

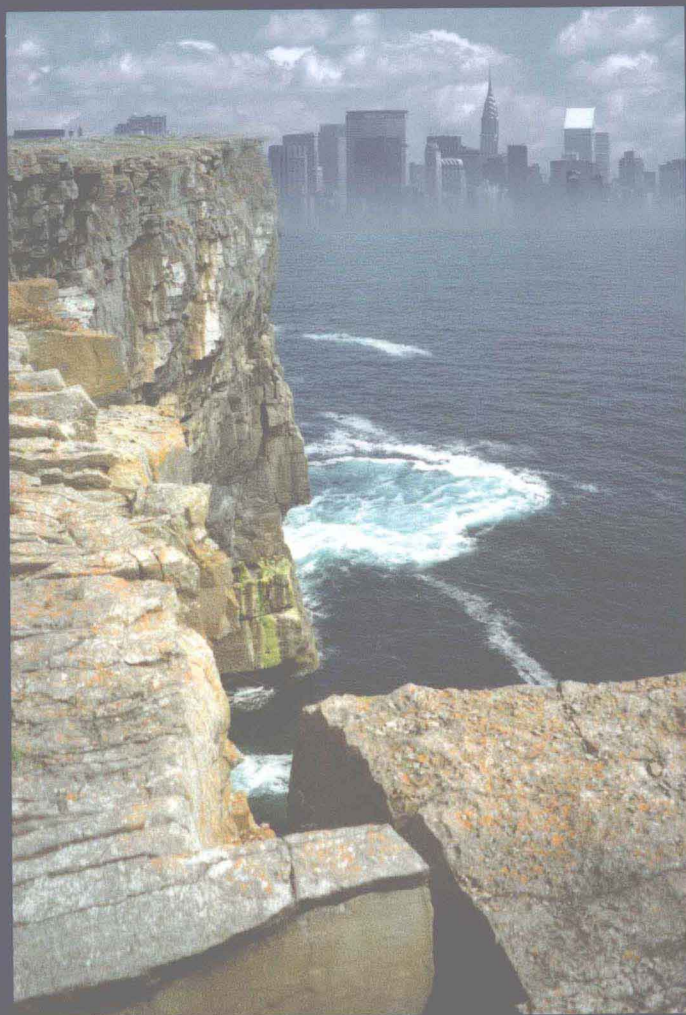
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VOLUME 42

Hedda Friberg-Harnesk, Gerald Porter and
Joakim Wrethed (eds)

BEYOND IRELAND

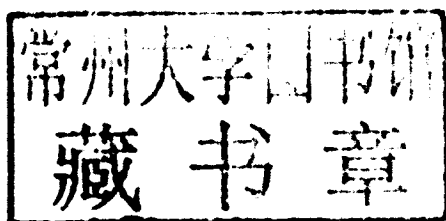
ENCOUNTERS ACROSS CULTURES



Hedda Friberg-Harnesk, Gerald Porter
and Joakim Wrethed (eds)

Beyond Ireland

Encounters Across Cultures



PETER LANG

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Beyond Ireland

Reimagining Ireland

Volume 42

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Introduction

In the context of modern Ireland it has become increasingly unsustainable to talk about absolutes like tradition and authenticity. The title of this collection is to be read metaphorically, not geographically: it does not exclude intra-Irish subjects. It is not intended to suggest another study of the Irish diaspora or a celebration of multiculturalism – although aspects of these are naturally to be found here – but rather to suggest the creative frictions and fictions that result from the dissolving of old loyalties, moving beyond nationalism towards the culturally diverse, beyond a bilingual Ireland to a polyvocal one, beyond the imagined community towards a virtual one, beyond a territorial Ireland to an ex-centric one. To a large extent, therefore, this is a volume of outsiders, from Colm Tóibín's deliberate resistance to establishment norms, to Paul Muldoon saturating himself in Jewish discourse, to John Banville's extensions of the parameters of Irishness, and to the lass of Aughrim finding a new role through her exclusion from the domestic hearth.

Beyond nationalism towards the culturally diverse

One of the prime tasks of any study that professes to go 'beyond Ireland' is, of course, to examine the constructed and contested idea of nation itself, and many of the essays here historicize the nature of that concept. Such notions are rooted in the legacy of colonialism, which Ronald Paul examines in his study of Engels' uncompleted history of Ireland. The critic and essayist Chris Arthur, whose 'Irish Orientalism' is studied here by Billy Gray, has suggested that it was the Province's reluctance to adopt a pluralistic and inclusive view of history that led to the obdurate inflexibility

and blinkered mind-set of the Ulster psyche. He questions the validity of pledging allegiance to disfiguring tribal totems, which serve only to accentuate rigid and endemic simplifications. Charles Armstrong shows how, like Arthur, poets such as Seamus Heaney, John O'Donnell and many others have tried to restore the integrity of body, mind and spirit by looking to Japan and Eastern systems of thought. In addition to such endeavours to reach new intellectual territories beyond Ireland, there are of course also global forces that demand cultural re-definitions and transformations. To explore issues of change and globalization, Åke Persson sheds light on the local as a vital component of a modern and multi-cultural Ireland by using images and concepts of wine-making, especially, perhaps, the concept of *terroir*, which in itself is a French import.

In the closing section, 'Borders and Cross-Cultural Encounters,' Ronald Paul foregrounds the way that in Frederick Engels' day the voice of the Protestant Ascendancy had another agenda which chimed in with English aspirations in Ireland: the relentless effect, and purpose, of figures like Tennyson, then the English Poet Laureate, writing of 'the blind hysterics of the Celt' was deeply political, setting British trade unionists against their Irish counterparts over Home Rule.¹ History became a discursive strategy to belittle the level of resistance and conceal the historical common cause between the Irish and the English working class.

Drawing on the work of Homi Bhabha and others, Carmen Zamorano Llena highlights the way that, instead of being deconstructed, national and cultural identities have reappeared in a diminutive form in relation to groups which are emerging, not from a position of cultural strength and legitimacy, but from exile, migration and marginalization. Many writers, like Roddy Doyle, have featured individuals from such groups, protagonists who have not done well out of globalization or the restructuring of Irish society of the past twenty years, and who do not identify with mainstream images of Ireland. This leads to conflict, particularly in the form of contested space: Martin Shaw, writing of some residents of a village attempting to expel

1 *In Memoriam* (1850), lyric 109. Alfred Tennyson, *Poems and Plays* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 259.

other residents with an equal claim, a group of Travellers, connects this to the politics of recognition, in which the Other resists the discourse of assimilation and instead demands a measure of dignity and worth which goes beyond images of dirt and rubbish. Ultimately this also deconstructs the concept of 'multiculturalism' itself, since it implies discrete social entities as homogeneous as the nationalist stereotype which they challenge, rather than affirming the ways of life (and their differences) that exist in modern Ireland.

Beyond the imagined community towards a historicized one

Nationalism looks back to a romantic myth of origin, 'an epoch preceding oppression and exploitation' in the words of Slavoj Žižek,² adding that such a view invites its antithesis, the myth of barbarism. In place of such reductionism, the writers here stress the significance of quite small events in producing new forms of consciousness. Lene Yding Pedersen emphasizes that literature too has a history, involving conventions for representing cultures such as the Roma. Formerly such representations were often remote from actual experience, dealing with images of 'gypsiness' within a discursive rather than an empirical frame. Billy Gray discusses the still-growing phenomenon of Irish Orientalism, which Georgia O'Keefe refers to as 'the faraway nearby'.³ It has assumed a distinct identity, which has had the promotion of tolerance and cultural understanding as its central thematic concern, and a resistance to a simplistic mind-and-matter dichotomy.

Several of the contributions draw attention to the way in which the legacy is also lived on an individual level: Joakim Wrethed argues that metaphorically the deracinated and apparently motiveless murderer Freddie

2 Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 2008), 213–14.

3 Chris Arthur, *Irish Willow* (Aurora, Colo.: Davis Group Publishers, 2002), xiv.

Montgomery in John Banville's *The Book of Evidence* (1989) is Ireland, possibly standing for tensions in the country's violent history. He also contends that Banville's elaborate prose picks up a diminutive theological-historical thread, which both establishes and problematizes what may be meant by 'Irishness' from such a textual–intertextual perspective. This ultimately poses difficult ethical questions to the meticulous reader, who engages deeply in exegetic processes. Róisín Keys shows that even the introduction of the radio, which was supposed to nurture the building of the new nation-state, brought with it a change in sense perception, intervening in the liminal space where Ireland meets the outside world.

From a bilingual Ireland to a polyvocal one

Any study of modern Irish literature must constantly return to the ambiguous relation of writers to the Irish language, which has sometimes been seen as giving a fragmentary and discontinuous link with the past. Thomas Kinsella expressed this publicly in 1967 with the pessimistic view that it was probably not worth defending 'a minor and embattled group, keeping loyal – for the best reasons – to a dead or dying language.'⁴ It was partly in response to this that poets like Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Cathal Ó Searcaigh, Ciaran Carson and Gearóid Mac Lochlainn turned to Irish in the 1970s, merging two different linguistic consciousnesses. Seán Crosson has shown how their constant intertextual shifts between English and Irish take a decentred and anti-authoritarian stance in their relation to society, art and life.⁵ This stands in stark contrast to earlier positions which identified language with nation in a simplified model which erased the significant roles of Spanish, Norse, and of course English in the Irish historical

4 Thomas Kinsella, 'The Irish Writer', *Éire-Ireland*, 2. 2, 1967, 8.

5 Seán Crosson, *The Given Note. Traditional Music and Modern Irish Poetry* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).

record. Carmen Zamorano Llena points to references in some of Roddy Doyle's stories to a pre-existing multicultural society which had its voices silenced by that same nationalistic discourse. This posits continuity with the present, where Irish is an official language of the European Union but has simultaneously been challenged by the almost continuous economic expansion up to the recent demise of the Celtic Tiger, with its accompanying movement of people into Ireland. This has led to a situation in the Republic where more than one person in ten was born outside Ireland and more people speak Latvian at home than Irish.

Beyond a territorial Ireland to an ex-centric and a virtual one

The long history of Irish emigration and exile has offered countless arenas for cross-cultural encounters, both as confrontation and assimilation. One such encounter is the Irish-Jewish one that Anne Karhio studies in Paul Muldoon's poetry, not in diasporic terms but as a feature of Muldoon's complex poetics. Another is what Ruben Moi calls Derek Mahon's 'peregrine poetics', in which the poet's extensively nomadic lifestyle draws him constantly to cultural crossings in his own work, and particularly towards engagements with paintings.

This book constantly exemplifies the truism that going 'beyond Ireland' is not a territorial question, since many Irish writers themselves occupy an ex-centric relation to their country, as shown in Anders Olsson's analysis of Colm Tóibín's *Bad Blood*, in which the 'I' paces the border between north and south, deconstructing and subverting the categories that 'he' professes to sunder. Through such questioning Tóibín approaches the concept of authenticity. His subversion historicizes the conflict by taking the protean metaphor of the hiring fair, which has been seen as an emblematic presence of colonial history and Protestant rule, casting the roles in which present individuals are set. Paradoxically, another way of emphasizing ex-centric status is, as Gerald Porter suggests, to make such persons protagonists, like

the lass of Aughrim in the ballad of that name, who has become a stranger to her own hearth.

Drawing on the insights of Mark C. Taylor, Hedda Friberg-Harnesk explores border-crossings in a fictional Europe of two pivotal moments, as conjured by an Irish and a Swedish imagination. In the two Europes juxtaposed here, Tayloreal grids shift and webs spread, 'entangling everyone in multiple, mutating, and mutually defining connections in which nobody is really in control'.⁶ In the intertextual encounter between two novels which this contribution entails, Hugo von Hofmannsthal's life and ideas emerge as a node of communication, especially in what John Banville, following von Hofmannsthal, has called 'the disjunction between the thing and the thing named'.⁷ A similar clearing for interactive processes is forwarded by Britta Olinder when she suggests that the poetry of John Hewitt – himself an Ulsterman partial to the rites and myths of Catholic Ireland – offers a richer weave of cross-culturality than most Irish authorships. In her analysis, Olinder carefully maps its segregated landscapes. Situated at the intersection of multiple boundaries as it is, Hewitt's writing manages, Olinder claims, to turn culture clashes into true encounters.

Beyond the feminized landscape to the degraded ecosystems of today

This book also attempts to confront the central topos of Irish national romanticism in the nineteenth century, an often feminized image of the land. As Ronald Paul shows, this was particularly directed against those

6 Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 23.

7 John Banville, 'Introduction.' *The Lord Chandos Letter and Other Writings*, by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, translated by Joel Rothenberg (New York: New York Review of Books, 2005).

who, under the baleful influence of Thomas Malthus, linked the impoverishment of the Irish to their inability to farm the land in a modern effective way. Thus, even nature was mobilized to demonstrate the unfitness of the Irish to manage their own affairs. In his history of Ireland, Engels sought to show that the utilization of both natural and human resources is always a question of political and economic power, in this case that of the English landowners 'beyond Ireland'. It was not the Irish peasants that were to blame, but the way the landowners had forced them to cultivate the soil in their own interests. Even during the famine, Ireland had exported food – meat and dairy products – to England. As Engels notes in his chapter on 'Natural Conditions', the introduction of capitalist farming methods in Ireland, which was forcing a shift from the production of grain to that of meat, was tantamount to genocide. Once again, it was the politics of the global colonial system, and not the needs of the population, that determined the condition of the Irish people. Engels' insight into the real nature of the ecological crisis in Ireland also informed Marx's comments in *Capital* about the link between England's colonial exploitation of Ireland and the concomitant degeneration of the soil. This same argument applies to the transition from the nationalist image of a primeval, fertile and feminized Ireland, personified as *Róisín Dubh*, to the degraded ecosystems of today. For some writers, this degradation is a result of a continuing dislocation of mind and body going back to Descartes. Thomas Kinsella has remarked that 'it is one of the findings of Ireland's dual tradition that an empire is a passing thing, but that a colony is not'.⁸ In the same way, the new economic world order that let loose the Celtic Tiger has brought, together with a diversified Ireland, new forms of dependence. It is one of the main aims of this book to explore how Irish writers have regarded this diversification and contested that dependence.

Hedda Friberg-Harnesk
Gerald Porter
Joakim Wrethed

8 Thomas Kinsella, *The Dual Tradition: An Essay on Poetry and Politics in Ireland* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1995), 111.

PART I

Irish Texts and Foreign Impulse