

Hedwig Schwall (ed.)

BOUNDARIES, PASSAGES, TRANSITIONS

ESSAYS IN IRISH LITERATURE, CULTURE AND POLITICS
IN HONOUR OF WERNER HUBER

Irish Studies in Europe

Volume

8

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 **Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier**

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in Honour of Werner Huber /**

Hedwig Schwall (ed.). -

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This volume starts and ends with gratitude. First of all to Werner Huber, founder of ISE which he firmly anchored at Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier who have been extremely helpful, precise and quick in the production of each issue.

Werner was active on all levels in Irish studies: publishing, teaching, spreading culture, networking, or simply helping out wherever needed. He was a truly European bridge builder, and one, I am glad to say, with a soft spot for Leuven. This started in 1978 when he met my predecessor in Irish Studies at an Irish Summer School organized by NUI Galway; the next year the two young Turks went together to the Yeats Summer School where they advocated new approaches. Werner was always keen to open up new horizons so at IASIL in Goteborg I invited him to join EFACIS and ever since he was a pillar of each and a hyphen between both organisations. When invited to be a lecturer at the first European Intensive Programme in Irish Studies in 2000 he generously spent the fortnight in Leuven inspiring the students who came from fifteen universities, some of whom are now professors in Irish Literature across Europe. Ever since Werner was a yearly visitor to our university, giving guest lectures and coming over for EFACIS meetings. In 2010 we were delighted to welcome him at the opening of our Leuven Centre of Irish Studies where he represented the German-speaking countries in a Round Table discussion on Irish Studies in Europe. While he described the situation as a sad one then, it is not so now. When we launched the Irish Itinerary in 2013, Werner was the ideal user of the programme and one of the mainstays of the initiative, making Irish culture visible throughout Central Europe as he coordinated musical, literary and film festivals with colleagues in Prague and in several places in Hungary and Germany. Everyone loved his friendly and efficient approach, as we hear from Ondřej Pilný, Csilla Bertha, Mária Kurdi and many others.

That this volume of ISE is one of the biggest ever reflects Werner's popularity. But ISE 8 also reflects on the success of the 2015 conference on "Boundaries, Passages, Transitions" Chiara Sciarrino organized in Palermo. This was a highlight in the history of EFACIS in terms of numbers, academic standard and style. It was wonderful to experience how Sicilians have been practicing the art of life for over twenty-five centuries, leading to the unforgettable hospitality Chiara and her colleagues showed us. We also thank her and her institution, the University of Palermo, for their financial support of this volume.

Thoughts have to incubate and papers have to be collected and corrected: my sincere thanks to all involved, the inspired contributions of the authors and the conscientious comments by the referees. In its last phase the process was accelerated by two EFACIS interns, Rebecca Jackson and Vera Gonskaya. It is thanks to their quick and thorough processing the volume can be offered to the whole EFACIS community, one year after Werner's passing. May this tribute bid him godspeed in his existence among us.

BOUNDARIES, PASSAGES, TRANSITIONS: AN INTRODUCTION

Hedwig Schwall

This eighth book in the series *Irish Studies in Europe (ISE)*, co-founded by Werner Huber, is dedicated to our dear friend, who died on 28 April 2016, only sixty-three years old. Part of the contributions come from colleagues who were present at his last conference, the Tenth International Conference of EFACIS on *Beyond Ireland: Boundaries, Passages, Transitions* which took place at the University of Palermo from 3-6 June 2015; further contributions were sent in answer to a call for papers to celebrate the work of Werner Huber.

Werner was a staunch EFACIS supporter and Palermo was the last place where he met his friends, Irish scholars together from all parts of Europe, from Tromsø to Malta, Brittany to Cluj, and of course from all Irish universities, North and South. Werner kicked off the Palermo conference together with Seán Crosson with the book launch of ISE 5. The next day Werner gave a talk on “‘Monty Python in the Viennese Woods’: Flann O’Brien in Austria”. This title was characteristic of his interests: film and drama were his favourite genres; sports and Irish culture were favourite topics in his search for identity in (de)mythologizing representations; and his favourite mode was that of humour, especially of the kind evident in the work of Beckett, Flann O’Brien and James Stephens, moving in later years to the grotesque as he found it in Martin McDonagh. Werner also wrote on women writers as diverse as Elizabeth Bowen and Marie Jones, interests which will find their echoes in this book.

Declan Kiberd sets the tone when he opens his contribution “Going Global?” launching the idea that maybe expressions of a national idea are like baby Moses in his basket, which may be rescued by some Pharaoh’s daughter in a different dispensation. Going back to De Valera’s radio broadcast on St Patrick’s Day in 1943, Kiberd draws a sweeping picture of the last century in Ireland, showing how “Unity of Being” has always been out of reach, partly because the powers that be – politics, economics and culture – failed to work together. Worse: between them, politicians, the banks and the Church destroyed the country to a level that there is no obvious value system from which to build it up again, hence the need for a rescuing outsider. While the ecclesiocracy destroyed itself by the numberless instances of child abuse – “the ultimate betrayal of trust” – economics did not help the country either: 150 years after the Famine, Ireland moved to another disastrous monoculture, that of houses. Further, as lawyers started to outnumber priests the country opened itself up to “predatory kinds of capitalism”.¹ Yet according to Kiberd, rescue may come, as it has happened in the past, from culture, from artists and writers. These are responsible for the “worlding” of Irish culture while exploring alterity, as either they or their work moved abroad

1 Claire Kilroy’s modern allegory, *The Devil I Know* (2012), is a hilariously striking satire on the dark globalized aspect of the Celtic Tiger years.

and back.² This influx of fresh value systems may contribute to a kind of “considered lay theology”, a “civic republicanism” – one in which, one hopes, women writers will be prominent. As Kiberd himself indicates, the Abbey Theatre has been criticized for overlooking women playwrights. We were delighted to welcome contributions on Nancy Harris and (further afield) on Marie Jones and Elizabeth Bowen; and while women writers are not in a majority in this collection, female contributors are.

In good EFACIS fashion not all articles focus on a literary questioning of boundaries: there is also the approach of political sciences and sociology. In the case of Katherine Side’s scrutiny of the *Scheme for the Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings (SPED)* this leads to the conclusion that, rather than integrating and pacifying, the scheme divided and polarized. People seeking assistance had to face two kinds of problems: on the one hand they were besieged by paramilitary organizations, on the other they had to endure a long and complicated application process in which the RUC was involved, which did not guarantee objective assessments. About today’s situation Side observes three things: first, the *SPED* administrators accept that the scheme exacerbated community-segregated housing; second, anno 2017 there is still no comprehensive examination of loyalist and paramilitary involvement in housing issues in Northern Ireland; and third, the scheme which had mainly aimed at curtailing emigration ended up “bolstering state securitization”, which led to closing off perspectives rather than opening them up. The effects of conflict-instigated housing displacement are now visible in its peace walls and public art displays, as well as in the elevated highways which connect the industrial growth poles implanted on Belfast’s periphery, but which bypassed or destroyed mixed-community neighbourhoods.

While Side focuses on the maintenance of physical and social boundaries in Northern Ireland, with focus on Belfast, that same city’s boundaries are dematerialized in Stefanie Lehner’s analysis of Stewart Parker’s *Northern Star* and *Pentecost*, the plays which start and end his triptych *Plays for Ireland*. The fact that each of Parker’s plays are ghost-haunted indicates that boundaries are not simply physical limits – they are also emotional, charged by experiences of people long dead, which keep vibrating, creating a cityscape still pulsated by its past. Like Kiberd, Parker believes that politicians, “visionless almost to a man” must be rescued by artists who “construct a working model of wholeness by means of which this society can begin to hold up its head in the world.” Here, boundaries are deconstructed in different ways. First there is the symbol of the liminal setting: the first play takes place in a semi-ruined cottage on Cave Hill where Belfast is said to have originated, the other in the kitchen of the last inhabited house between the sectarian lines in East Belfast. Second there is the meta-theatrical aspect: in one performance, the action is set in the wings of the theatre. A third way of questioning boundaries is in the dialogue, like when one of Parker’s protagonists, the leader of the United Irishmen at the end of the

2 For detailed illustrations see the excellent book *Literary visions of multicultural Ireland: the immigrant in contemporary Irish literature*. Ed. Pilar Villar-Argáiz. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2014.