

Scott Brewster and Werner Huber (eds.)

IRELAND:
ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES

Irish Studies in Europe

Edited by

Werner Huber, Catherine Mignant, Hedwig Schwall

Volume

5

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**IRELAND:
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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).

forms of association, as a platform from which to forge a close relationship with the Conservative party. These different examples indicate the substantial visibility and involvement in British public life of Protestant Irish migrants.

Donatella Abbate Badin investigates the ways in which Italy has offered complex and often distorting mirrors in which Irish writers can contemplate themselves. Badin demonstrates how Irish accounts of travel in Italy convey “hetero- and auto-images alike.” In the early nineteenth century the gaze of Grand Tourists such as Lady Morgan and Thomas Moore was conditioned by Ireland’s colonial status. Contrastingly, post-independence voyagers like Elizabeth Bowen, Sean O’Faolain, and Colm Tóibín have striven to see Italy in all its diversity, but each encounter ends up as an exercise in self-fashioning.

Michelle Paull reconsiders Sean O’Casey’s one act play, *Time To Go* (1951), treating it as a departure from his previous theatrical practice and as a transitional moment in his political thought. Its initial unpopularity may be partly explained by its departure from realist techniques, but also because the post-war audience misunderstood O’Casey’s fleeting vision of a transformed economic system. O’Casey’s play can be read as an attack on the isolationism of De Valera, but Paull also sees it as uncannily prescient for contemporary Ireland in its critique of capitalist models of exchange and “the false logic of the market economy.”

Brigitte Bastiat analyses four plays by Owen McCafferty (*The Waiting List*, *Mojo Mickybo*, *Closing Time*, and *The Absence of Women*) that portray the dislocation, entrapment and frustrated longing for elsewhere of protagonists in Belfast during and after the Troubles. Set amidst the violence of the 1970s and 1980s or in a post-conflict city in which sectarian tensions and conservative attitudes remain, the plays revolve around immobilised and alienated characters for whom neither a consoling return to, or escape from, Belfast appears possible. As Bastiat argues, these characters dream of departure, but never arrive anywhere.

EFACIS 8 broke new ground by hosting a plenary panel on the Visual Arts in Northern Ireland, organised by the Canadian photographic artist Sylvia Borda. She discusses her CHURCHES IN-NI project, which portrays, in the form of a series of ceramic plates, faith buildings from the 1950s and 1960s that subscribe to modernist design principles and eschew overt denominational signifiers, thus defying “their own religious roots or purpose.” Borda’s project at once reveals Northern Ireland’s unchronicled modernist architectural past and casts an ironic glance at the imagery that has defined cultural identity in the North. In doing so, her work suggests the possibilities of fresh perspective seemingly denied in McCafferty’s drama.

Hedda Friberg-Harnesk follows the transit in Anne Enright’s fiction between Ireland and America, a movement which enables border-crossings and encounters with elsewhere. Friberg-Harnesk utilises the work of Salman Rushdie, Michael Cronin, and Susan Bassnett on cultural translation and global travel to show how Enright high-

lights the ethical necessity of the “thoughtful negotiation” of such crossings, even if her travellers translate the complexity of the Other with varying degrees of sensitivity and insight.

Eoin Flannery similarly places Irish fiction into global circulation, discussing Colum McCann’s prize-winning *Let the Great World Spin* (2009), a novel that centres its oblique response to 9/11 on Irish characters and brings questions of Ireland and Irishness into a productive dialogue with the transnational networks of power symbolised by the World Trade Centre. The novel is shadowed by the devastating impact of 9/11 and does not minimise the suffering of its victims, but it refuses to be overwhelmed by the event. McCann braids together diverse narratives and time-frames into a story of “grace and hopeful anticipation,” exemplified by the novel’s treatment of Philip Petit’s tightrope walk between the Twin Towers in 1974.

Claudia Luppino surveys the fiction of John McGahern, Colm Tóibín, and Clare Keegan from 1990 to 2010, reading the mobility and instability of individual characters as symptomatic of Ireland’s coming to terms with its historical legacies. The novels and short stories under discussion chart two decades that veered from surging confidence to pessimism about the future and grew introspective about the state-building past. These tensions and transitions are registered in the complex shifts between different temporal and spatial dimensions in each author’s work.

The volume concludes, fittingly in light of the earlier discussion of *The Gathering*, with Anne Groutel’s assessment of the role of diaspora business elites in shaping Ireland’s economic affairs in the wake of financial crisis, primarily through the Irish Global Economic Forum. In recent years, diaspora elites have offered advice and qualified support for the Irish Government, identifying business opportunities, but also emphasising the need to promote indigenous entrepreneurship and highlighting political failures in economic strategy. The note of scepticism was dramatised in 2012 by the actor Gabriel Byrne’s decision to step down as cultural ambassador to the US; in doing so, he denounced *The Gathering 2013* as a “sham” designed to “shake down” Irish Americans. As Groutel concludes, the diaspora elites are ready to help Ireland’s economic recovery, but expect the Irish government to be a transparent partner, to acknowledge its responsibility for the crisis, and to show a ‘commitment to act.’