

Scott Brewster and Werner Huber (eds.)

IRELAND:
ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Irish Studies in Europe

Edited by

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The present volume is the fifth in the *Irish Studies in Europe* series. It is published under the aegis of *EFACIS: The European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies* and is meant to reflect something of the multi-disciplinary and international character unique to this organisation.

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Lincoln, Vienna
January 2015

Scott Brewster
Werner Huber

INTRODUCTION

Scott Brewster

A decade ago, with its economy and cultural confidence surging and with new political alignments possible in the North, Ireland seemed to have ‘arrived’ on the world stage by conventional measures of success. Yet the recent financial storms and accompanying social pressures are a reminder of the challenges as well as the opportunities of leaving behind old certainties and becoming ‘global.’ It has equally meant reappraising values, attitudes and practices seemingly consigned to the past and to questioning the verities that have driven the heady but uneven transformation of modern Ireland. This volume explores the Irish experience, both within the contemporary period and over a much longer historical span, as a process of navigating between ‘here’ and ‘elsewhere,’ of discovery and unpredictable encounter, of temporal and spatial dislocation as well as complex connectedness.

Many of the papers in this volume were originally aired at “Arrivals and Departures,” the eighth biennial conference of the European Federation of Associations and Centres for Irish Studies (EFACIS) at the University of Salford in September 2011. It was the first EFACIS conference to be held in the UK and also the first to be organised in collaboration with the British Association for Irish Studies (BAIS). In keeping with the multi- and interdisciplinary character of EFACIS, the Salford conference programme featured papers drawn from history, literature, politics, film studies, cultural geography, diaspora studies, economics, social sciences, and visual culture, and much of this diversity is represented in the current volume. Fittingly, this landmark event took place in North-West England, a part of Britain whose history has long been marked by a strong and vibrant Irish presence, as evidenced by the internationally renowned Institute of Irish Studies at the University of Liverpool, highly active organisations and community groups such as the Manchester Irish Education Group and the Irish World Heritage Centre in Cheetham Hill, Manchester, and the annual Manchester and Liverpool Irish Festivals. The family histories of so many in this region involved leaving Ireland in the last two centuries and making new starts here: this experience formed part of the thematic impetus behind the conference title. The University of Salford has made its own distinctive contribution to charting that history, most notably in the work of Professor Frank Neal. Sadly, on the first full day of the conference, news reached us of Frank’s death after a long illness, and tribute was paid to his work and commitment to Irish Studies during the course of the conference. Greater Manchester, a part of the world enriched by people who left Ireland to build lives elsewhere in previous historical moments of crisis or opportunity, thus provided an ideal setting in which to reflect on a time of rapid change for Ireland.

This volume entered its final stages of preparation in late 2014, the year after The Gathering, a tourism initiative designed to celebrate the arrivals and departures, transformations and returns that have shaped Ireland's history and definitions of Irishness. In a press statement released on 23 December 2013, The Gathering Ireland 2013 concluded that the initiative had met its "broad-based aim of engaging the people of Ireland to invite ancestral relatives and friends to attend 5,000 Gatherings across the country."¹ The summary of outcomes, however, was couched primarily in commercial rather than cultural terms: The Gathering delivered €170m in revenue and had remained within its €13m budget from the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport. It had been a "bumper year" for Irish tourism, which increased by 7.3%, and visits from the United States – a "key target market" – saw double-digit growth. As the official website declared, the year "showed the world just what we're made of." The Gathering may have epitomised "uniquely Irish pride and passion" and affirmed abiding connections between Ireland and its diasporas, but it also exploited a sustainable brand that could be marketed efficiently and cost-effectively in a period of continuing austerity. Significantly, the success of the project depended on human investment and sought to engage families and communities still counting the financial and social costs of Ireland's uninhibited embrace of impersonal, international exchange.

*

Ruth Barton opens the volume with an exploration of Irish popular entertainment in British working-class culture centred on the *Old Mother Riley* film series, which ran from the late 1930s to the early 1950s. With their mix of comedy, sentimentality and strongly performative elements, the films enjoyed enduring popularity despite attracting critical derision (*Mrs Brown's Boys* is a contemporary parallel). Mother Riley's act offered the pleasures of nostalgia but also subverted dominant middle-class culture. This image of the Irish as at home in working-class Britain then disappeared until the 1980s when, as Barton argues, Irish figures are portrayed as "symptomatic of British working-class authenticity" in films such as Terence Davies's *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988). These often fleeting images disclose the "fugitive knowledge" of how 'a rich history of Irishness' has been articulated in British cinema.

Mervyn Busted reassesses the relatively neglected Protestant Irish migrant experience in Britain by focusing on two personal narratives and the role of the Orange Order. The Liberal MP Mitchell Henry possessed the wealth, education and family connections to settle comparatively easily in Britain and to circulate between the two islands. Not all who arrived had these advantages, however, and for many the Orange Order offered a point of religious identification, a source of charitable support and a means of exerting considerable influence on constitutional politics. Busted shows how a figure such as William Touchstone could use the Order, alongside other

1 <www.thegatheringireland.com/Media-Room.aspx> (15 Jan 2014).