation his friend Oliver St. John Gogarty extended to him late in 1907. (Gogarty then had lodgings at Spitalgasse 1 in the 9th district, very close to the Old General Hospital, which is now part of the University). Even so, Joyce provides excellent parameters to initiate discussions of the “Ireland vs/in/and/with/without Europe” theme.

For a start, one could do worse than listen in on the autobiographical persona of Stephen Dedalus musing as he is walking along Dollymont Strand on “a day of dappled seaborne clouds”:

Disheartened, he raised his eyes towards the slowdrifting clouds, dappled and seaborne. They were voyaging across the deserts of the sky, a host of nomads on the march, voyaging high over Ireland, westward bound. The Europe they had come from lay out there beyond the Irish Sea, Europe of strange tongues and valleyed and wood-begirt and citadelled and of entrenched and marshalled races. (Joyce, *Portrait* 167)

Europe thus is many things to Joyce, not only the Gothic/Exotic Other, as this quotation would lead us to believe, but also a symbol of liberation, cosmopolitanism, and modernism. At the end of his book *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, James Joyce aka Stephen Dedalus prepares to leave Ireland, an “afterthought of Europe” (*Stephen Hero* 52), for Paris to study medicine and encounter Life! The parameter of Ireland vs. Europe in the whole of Joyce’s *œuvre* neatly reflects the trajectories of exile, return, distancing, and appropriation, as expressed in the famous apothegm containing Stephen’s advice to one of his fellow students: “Told him the shortest way to Tara was *via* Holyhead” (*Portrait* 250). And Joyce did indeed follow his own advice. Although he spent the better part of his life in ‘exile’ in mainland Europe (the

1 Joyce, as quoted by Kearney 17. In Joyce’s highly autobiographical play *Exiles* (publ. 1918) we find the lines: “If Ireland is to become a new Ireland she must first become European” (45).

Habsburg Empire, Italy, France, Switzerland), he could never get away from the ‘matter of Ireland’ as the essential subject and theme of his work.

In yet another variation, the Ireland/Europe dichotomy is satirised by the arrogant piss-artist (if you excuse the language) that Stephen Dedalus has become by the time we follow his career in *Ulysses*: “You suspect [...] that I may be important because I belong to the *faubourg Saint Patrice* called Ireland for short. [...] But I suspect that Ireland must be important because it belongs to me” (*Ulysses* 599).

This healthy reversal of perspective is also underlying the agenda of these proceedings. The conference brought together scholars from many different countries, from many different schools, approaches, and disciplines² to engage in comparative studies and explore mechanisms of cultural transfer, contact, reception, and intertextuality, still they were united in their common aim and effort to question and explain traditional perspectives and to illuminate and deconstruct (as the case may be) myths and stereotypes that Ireland and Europe have entertained about each other in the twentieth century mainly.

At the EFACIS conference and in the present volume the Nobel Laureate **Seamus Heaney** gracefully consented to open the proceedings with a lecture-cum-reading. Heaney plays variations on the Joycean/Dedalian idea of a European trajectory, as his title indicates (“Mossbawn via Mantua: Ireland in/and Europe: Cross-Currents and Exchanges”), Mossbawn, of course, being Heaney’s birthplace in Northern Ireland, and Mantua that of the poet Virgil. ‘The shortest way’ to Mossbawn and to an overview of the poet’s career and *œuvre* is via five European “starting points” or “provinces.” By these Heaney means models, examples, influences, parallels, perspectives, ways of inspiration. The five categories are as follows: (1) Classical: Greco-Roman civilisation and Judaeo-Christian heritage; (2) Barbarian: the North/South divide in Europe; (3) Hyperborean: twentieth-century Russian and Eastern European poets; (4) Dante Alighieri; (5) direct translation as a “response to different contemporary crises.”

In the second half of his key note address Heaney cites, and comments on, individual poems that are illustrative of his engagement with various dimensions of Europeanness and their effect on his work. He concludes with a new translation of the famous medieval poem “Pangur Bán” about a cat and a monk in his cell hunting mice and words/meanings respectively.

In “Hy Brasil: Cartographic Error, Celtic Elysium, or the New Jerusalem?” **Barbara Freitag** examines early literary representations of the phantom Brasil Island off the western coast of Ireland, which has captured the imagination of writers ever since it

2 A selection of film papers from the conference including a lengthy interview with Lenny Abrahamson and Mark O’Halloran has been published as a separate volume (see Huber and Crosson).