imagining ireland
VOLUME 67

John Lynch and Katherina Dodou (eds)

# THE LEAVING OF IRELAND

## MIGRATION AND BELONGING IN IRISH LITERATURE AND FILM

John Lynch and Katherina Dodou (eds)

# The Leaving of Ireland

## Migration and Belonging in Irish Literature and Film

PETER LANG
Oxford • Bern • Berlin • Bruxelles • Frankfurt am Main • New York • Wien

Bibliographic information published by Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek.
Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available on the Internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2015948443

ISSN 1662-9094
ISBN 978-3-0343-1896-9 (print)
ISBN 978-3-0353-0751-1 (eBook)

Cover image © Rosita Gilsenan


Hochfeldstrasse 32, CH-3012 Bern, Switzerland
info@peterlang.com, www.peterlang.com, www.peterlang.net



This publication has been peer reviewed.

Printed in Germany

# Dedication

This volume of scholarly essays was originally planned as the academic portion of a Festschrift in honour of Irene Gilsenan Nordin, Professor of English Literature at Dalarna University in Sweden, upon the occasion of her retirement in December 2014. For decades, Irene has excelled at the elements that compose a remarkable academic career in literary studies: she is a pioneering and respected scholar, a wonderful teacher who has effectively educated and inspired hundreds of literature students, and a generous colleague whose sage advice is sought by seasoned and budding scholars alike. During her twenty-one years at Dalarna, Irene has been a driving force in creating a vibrant scholarly milieu, so vital for a small university, and has, through her leadership, teaching and collegiality, fostered and maintained excellent scholarly values and critical inquiry. Throughout this time, Irene has established Dalarna University as a significant centre for Irish studies. She has been the founder and head of DUCIS, the Dalarna University Centre for Irish Studies, and the creator and coordinator of the successful one-year MA Programme in Irish Literature at Dalarna. Her long-standing dedication to the development of the study of Irish literature, and poetry in particular, is paired with her involvement as board member, president and repeated conference organizer and host of the Nordic Irish Studies Network and as co-founder and literary editor of *Nordic Journal for Irish Studies* (2002–2013), which under her editorship in 2012 was classed as a Grade 1 journal on the European Reference Index for the Humanities. Irene's contributions also span her involvement in DUCAS, the Dalarna University Centre for African Studies, and her launching, and running, the English Department's one-year MA Programmes in African Literature and in English-Speaking Literature, through her participation in organizing three LLP Erasmus Intensive Programmes on the topic of Migration and Narration (2010–2012), to her leadership of the research group Literature, Identity, Transculturality (LIT) at Dalarna University, and her current

presidency of SWESSE, the Swedish Society for the Study of English. These merits testify to Irene's dedication to the profession and to the breadth of her scholarly interests, but they say little of her as a colleague, a mentor and a leader. Irene takes genuine and spontaneous pleasure in helping promising scholars, and spurring them on to greater things. Such generosity is natural to Irene; it is part of her search for kindred intellectual spirits that has spawned deep friendships and long-running discursive engagements all over the world. The contributors to this volume make up only a small proportion of them. We hope this medley of contributions on the recurring themes of migration and belonging in Irene's research will serve as a tribute to her.

The Festschrift was made possible through the financial support of the research profile Culture, Identity and Representations (KIG) at Dalarna University.

# Contents

# Introduction

> Modernity exists in the form of a desire to wipe out whatever came earlier in the hope of reaching at last a point that could be called a true present, a point of origin that marks a new departure. This combined interplay of a deliberate forgetting with an action that is also a new origin reaches the full power of the idea of modernity.
>
> — PAUL DE MAN, 'Literary History and Literary Modernity', 388–9

The title of this collection, *The Leaving of Ireland*, refers to the idea of departure as both a physical movement and a temporal category that points to the quite different country that exists today in contrast to the Ireland of the twentieth century. A number of vectors of social change, from exposure of Church abuse scandals to globalization and economic turmoil, have altered the landscape of Ireland forever. However, this does not merely supplant what went before in a linear developmental process. What such a moment offers is an opportunity to reconsider the very terms by which the dominant narrative of Irish identity has asserted and maintained itself and it should not be, as Paul de Man pointedly argues, simply another moment of 'forgetting' that functions to generate another point of origin. One mythology should not be replaced by another but instead open a space for a critical reflection on the process of writing itself.

Any act of leaving, a flight, evokes the spectre of a return, and it is perhaps accurate to characterize the link between the essays in this collection as being one concerned with exploring something of the effects of the 'other' place – often private and replete with affiliations – that is actually intrinsic to the appearance of the public and established notion of Irish identity in literature and film. What appears within the discourse of Irishness today is now a range of often conflicting subjectivities that disturb not just the singularizing purpose of identity but also the regime of temporality that attempts to fix things in the past as history, the modernity predicated on

forgetting as described by de Man. What has returned is not just many of those who migrated away in the latter part of the twentieth century but also the experience of dislocation they encountered as they did so and which now becomes the new experience for those who had stayed behind.[1] This brings with it a recognition that home is not necessarily in the one place but often it is in more than one and that this moving between locations itself generates multiple perspectives rather than the singular. These new realities produced in this movement have to be accommodated, reluctantly or otherwise.

In this way, the essays in this collection are part of a wider response to the significant changes that Irish society and its sense of identity and self-presence have undergone in the last few decades. It has become commonplace to note that the period since the rise of the Celtic Tiger up to the present moment has meant rapid and extreme transformations of the Irish social, economic and physical landscape.

The significance of new migratory patterns to and from Ireland in the last twenty years and the public examinations in this period of certain mythologies of Irishness have indeed been subject to critical appraisal. However, the essays here offer a fleshing-out with regard to the ways in which Irish literature and film have sought to represent and negotiate these challenges. The critical perspective afforded by our present moment – comprising the ability to look back with critical distance upon the processes which made visible (past) traumas and made possible early attempts at working through these – enables us to reflect differently on the impact of those processes on the understanding of key elements of Irish identities and experiences. This book aims to offer a new understanding of the literary engagement with those changes by hinging its explorations on the experiences and processes of migration and belonging. The interactions between the cultural forms and literary and filmic products examined

1 As Fintan O'Toole writes: 'Put simply, between 1990 and 2007, Ireland experienced as newness and postmodernity what Irish people as emigrants had experienced as modernity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' (ix). In Maher, Eamon, ed., *Cultural Perspectives on Globalisation and Ireland* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009).

in the included essays help shine a light on how Irish writers and others have engaged with experiences of migration, displacement, exclusion and belonging but also with changing notions of national identity.

The fourteen essays in the volume revisit crucial constituents of Irish history and self-perception at the micro-level, with consideration of the representation of individual experiences of migration – of living in a new context, of being tethered by emotional ties to home – and likewise of forms of individual identification and the possibility of defining a place and a sense of belonging, as well as at the macro-level, with regard to the treatment of larger politico-historical transformations, national affiliations, and changed social and geographical landscapes.

The chapters range across diverse material and authors, but the book is organized around three themes that map out key concerns for the collection: 'History, Memory, Identity'; 'Mobility, Identity, Social Change'; 'Place, Home, Elsewhere'. Essays in the first section deal with different emotional legacies of Irish society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The starting point is the impact of the Great Famine and its unique position as a primal scene of Irish suffering and displacement. Heidi Hansson's opening chapter examines the work of Emily Lawless in relation to the physical traces of the Famine that endured and the visible traces on the landscape. By reading through the experience of trauma and its disruptions of place and time, what is foregrounded is the author's lack of sentiment in typical literary characterization, instead shifting the narrative to a depersonalized landscape that bears the scars of this catastrophe. There is a geological or ecological time at work that transcends the human. Similarly, Katherina Dodou looks at a contemporary Irish author, Joseph O'Connor, and his novelistic treatment of the themes of Irish memory and the Famine. Here, the literary strategy of displacing the mediation of the Famine primarily through an American narrator and other documentary material in a self-reflective style shifts the experience from an account of misery and suffering that might uncritically support a simplistic notion of collective memory and, rather, points to what O'Connor describes as an authentic memory. In this way there is recognition of the mobile nature, or travelling, as Dodou describes it, of the symbolism mobilized in different orientations on the Famine, where the movement and migration of people replicate the

movement of the 'real' meaning in literary and political discourse. A different negotiation of trauma is the subject of the chapter by Malin Lidström Brock, that of Ireland's mother-and-baby homes and the portrayal in the generally well-received film *Philomena*, based on the account by the British journalist Martin Sixsmith of Philomena Lee's life and search for her son, who had been given up to an American couple for adoption under coercive circumstances. This has long been a part of Irish life that was silenced within official discourse just as the women themselves were silenced under a blanket of shame and denial within a form of patriarchal nationalism. Cultural representations such as film will of course tend towards certain structures of storytelling that reveal in dramatic form the deep emotional wounds inflicted on the survivors yet are often challenged by an official discourse precisely on those terms as shallow and untrustworthy. This draws attention to other conflicts and paradoxes that can operate when there are attempts to give a voice to the silenced or marginalized, yet such efforts have begun a process of forcing a re-evaluation of Ireland's narratives of nationhood through the twentieth century. In a similar vein, Mats Tegmark examines the reactions to Frank McCourt's memoir *Angela's Ashes*. Shifting between the positions of an Irish reader and an American one, the chapter assesses whether what Foucault calls the 'regime of truth' in operation is largely an American-inspired one that make the memoir expressive of certain values of individualism and pluralism that were key reasons for the book achieving the level of success it did. The final chapter in this section links, in many ways, with some of the themes discussed so far. Here, two sisters are interviewed by John Lynch and recount details of their early lives as women religious and their subsequent experiences of migrating to London in the 1960s. As an account of oral history, this is at least partly an attempt to push the idea of giving voice to marginalized subjects to its limit. The pseudonymous interviewees provide fascinating details of what it was like to live in that place during this period and to occupy an identity that was often problematic and subject to hostile attitudes as the Irish conflict extended to the British capital. As both sisters now reside once more in Ireland, their journey and return express an important aspect of Irish life as it once was and will perhaps never be again.

The second section is entitled 'Mobility, Identity, Social Change'. These interlinking terms operate to generate a series that passes through something of the expanded sense of being in Ireland that characterized the years of the 1990s' economic boom, with its challenge to the domestic monoculture driven by the forces of internationalization and globalization. Michaela Schrage-Früh considers two novels that address something of this experience of loss of certainty in this period, where the promises of consumerism and prosperity are not matched by a tolerance or recognition of the intrinsic otherness of Irishness itself. In Barry McCrea's *The First Verse* and Sean O'Reilly's *The Swing of Things*, we see different manifestations of a character's sense of being an outsider in Dublin city. In different ways, both novels, according to Schrage-Früh, point to the need to disrupt the homogeneity of what it is to be considered Irish to allow for a true intercultural encounter. Robert Brazeau considers the work of J. M. Synge through the concept of mobility as it derives from a notion of geomodernism, that is, the foregrounding of place in any theorization of modernity, even as it is usually described in globalizing terms. Close readings of key works of Synge explore how the codes of familism and gender are often problematized by the author in relation to the emergent nation state. Eóin Flannery, on the other hand, also explores the idea of mobility but directs his attention to Colum McCann's novel *Zoli* and its focus on the marginalized identity of the Roma and the cultural incommensurability of the travelling communities of Europe, something evident in the precarious status of Irish Travellers. A detailed reading of the novel highlights its themes of movement and the difference at the heart of the narrative. What can be seen in the autobiographies of Liam O'Flaherty, according to Hedda Friberg-Harnesk in her chapter, is evidence of the author as a kind of 'identity migrant', where the necessity of adapting to the circumstances of a new environment sees a sort of doubling in which origin and adopted world form a hybrid 'innerscape'. Through his travels and various engagements with disparate ideologies and political systems, Friberg-Harnesk maps out the tensions and contradictions evident in his ongoing sense of subjectivity. The final chapter in this section sees Britta Olinder examine the novels of Deirdre Madden and the idea of travelling as a third term between exile and migration. In many ways this term leaks

into the spaces between the other more singular definitions and points to what Olinder usefully describes as the existential tension between belonging and being in the world, located somewhere between home and place.

The last section, under the heading of 'Place, Home, Elsewhere', orientates itself around the idea of the inherent plasticity of representation, where even the notion of a language having a home, with all its connotations of security, is suspect. In this context the deconstruction of the organic unity inherent to Romanticism by Paul de Man returns us to the notion of allegory and its refusal of a nostalgia for its own origin and instead a foregrounding of its essential ambivalence. In her chapter on the poetry of Paul Muldoon and Sinéad Morrissey, Anne Karhio considers how the authors mobilize a kind of referential switching between linguistic and photographic registers in certain poems to make visible something of the process of framing and selection that are intrinsic to the writing process. Rather than seek to offer an authority grounded on the seamless vision of the author, they present a self-conscious reflection on the unreliability of language and its relation to place. In his discussion of the poetry of Paul Muldoon, Ruben Moi examines the notion of 'elsewheres' as offering insights into the migration experience that generates a sense of being 'betwixt and between' cultures, times and places. Focusing on Belfast, the chapter evaluates the ways in which cities facilitate encounters with the other and in this way lead to a sense of the multiplicities, or indeed, multiple-cities, existing and perhaps conflicting within that place. In a similar way, Muldoon as a poet operates through the other times of affiliated poets such as Larkin, MacNeice, Heaney and Carson. More recently, the financial crisis of 2008 has had a profound effect on the self-perception of Ireland as its belief in the endurance of the new prosperity gave way to fears of the return of emigration and generations lost to economic misery. Eugene O'Brien, in his chapter, considers the legal and epistemological foundations of the emergent Irish society and how they can shed light on the contemporary interpretations of the crisis from within the discursive position of the state. Here, the pragmatics of maintaining the relationship between the state and the financial sector mean that the language of legal judgement always falls on the side that favours those interests under the misnomer of Irish law. This further extends into the social and political

class system; certain cases he examines reveal this to be equally outside the boundaries of the punishable. The notion of an Irish crime seems predicated on foundational structures of the nation that set limits to any possibility of justice as the terms of judgement are skewed in favour of dominant classes in an impoverished public sphere. In the final chapter of the book, Charles Armstrong looks at W. B. Yeats's *Autobiographies* and connects certain ideas of dislocation and homelessness with the 'experimental life' of the Bohemian poet. The potential for the experience of something new to emerge from a truly open sense of living is one that does not follow a previous script but rather endeavours to follow the example of the Nietzschean knowledge-seeker with all its attendant risks. Here the self-transformation of the poet is echoed in the transformative function of poetry on language, where both wander from the familiar and search out the exotic, whilst paradoxically grounding themselves ultimately in the desire for a settled existence.

History, Memory, Identity