

Ondřej Pilný, Radvan Markus, Daniela Theinová, James Little (eds.)

IRELAND: INTERFACES AND DIALOGUES

Irish Studies in Europe

Volume

11

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**IRELAND:
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IRISH STUDIES IN EUROPE

Irish Studies in Europe is a series of peer-reviewed academic publications in Irish Studies. The series aims to publish new research from within the humanities and social sciences on all aspects of the history, society and culture of Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the Irish diaspora. The programme of the series is a deliberate reflection of the objectives of the *European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies (EFACIS)*, under whose aegis it is published.

The “European” dimension suggested by the series’ title is an indication of a prioritized, but by no means exclusive, concentration on European perspectives on Irish Studies. With such an “etic” approach the publications in this series contribute to the progress of Irish Studies by providing a special viewpoint on Irish history, society, literature and culture. The series also documents the vitality and wide variety of European traditions of Irish Studies as an inter-, trans- and multi-disciplinary field of research.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	ix
<i>James Little</i> (Charles University, Prague)	
INTRODUCTION	1
TRANSNATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL INTERACTIONS	
<i>Gavan Titley</i> (Maynooth University / Swedish School of Social Science, University of Helsinki)	
THE STRANGE LIFE OF FREE SPEECH TODAY: A TRANSNATIONAL REFLECTION ON NATIONALISM, RACISM, AND NOISE	9
<i>Marion Bourdeau</i> (Jean Moulin – Lyon 3 University)	
TRANSCULTURAL DIALOGUE THROUGH CONNECTION: STORYTELLING AS A HOPEFUL INTERFACE IN COLUM McCANN'S <i>APEIROGON</i>	23
<i>Jochen Achilles</i> (University of Würzburg)	
SYNGE'S <i>PLAYBOY</i> AS INTERCULTURAL CONTACT ZONE: THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE WESTERN WORLD	35
DIALOGUES WITH THE PAST: MEMORY, RECOVERY, AND COMMEMORATION	
<i>Vojtěch Halama</i> (Charles University, Prague)	
FROM DIRECTOR TO COORDINATOR: THE IRISH STATE AND THE OFFICIAL COMMEMORATION OF THE EASTER RISING IN 1966 AND 2016	53
<i>Susan Curley Meyer</i> (University College Dublin)	
WOMEN, WAR, AND WEARABLE HISTORY: WINIFRED CARNEY, GRACE GIFFORD-PLUNKETT, AND A CLASSICALLY INSPIRED CAMEO BROOCH	65
<i>Mary McAuliffe</i> (University College Dublin)	
A "WOMAN'S DOOM": CLASS AND GENDERED VIOLENCE DURING THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE	83

<i>Rachel Andrews</i> (University of Galway)	
DIGITAL WITNESSING AS MEMORY WORK: THE CASE OF THE BESSBOROUGH PLANNING HEARING	97
<i>Michael Lydon</i> (University of Galway)	
A POPULAR CENTENARY: IRISH POPULAR MUSIC'S RE-INTERPRETATION OF THE 1916 RISING	113
<i>Anna Falkenau</i> (University of Galway)	
INTERSECTIONS, CONFLUENCE, AND EMBODIMENT OF IRISH TRADITIONAL AND FOLK MUSIC REVIVALS: GALWAY, 1961-1981	125
<i>Seán Crosson</i> (University of Galway)	
ROUNDTABLE ON IRISH DOCUMENTARY CINEMA WITH ALAN GILSENAN, GILLIAN MARSH, AND PAT COLLINS	145
<i>Clare Wallace</i> (Charles University, Prague)	
ART-MAKING, ACTIVISM, AND COLLABORATION: PLENARY CONVERSATION WITH LIAN BELL AND MAEVE STONE	161
HAUNTINGS AND TRAUMAS: COMMUNITY, CLASS, AND GENDER	
<i>Laoighseach Ní Choistealbha</i> (University of Galway)	
"I'M THEIR GHOST": TRAUMA, RADIANCE, AND THE MACABRE IN ANTHONY GLAVIN'S "LIVING IN HIROSHIMA"	185
<i>Radvan Markus</i> (Charles University, Prague)	
THE EPIDEMIC AND THE CARNIVALESQUE: Ó CADHAIN'S UNPUBLISHED PLAY <i>TYPHUS</i>	201
<i>Alessandra Boller</i> (University of Siegen)	
"TIES CONSTITUTE WHAT WE ARE": HAUNTED GENDER AND CLASS IDENTITIES IN POST-CELTIC TIGER NARRATIVES OF COMMUNITY	211
<i>Jessica Bundschuh</i> (University of Stuttgart)	
POST-AGREEMENT BORDER INFRINGEMENTS AND LISTICLE FRAMING IN MICHELLE GALLEN'S <i>BIG GIRL, SMALL TOWN</i>	231
LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS	243

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INTRODUCTION

James Little

When, in March 2020, we chose the theme of “Interfaces and Dialogues” for the annual conference of the European Federation of Associations and Centres of Irish Studies (EFACIS), we had little expectation that our primary conference interface would be the computer screen, and that our dialogues would take place over Zoom. Over two years later, as we write the introduction to the collection arising out of that conference (which eventually took place, fully online, in September 2021), the concept of interface has undergone enormous change in our daily lives due to the Covid-19 pandemic, while the role of dialogue has become ever more important in a public sphere increasingly shaped by digital media platforms.¹

It is in the context of such online platforms that our collection opens, as part of a section entitled “Transnational and Intercultural Interactions”. Gavan Titley provides a “transnational reflection” on “the strange life of free speech” in contemporary society, with particular attention given to “the reproduction and contestation of forms of racism in Europe”. Central to Titley’s essay is an analysis of the incessant circulation of far-right ideas in an online media environment which is inherently unstable. In this context, Titley contends that “the mission of the university includes discriminating between ideas, and this involves closure, actively neglecting those which have been discredited or disproven”. He concludes by analyzing the particularity of the Irish public sphere, where a “more sustained mobilization” of the transnational far-right “repertoire” remains a dangerous potential, but warning at the same time about the dangers of proceeding from specific case studies of free-speech controversies to abstract generalizations on “freedom of speech”.

Moving from how Ireland functions within a global media interface to Irishness itself as “a favourable interface to open a dialogue about and with conflict zones”, Marion Bourdeau’s contribution analyzes Colum McCann’s representation of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in his novel *Apeirogon* (2020). The heart of Bourdeau’s analysis is an ethical question about the comparison of conflicts in Ireland and the Middle East: “Is the novel facilitating or forcing intersubjectivity and transculturalism? Is it celebrating differences while underscoring points of connection or encouraging the erasure of cultural diversity by comparing different situations and concluding that they are the same?” She suggests that the ethics at work in McCann’s writing are dependent on a balance of dialogues that unbalance his reader, and that his “aesthetic and ethical project revolves around connection”.

1 Recordings of the roundtable discussions, poetry reading, and concert which formed part of the conference are available online on the website of the Centre for Irish Studies, Charles University; see <<https://irish.ff.cuni.cz/en/2021/06/30/efacis-2021-conference-interfaces-and-dialogues/>>.

For his part, Jochen Achilles treats a single performance text, J.M. Synge's *Playboy of the Western World* (1907), as an interface for intercultural interactions. Contending that "transnationalism and multiculturalism have come to replace the postcolonial paradigm" long seen as the dominant frame for Irish studies, Achilles views three adaptations of Synge's play as "expressions of changes in the cultural imaginary": Mustapha Matura's *The Playboy of the West Indies* (1984); Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle's co-authored version of *The Playboy* (2007); and an adaptation by Pan Pan Theatre and the Beijing Oriental Pioneer Theatre (2006). Drawing on Philomena Mullen's image for her lived experience of being "simultaneously Irish and not Irish", Achilles contends that such intercultural adaptations "open up opportunities for more and different experiments with postnational specificities".

As we approach the conclusions of Decades of Centenaries on both sides of the Irish border, focus naturally turns towards "Dialogues with the Past", the rubric for the second section of our collection. Vojtěch Halama sets state commemorative practices in the Republic of Ireland within an international context of "a disintegration of national metanarratives". Within this broader context, Halama homes in on 1966 and 2016, key dates for official commemoration of the 1916 Rising. Between these two commemorations, Halama argues, "the underlying message switched from promoting unity to embracing diversity". Drawing on a series of state archival records and public commemoration practices, Halama maps the specificities of state commemoration as the state changed role from "director" to "coordinator".

While Halama's focus is on official commemoration, Susan Curley Meyer examines a personal dialogue between two participants in the 1916 Rising, focusing on a brooch gifted by Winifred Carney to Grace Gifford-Plunkett. Curley Meyer contextualizes this exchange within the long history of brooch-wearing, as well as analyzing the material contexts in which the Carney-Gifford brooch was made and the symbolic resonances of its classical design. In doing so, she demonstrates "the advantages of adopting multidisciplinary methodologies when attempting to add to established historiographies which consider women, war, and national identity", thus treating disciplinary boundaries themselves as interfaces.

Also drawing on archival sources, Mary McAuliffe focuses on the intimidation of and violence towards women by the Irish Republican Army during the War of Independence. This included physical beatings, threats to their homes and families, and "bobbing" – the forced cropping of hair – on suspicion of having relationships with Royal Irish Constabulary members. McAuliffe claims that such attacks not only attempted to fix the assaulted women in places of social exclusion, but also acted as a reinforcement of the IRA's own image as protectors of their community. McAuliffe focuses on barrack servants, who were typically from the local community, and whose "low-paid, but steady and secure income" was rendered extremely precarious by such violent interventions. These stories "fit within the broader narratives of female victimization, coercion, and shaming during this revolutionary period".