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IRISH STUDIES AROUND THE WORLD - 2025

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Introduction

What an honour it is to take over this reviews section from the ever-excellent Maureen O'Connor – I have big shoes to fill. Irish Studies around the world is growing year on year. I know from my own work on the IASIL committee, where we capture a snapshot of the work happening around the world, that Irish Studies centres are blooming from Taiwan to Tehran. We had 448 events in 23 countries in our report for 2024/25. *The Irish Times* carried a huge feature on the excellent Irish Studies conference in Mexico lead by Professor Aurora Piñeiro (McCarthy 2025). The conference scene was busy in Irish studies, with events such as IASIL in Galway, AEDEI in Huelva, ACIS in Denver, EFACIS in Turku and an interesting session from LCIS in Leuven and the Keogh Naughton Institute on the Future of Irish Studies Authors such as Sally Rooney, Maggie O'Farrell, Ursula Rani Sarma, Anna Burns, Claire Keegan, Anne Enright, Emma Dabiri, Colm Tóibín and Adiba Jaigirdar are finding, and growing, global acclaim. The range of work is more than Joyce, Beckett, Yeats and Heaney (although the publishing lists might tell you different!).

Part and parcel of the growing interest are more students, more ECRs, and as a result more publications. Despite reports saying the number of humanities graduates is declining (Jaschik 2022), publishing in the humanities continues to grow. This aligns with trends globally: academic publishing is on the rise – with academic publishers making profits that rival some of the tech giants, according to a recent article in The Conversation (Rhodes 2026). The publish or perish mantra has created a monster, and one that is making the publishers very wealthy indeed.

Despite moves to DORA, COARA and narrative CVs, metrics are still king. In the UK, REF dictates the best "outputs" and universities, departments and disciplines are ranked accordingly. Getting the "highest" marks does not guarantee safety however, with many universities cutting highly ranked humanities departments in waves of cuts impacting colleagues in the UK. In interviews, grant applications, and promotions, these numbers are key – what is the impact factor, the H weighting, how many and how often, etc. And while journal publication is growing exponentially, the monograph still holds weight in our discipline.

The pressure to publish, widely, strategically, internationally, regularly is on all of us. I feel particularly for PhD researchers, struggling (if they are lucky on completely outdated scholarships that barely cover rent), working part-time, and full time, taking on the "good for the cv" lectures and classes, and then trying to publish to keep up with their peers. PhD students graduating with more publications than some of the permanent tenured staff in the departments where they studied. The bar continues to be raised higher and higher. However, more is "better" should not be the answer.

Where within this does the review come into play? These are important pieces of scholarship, that continue the peer review process. Reviews let others know about your publication, they list the pros and cons, evaluate and situate the work within the field. With so much work published year on year, how do we separate the excellence from the metrics? This is where reviews are essential. And reviews have different styles and forms even within Humanities – some take a strong critical view, some are more gentle, some take the chance to grind the axe for that time they were slighted by the author, others love finding that one typo and reminding you the best time to copy edit is when it is published. Reviewing work is an essential part of the process, the book is not finished until it has been reviewed, and shared and read. It is also a vital publication route for ECRs, and an opportunity to get to grips with academic publication, the possibility of a free (most likely e)book, and the very important statistic for the CV.

Yet it is much more complex than that. How, for example, do ECRs or precarious academics navigate the process? One thing I have learned is academia is a small place, Irish

Studies smaller, and there is no doubt you will some day bump into that person whose book you reviewed. When you criticise – do these things come to mind? Can I critique this stellar scholar in the field? Someone who could review my job/book/grant application later? Us academics are also a fragile bunch. How to you balance good critique with ego, job security, a career? And this can be obvious in some more established scholars' reviews of ECRs work too – a number of ECRs have been publicly criticised and attacked. Secure academics pilling on precarious researchers in the name of criticism. It is a difficult line to navigate.

When I was precarious, I was cautious of reviews. Coming from journalism, prior to academia, where I pumped out up to 40 articles a week, I also had, and still do, a different viewpoint on reviews. I am much more conscious of libel laws. Weekly people would appear at the desk to give out about a single word, the position of a picture, the page their article appeared on, and especially when the article did not appear! And telling them it is just "a review" of your court case was not going to solve the issue. It has been interesting seeing all styles of reviews come in, and I wonder about style, and reception, which I hope will evolve during my tenure.

As reviews editor, all these things must come to mind; but one thing I had not considered was the absolute disregard of many publishers for reviews. One publishing conglomerate has a generic online form that has no acknowledgement of your submission. On their website the section that deals with requesting books for review contains no contact details leaving no opportunity to follow up. The only option is to type into the void (the generic online form) regularly hoping that one of the requests to send out a book will reach the right server and the reviewer might receive a copy. One book I entered in 7 times to this form – only for the book to arrive 3 months later. Others refuse to send physical copies. One told me (hopefully not prophetically) that Ireland was no longer in the EU and they could not send a copy to a reviewer in Ireland. Others just never sent out the books and ignored my emails. One reviewer informed me that the book had arrived the day I prepared this for submission. The majority were the "big" publishers. Just to note Taylor and Francis' parent company Informa reported a revenue growth of 20% in 2025 with revenue of £2,035.9m, adjusted operating profit of around £578.9m and free cash flow of £356.9m (The Bookseller 2025). They are making ginormous profits from publish or perish, literally banking on our need for metrics, all the while cutting back on copy editors and embracing AI, never mind using our work for free to train AI – they can afford to send out a physical copy of the book. We must push back against this, perhaps in our own contracts with them. I would be interested in hearing your thoughts on this.

Yes, reviewers disappear, but this is academia, we have enough going on. Suddenly you end up with a new job; a move across country; a grant application; admin responsibilities; the one thing your CV needs for that job/promotion/application and you must take it and forget about the review. I know only too well as I write this to procrastinate on an article I desperately need to finish. So, this year if your book did not appear, it may next year, in fact it may not have arrived at the reviewer's door yet. Be patient – a little slow scholarship is a nice form of resistance to the metrics.

What I will say is Irish Studies is lively, it is global, and researchers are making excellent contributions to knowledge, growing and expanding the definition of Irish Studies, responding to changes, and yes, we definitely have not abandoned Joyce, but we are letting Rooney in on the action. We have room for more though – bring me your books!

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Teaching John McGahern's **The Dark**
Anna Teekell and Ellen Scheible, eds.
Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2025. 98 pages.
ISBN: 978-0-8156-1178-3

Reviewer: Eamon Maher (TU Dublin)

This new teaching guide for McGahern's second novel, *The Dark*, emerges from a US critical edition of the same novel. It transpired that the publisher, Syracuse University Press, only had the rights for the publication of the latest version of the novel in the North American market, which prompted them to publish the Introduction and the essays on their own, which is a very welcome decision. The editors, Anna Teekell and Ellen Scheible, along with the authors of four excellent essays, Frank Shovlin, Barry Houlihan, Enda Duff and Kate Costello-Sullivan, have come up with an excellent reappraisal of the novel, as well as supplying challenging new ways to read a book that was first published 60 years ago and promptly banned by the Censorship Board in Ireland. This, along with the author's civil marriage to a Finnish divorcee, Annikki Laaksi, would ultimately lead to McGahern's dismissal from his position as a national schoolteacher in Belgrove, Clontarf. What is good about this guide is that it gives readers, those

who already know the text really well, along with students and readers who may be coming to it for the first time, a great feel for what one should look out for in this rather gloomy novel, to which McGahern originally used the title, "The Pit".

I have never been able to comprehend McGahern's oft-repeated view that if *The Dark* had been better written, it would never have been banned. You see, the problem was not so much the style as the content: sexual abuse in the home and the workplace, along with suspected sexual grooming by a priest of his young cousin – who comes to spend time with him in the presbytery with the idea of discussing a possible vocation – graphic descriptions of adolescent masturbation as well as of the various sexual fantasies of the main protagonist, Mahoney. These elements were never going to escape the attentions of the Censorship Board at the time. And if that were not enough, the use of the word F-U-C-K on the very first page was definitely not going to go unremarked. It should be understood that a national schoolteacher in Ireland in the 1960s – a situation which still persists today, though to a far lesser degree – was technically an employee of the Catholic Church even though his salary was paid by the State. Consequently, McGahern must have known that the salacious content of his novel could well endanger his ongoing employment as a teacher. When he refused to resign, the Manager of the school, a Fr Carton, under strict instructions from the conservative Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid, dismissed him.

The Dark is far from being a perfect novel – the style is unusually jerky in places for a McGahern text, which may have been as a result of the writer's desire to convey some of the turmoil that young Mahoney was going through – and it is certainly not an easy read. The seedy underbelly of rural Ireland during the middle decades of the last century is exposed in a way that makes readers uncomfortable. Anna Teekell is correct in pointing out in her illuminating Introduction that McGahern felt compelled to write *The Dark*, and to get it into the public domain. She emphasises "the power and beauty" of *The Dark* as a novel, noting that "the scenes of savagery are counterpoised against moments of beauty and a heartrending candor of a young man finding his only scraps of love from a father he also hates" (xviii). It is the literary qualities of the book that still attract readers today, and not its rather daring content. Before offering detailed and helpful summaries of the various essays in the collection, Teekell also trawls through the background to the banning and the way in which various literary critics have responded to the novel: she sets the scene extremely well.

The sharp analysis that characterises Teekell's Introduction is also apparent in the essays, with Frank Shovlin, editor of the invaluable *Letters of John McGahern* and author of the soon-to-be-published approved biography of the author, providing a type of companion piece to Val Nolan's definitive account of the banning of *The Dark* in 2011. Shovlin quotes from the archives of Dáil debates to emphasise the high degree of controversy the scandal engendered in political circles, and the divide between how the liberal Labour TD Dr John O'Connell and then Fianna Fáil Minister for Finance, Jack Lynch, viewed the banning – O'Connell's left-wing tendencies baulked at literary works being seized by the Customs, whereas Lynch was more supportive of the authorities.[1] Shovlin also cites a letter that his editor at Faber, Charles Monteith, wrote to McGahern, asking him to excise the four-lettered word from the opening page and stating that, if retained, it would "almost certainly lead to your novel being banned in the Irish Republic" (7). Around the same time in England, Penguin won a lawsuit that was taken against it for obscenity in D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, so publishers were feeling nervous about what they put into print. Shovlin ends by asserting that McGahern's "reputation is secure with or without the infamy surrounding *The Dark*" (17), which is undoubtedly true.

[1] Another Fianna Fáil Minister, Brian Lenihan, in 1967, was the one who put in place a review and potential revocation of book bans after 12 years, a move that took a lot of wind out of the sails of the Censorship Board.

Using the invaluable archive materials in the Hardiman Library in the University of Galway, Barry Houlihan explores the various drafts of *The Dark*. He notes: "The flow of handwriting, the frustrated pauses, even the coffee cup-ring stains present on many of McGahern's manuscripts and notes, enable the reader and the writer to meet in an otherwise impossible moment" (19). This article brings alive the painstaking manner in which McGahern revisited his texts over and over again, trying to get the exact word or expression to convey exactly what he wanted to say. One of the most interesting aspects of the novel is the alternation between third and second-person narration, which is quite different from archive to printed text. Houlihan observes: "For instance, the direct *you/your* is changed to the indirect *he/his* in numerous places. Such changes make the experiences of the boy less confrontational toward the reader, reducing the force of a didactic act of witnessing" (29). It would be hard to find a better explanation of how the narrative voice and the point of view employed by the author really do change the dynamic of the novel.

Enda Duffy's essay argues that *The Dark* marks out McGahern as being the first Irish biopolitical novelist, by which he means that the book "assumes that the control of bodies is key to the oppressiveness of Irish culture" (37), a perspective that is convincingly proven in analysis such as the following: "*The Dark* is full of sinkholes, fissures of storytelling into which courageous acts of speaking to power cannot avoid disappearing" (39). Referring to the paternal abuse in the bed that Mahoney Senior and his son share, Duffy opines that the language employed "is characterized by passivity, disembodiment, negativity and repetition – a depersonalized, rhythmic rhetoric of abject horror" (42). Again, this is a wonderfully insightful reading.

Speaking of "horror" segues well with the last essay by Kate Costello-Sullivan, "Reading Trauma in *The Dark*", which begins with a discussion of a 2021 article by Clair Wills entitled "Architectures of Containment" dealing with the publication of the official report into the Mother and Baby Homes in Ireland. Costello-Sullivan notes that McGahern had written about child abuse as early as 1965 in his second novel and yet there appears to have been collective amnesia about what was happening in the Industrial Schools, Magdalene Laundries, Mother and Baby homes, and particularly in the family environment. In a brilliantly researched essay, which draws on trauma experts such as Judith Herman and numerous McGahern scholars, the author concludes in the following manner: "Reading *The Dark* in light of trauma does not entail an act of literary excavation or the implementation of revisionist history. It only requires that we see and acknowledge what has been right there before us, in stark clarity, waiting for years to come to light" (75). This is an excellent summation, and one that is perfectly in tune with the arguments put forward in the course of the essay.

I will conclude by saying that it is wonderful that this teaching guide is available on this side of the pond, as that will focus even more attention on what is a significant text in McGahern's oeuvre and in Irish literary and cultural history. Sincere congratulations once more to the superb work of the editors, Teekell and Scheible, and to the contributors. Kudos also to Syracuse University Press and the irrepressible editor of the ever-expanding Irish Studies series there, Kate Costello-Sullivan, for finding a way to get worthwhile books like this into print. Whenever I next give a lecture or write an article on McGahern that covers *The Dark*, I will make sure to have this guide close at hand.

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Narrating Irish Female Development 1916-2018
Jane Elizabeth Dougherty
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2025. 286 pages.
ISBN: 9781068502309

Reviewer: Dianne McPhelim (Dundalk Institute of Technology)

In this well-defined study of over a century of Irish Women's writing, Jane Elizabeth Dougherty applies feminist psychoanalytical theory to examine Irish postmodern narratives, which she argues, before 2018, depicted the maturation of the female as "disarrayed and often deliberately disorderly" (13). Dougherty's methodological charting of the Irish cultural experience examines established ideologies of Irish literature and subsequent Irish identity, as generated by W.B. Yeats and James Joyce, in contrast to female-authored texts by Anne Enright, Eimear McBride, and Eavan Boland. Employing a variety of texts to trace the evolution, or lack thereof, of female narrative maturation within Ireland's formative years, Dougherty's innovative study calls attention to a literary legacy of misunderstanding and neglect.

Providing a highly functional overview of the employed texts, Dougherty's introduction intertwines Ireland's social and literary history with the subsequent four chapters and coda, organised to guide the reader sequentially through this narrative. Commencing with the 1916 Rising and concluding with the landmark 2018 abortion referendum, Dougherty positions her research in line with the early constitutional assertion that the female child was not recognised. In a discussion published on the Edinburgh University Press blog, Dougherty states: "There is no agreed-upon cultural story of how and when an Irish female child becomes a woman" (2025). The author further emphasises how "female developmental stories have been largely overlooked by critics", due to a view that their narratives were "counterfeit, pale imitations of the Irish male developmental story" (2025). This alienation directly influences Dougherty's considerate handling of the texts she investigates in her study. "I treat the writers under study as authors, a privilege denied to most of them" (30), she states, creating a space to inspect how limitations placed on females from birth extended to adulthood, thus generating a "social marginalisation" (11) of both the women themselves and their resulting literature.

Significant dismissal of the female writers prompts Dougherty to claim that they: "should be judged on their potentiality, even when they do not fulfil it" (30). In her justification of this, she points to how early, unpublished writings of male writers, namely Joyce and John McGahern, have been granted serious criticism, despite the authors' dismissal of their own texts, and irrespective of perceived aesthetic. Regardless of any mediocrity, Dougherty proposes, such equality should be offered to female writers, a suggestion that encourages a

rediscovery of women's writings and potentially a vibrant opportunity for scholars to restore the missing voices of Irish literature. Exclusion, actual and metaphorical, is a central theme, Dougherty concisely cataloguing a parallel erasure of literary female writings with other voices of the period, such as the Daughters of Ireland or the Irish Ladies' Land League (102) during the establishment of the State. Advocating the maturing of female narration as an "ideal genre through which to develop feminist psychoanalytic narratology", Dougherty argues: "the genre exemplifies strong narrativity while the gender possesses little narrative authority" (25). Drawing on the 1990 election of Mary Robinson, Ireland's first female President, to portray the initial resituating of female authority in the Irish narrative, Dougherty pinpoints what she terms the nation's "rebirth" (71). Proposing the President's symbolic status painted a new version of "Mother Ireland" (73), Dougherty suggests this renaissance encouraged an unveiling of hidden narratives by Ireland's "othered" citizens, specifically women and children.

Highlighting the historical swallowing of Irish women writers such as Maria Edgeworth and Sydney Owenson into British literary history and setting necessary limitations, the book focuses solely on prose works by writers from the Irish Republic; Dougherty justifying any exclusion of notable works such as *Milkman* (2018) by Anna Burns in favour of Irish texts she describes as being formerly "[…] overlooked, or undervalued by critics and scholars" (30). Refreshingly, this includes neglected works, such as Dervla Murphy's *Wheels Within Wheels.* First published in 1979 and reissued in 2010, Dougherty supplies a first critical reading of the travel writer's autobiography. Portraying an astute understanding of the importance of female-to-female relationships within an Irish context, Dougherty contends: "The death of the mother is the birth of the female" (157), referring to Murphy's newfound freedom following the death of her mother. This observation can be paralleled with the demise of old Ireland and the subsequent tepid freedoms achieved through constitutional changes and further separation of Church and State. "Like most female subjects", Dougherty writes, "Murphy is confounded by her mother's simultaneous power and powerlessness" (157).

Such assessment deviates from the usual male-oriented gaze often proffered by scholars or as apparent in Ireland's literary canon. However, Dougherty reverts to this lens in her review of Clare Boylan's novel *Holy Pictures* (1983), largely due to Boylan's own emphasis on characterisation of the female through the eyes of a variety of male characters, each illustrating the tendency to place women as objects either needing to be protected or hunted. In this, and the novel's sequel/prequel *Home Rule*, Dougherty observes how "mature female subjectivity is disempowerment" and female development is matched by the degeneration of self through what she terms "castration" (160-1). This implies a further removal of the female, to "other"; neither male nor fulfilling the designated maternal role. Evidenced by Dougherty through her careful dissection of female characters' temporality, this notion is supported later in the novel as the father changes the family surname. As Ireland's identity shifted with the creation of a Republic, this enforced removal of female identity parallels the constraining of Irish female narratives and subsequent prevented maturation that Dougherty's research magnifies. Dougherty culminates her study with a timely exploration of emerging authors, whose work explores "Irish female maturation narratives produced by members of the global majority that have grown up in and should be full citizens of the Irish Republic" (250). *This Hostel Life* (2018), an anthology from Nigerian-born writer Melatu Uche Okorie, and Soula Emanuel's *Wild Geese* (2023) have recently broken with traditional conventions to fill a literary space empty of representations of global cultures. Dougherty highlights Okorie's fresh contemplation of an "audience's white gaze" (251), amplifying the need for contemporary ideas surrounding Ireland's "narratives of working-class and impoverished female maturation" (249).

Despite previous reviews alluding to a lack of diversity in this research, this does not detract from what this book achieves. Considering the timeframe it covers, Dougherty's focus and conciseness are admirable. Any neglect may lie in the lack of inclusion of disabled authors

such as Rosaleen McDonagh, whose plays and memoir, *Unsettled* (2021), unfortunately fall outside the strict parameters set by Dougherty. Visually elegant both inside and out, it would be negligent not to draw attention to the book cover's suitably thought-provoking artwork, provided by Sligo-based mixed-media artist Michelle Granville. Through its complex examination of literary form, narration and content, Dougherty advocates for the elevation and revival of previously ignored Irish women's writing. Viewed through the lens of feminist psychoanalytic narratology, Dougherty's approach is invigorating and justifiably situates female writing on equal footing with those considered the fathers of Irish literature, providing an extensive and useful bibliography to a new academic audience in the process. While this broadly engaging teaching resource will foster conversation across all levels of academia, it is particularly useful to undergraduate studies due to the balance of theory and textual example. A constructive addition to contemporary research, the true impact of this book will be the role it plays in future recognition and revaluation of Irish female narratives.

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Flann O'Brien and the European Avant-Garde, 1934-45: Dublin's Dadaist
Tobias William Harris
London: Bloomsbury, 2025. 248 pages.
ISBN: 9781350415898

Reviewer: James Green (Wake Forest University)

Often, when teaching Irish modernism, it can be all too easy to unwittingly fall into narratives that see the island of Ireland *benefiting from* European ideas in a one-way fashion. Situated firmly at the margins, this spare and paltry Irish modernism gets positioned as a niche off-cut of the monumentality achieved by the nearby cosmopolites from London, Paris and Berlin. The possibility of such narratives must surely be part of the reason that the editors of the recent *Irish*

Modernisms: Gaps, Conjectures, Possibilities maintain that the term "Irish modernism" can be "critically colonising" (Fagan, Greaney and Radak 2022: 4). It is an image of Ireland as aesthetically indebted; the achievement of *Flann O'Brien and the European Avant-Garde* is to push back decisively against this, showing a true dialogue at work.

Tobias Harris's aim is to survey Brian O'Nolan's (Flann O'Brien's) projects from 1933-45, in the light of "forms and procedures from which his writing is 'trying with difficulty to free itself'" (9), contextualised by a corresponding global, specifically European, net of influences. In so doing, Harris provides a vibrant and persuasive picture of the coterie among which O'Nolan was set, and the material circulating in Ireland and abroad. Figures important to this narrative include Niall Sheridan and Niall Montgomery, supported by a peripheral range of notables in Irish literary life, such as Blanaid Salkeld or Micheál MacLiammóir (22). The centrality to his research is clear: "no other circle in Dublin was more attuned to the developments in European avant-gardism" (122). His broad thesis is that this set imbues O'Nolan with an "anti-authoritarian" contribution to Irish literature, in both form and politics (198). For Harris, to study this network is thus to open up a conjunction between his aesthetics and his politics.

For example, in his first chapter on "O'Nolan's European Milieu", Harris demonstrates that there is a need for complex accounts of literary influence. Harris shows that Niall Sheridan, who was close to O'Nolan, considered an interchange of ideas between Ireland and Europe happening both ways, with Kafka's innovations thanks to a general "crisis" in the novel brought about by Joyce (36-7). In fact, the ethos of collaboration is itself drawn into conversation with the collagist aesthetics of Dadaism. A plain history of the network is therefore not enough: rather Harris provides a contextual sense, the cultural and aesthetic ideas proliferating in this circle, in this chapter.

In the second chapter, his analysis of "Blather, Razzle and Dada" brings out the clear connections between O'Nolan's periodical *Blather*, the English satirical magazine *Razzle*, and, less obviously, Dada publications such as *Der Dada.* Here Harris argues for "linking" O'Nolan "to the practices" of Dadaism, blending the humour of *Razzle* with the unpredictability and anti-commercial ethos of Dada (62). Harris begins with an "extended identity trope" – the linking of the key word "Blather" to "a series of organizations and commercial products" – and makes connections, both intuitive to O'Brien scholars (such as *Cruiskeen Lawn*'s free play with the pseudonymous identity of Myles na gCopaleen) and unintuitive but productive: Dadaist photomontage and *Blather* as satires of "falsified heterogeneity" in art (63-7). In his final chapter, Harris shows how his later career develops from this point: "*Cruiskeen Lawn* invites readings that place it alongside both Irish newspapers or periodicals and the broader context of European modernism" (178). O'Nolan's experience of the periodical form invests his work with a complex sense of his work's relation to other art and society at large.

Harris therefore interprets the job of showing such connections in multiple ways. For example, in his third, more wide-ranging chapter he shows how mutually informing conditions – such as the reactionary turn in 1930s European politics – led both Jorge Luis Borges and Flann O'Brien to "happen […] upon the invented text as a central literary strategy" (86). Usually, it is prudent to avoid the verb "to happen upon" in accounts of literary influence. But it shows us that Harris is looking for not just historical but formal and stylistic connections, letting the literary side of a literary history take the reader into more speculative and exegetical places. In that sense, simultaneous discoveries are being narrated here, the sensitivities and shifting shapes of an entire network, on top of a simpler narrative that outlines plainly who borrowed what from whom. Harris seems unconcerned that Borges is not quite in a "European" avant-garde. Explaining such a turn towards metafictional techniques in the light of European history is a tall order, but also a challenge that any scholar of Flann O'Brien must feel incumbent upon them, and to explain via a correspondence with the Argentine author makes sense.

A still more convincing act of contextual linkage occurs in the fourth chapter, on Kafkaesque elements of *The Third Policeman* and *An Béal Bocht*. Here, the book's association of O'Nolan's projects to the world-historical depravity of fascism is clearest. With war in Europe breaking out decisively in 1939, the Dáil empowered the government to suspend democratic norms, generating considerable unease among intellectuals like O'Nolan. It is no coincidence both novels exhibit, according to Harris's interpretation, the infernal inversion of "growth and renewal", the "rule of arbitrary justice" and "the constant threat of violence" (114-16). The strength of this argument is in a revelatory emphasis on this wartime context to these two novels. There is also strength in seeing the popular English translations of Kafka from the 30s, with their Christianised emphasis on redemptive possibility, reinvented in O'Nolan's emphasis on a hopeless and exhausted nonhuman world, where human flourishing is actively thwarted by new, violent technologies.

The final two chapters provide what might be to readers the clearest linkages to the European avant-garde thus far outlined. His penultimate chapter, on O'Nolan's wartime plays *Faustus Kelly* and *Rhapsody in Stephen's Green: The Insect Play*, provides a lucid window into a flourishing theatrical scene in wartime neutral Dublin. Harris brings out Brechtian dimensions, positing these works as examples of his "epic" theatre: through refashioning old stories, the audience is alienated into an observer role, but thereby empowered into decisions, with "comic results" (159). *Faustus Kelly* joins the chorus of ironisations of Goethe's *Faust* spurred by the war, with Thomas Mann, Karl Kraus and Paul Valéry. *The Insect Play*, meanwhile, transfers a play by the Čapek brothers, From the *Insects' Life*, and Kraus's *The Last Days of Mankind*, to an Irish context. The humorously strained allegories of these works become parodic "warning[s] against hegemonic politics of any political stripe or ideological justification" (161). Far from an exercise in genre play, the overall understanding is that the Irish political context and the violence raging through the European continent achieve a disquieting convergence in O'Nolan's plays, "one of the darker statements of O'Nolan's career as a satirist" (167).

The final chapter, on *Cruiskeen Lawn*, fully demonstrates O'Nolan's developed achievements. Engaging with the impact of exhibitions of international modernist art in Dublin by the IELA ("Irish Exhibition of Living Art") in 1943 and 1944, the column presents a "counterpoint" to *The Irish Times* war coverage and reveals another anti-authoritarian slant (181). O'Nolan is argued to have evolved his irreverent approach to the periodical from his *Blather* days, by nurturing a complex aesthetics that seems to point to significant works like Theodor Adorno's posthumous *Aesthetic Theory*. The column levels a critique at something "invariably off-stage", using a "montage procedure [that] reaches outside itself as an object", thereby bringing an audience to awareness of an incongruence between reality and the art-object, rather than providing a false catharsis like the *Irish Times'* reception of the IELA (182). This means the column "encompass[es] in its comic frame the entirety of the daily paper", which Harris stresses is often reporting from a putatively "neutral" standpoint on the war (186). What emerges is a politicised relationship between art and society: faced with the prospect of art being wholly subsumed into authoritarian structures, *Cruiskeen Lawn* is also a column explicitly "includ[ing] a critical account of itself", and thus unable to be co-opted by those who insist on art's transhistoricality (182-3).

Harris has written a book that both counts as a celebration of O'Nolan's work and argues for his position in a canon of anti-authoritarian aesthetics and politics. Pointing to a conceptual sophistication behind the humour, the book draws on wide reading and precise archival research to depict O'Nolan convincingly as a successful writer, not a fable of thwarted ambitions. When reading *Cruiskeen Lawn*, a picture might emerge from Myles na gCopaleen's unique voice of a satirist paring his fingernails, so to speak, but Harris argues for an engaged, committed artist. This argument requires literary interpretation to work, rather than depending on biographical

fact, but this is equally true of many successful Joyce studies, for example. At times, I admit, this mode can feel like arguing by analogy, rather than a genuine dialogue between O'Nolan's circle and Europe. But by showing a command over the aesthetic debates, and persuasively historicising political developments, Harris has decisively argued his corner. Perhaps directions for future research are suggested by this: how might O'Nolan the reader make connections in time, as well as in space? But also, how else might we define or even qualify O'Nolan's "anti-authoritarianism"? With these connections amply demonstrated here, the study of Irish modernist writing in general can only benefit from carefully reading, maybe questioning, but surely learning from Harris's example.

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Speranza: Poems by Jane Wilde
Eleanor Fitzsimons and Eibhear Walshe, eds.
Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2025. 332 pages.
ISBN: 9781836240372

Reviewer: Lorraine Lawrance (Hibernia College)

Speranza: Poems by Jane Wilde is a welcome contribution to Irish literary scholarship. Jane Wilde (née Elgee, 1821-1896) has long been known as the mother of Oscar Wilde, but this collection restores her as an accomplished poet, translator, and nationalist intellectual in her own right. Eleanor Fitzsimons and the late Eibhear Walshe have produced a work of both literary recovery and cultural restoration. Their careful curation, scholarly commentary, and inclusion of several previously unpublished poems make this the first contemporary edition of Wilde's poetry. It reveals a writer whose imaginative range encompasses political fervour, spiritual questioning, and an enduring empathy with the suffering of the Irish poor.

The edition is framed by two interpretive essays. Fitzsimons, a noted biographer and author of *Wilde's Women* (2015), situates Wilde's poetry within the intellectual circles of

nineteenth-century Ireland and Europe, while highlighting her role in the Young Ireland movement and her advocacy for women's education. Walshe, who passed away suddenly in 2024, brings a sensitive and reflective reading to Wilde's work, interpreting her poetry as a dialogue between personal conviction and public duty. His contribution, in retrospect, reads as a final testament to his enduring commitment to voices overlooked in Irish literary history.

Wilde first came to prominence as "Speranza" – the Italian for "hope" – writing for *The Nation* in the 1840s, a period defined by famine, revolution, and cultural awakening. Among the most fascinating inclusions in this edition is "Our Fatherland", first published in *The Nation* in November 1846. The poem expresses a passionate longing for Irish freedom and bears striking resemblance to a later poem of the same title published under the pseudonym Spartacus by William James Lincon, the only Englishman to write regularly for *The Nation*. Both versions echo Herwegh's "Schlusslied" (1841), suggesting Wilde's engagement with continental revolutionary literature. This intertextuality reflects the editors' insight that Wilde's nationalism was at once fervently Irish and cosmopolitan in outlook – a blend of local patriotism and European idealism.

Equally compelling is "Sign of the Times" (1847), written during the height of the Great Famine and on the brink of the failed rising of 1848. In this poem, Wilde implores the younger generation to take up the struggle against oppression. Her voice here is both exhortative and mournful, blending hope with warning. Yet her work also introduces a tone of moral introspection rarely found in her male contemporaries.

No discussion of this volume would be complete without reference to "The Famine Year" – perhaps her most famous poem – first published in *The Nation* in January 1847 under the title "The Stricken Land" (74). Here, Wilde confronts the catastrophe of the Great Famine with unflinching moral clarity, denouncing a system that allowed people to perish "in the midst of plenty". On page 74, the authors depict how Canon John O'Rourke, writing in his *History of the Great Irish Famine* (1875: 10), described Wilde as "the gifted poetess" (74) who, "through verse and prose in *The Nation*, exposed the system which left people to die of starvation" (74). The poem's raw indictment of political negligence and its evocation of maternal grief place it among the most searing documents of nineteenth-century Irish experience. Its inclusion in this edition allows readers to appreciate how Wilde's poetry stood at the intersection of art, politics, and humanitarian witness.

Another standout piece, "France in '93", connects the French bread riots of the 1790s with the cries of starving Irish people during the Famine (81). The duo detail how in *The Spectator*, 3 April 1847, pp. 323-4, "the Irish need to be humoured, as they humour their own brutes". Wilde's use of historical analogy highlights her belief in the universality of suffering and resistance. The parallel between the sans-culottes and the Irish peasantry is not simply rhetorical; it reveals Wilde's understanding of history as cyclical, her conviction that oppression and revolution are recurring human dramas. As Walshe and Fitzsimons outline in their introduction from *The Spectator*, "a battle-cry may be the way to pacify the Irish" (81). In Wilde's hands, history becomes moral argument. Her cosmopolitanism – rooted in the revolutionary ideals of liberty and fraternity – broadens the emotional and political reach of Irish nationalism.

Later works such as "The Shorn Sheep" (1882) and "The Soul's Christening" (1876) reveal a more intimate and contemplative side of Wilde's art. "The Shorn Sheep", first published in *The Pilot*, was written as a translation and later admired by Victor Hugo, who thanked Lady Wilde for sending it to him while modestly noting his limited English. Lines from the poem later appeared in *The Vision of the Vatican*, drawing further intertextual links with Hugo's "Le Pape" (284). The poem's pastoral imagery and its quiet meditation on vulnerability suggest Wilde's growing interest in spiritual endurance. By contrast, "The Soul's Questionings", composed during her husband's final illness and published just days after his

death, is a dialogue between suffering souls and an unresponsive Fate (273). Its sombre tone and theological questioning mark a departure from the earlier nationalist verse, demonstrating her capacity to move from the collective to the personal, from rhetoric to metaphysical reflection. As the authors depict, "The poem takes the form of a dialogue in which 'the souls of the death stricken' question Fate, asking why they must suffer 'this cruel, remorseless Death'" (273). As Fitzsimons observes, Wilde's later poetry deepens our understanding of her as a woman who endured profound personal loss while remaining intellectually and morally engaged with the world.

The editorial achievement of Fitzsimons and Walshe lies not only in assembling these texts but in presenting them with sensitivity and precision. Their annotations guide readers through the historical, literary, and biographical contexts without overwhelming the poetry itself. The decision to include previously unpublished works enriches the portrait of Wilde as a versatile writer whose themes range from national liberation to personal salvation. Her bilingualism, her engagement with European Romanticism, and her advocacy of women's education all emerge clearly through the editors' framing.

The style of Wilde's verse inevitably reflects its Victorian origins: ornate, rhythmic, and steeped in moral earnestness. Yet, read today, it is precisely this sincerity that gives the poems their power. Wilde wrote not for aesthetic experiment but for ethical persuasion. In that sense, her poetry resembles a form of civic education, an effort to awaken empathy and responsibility in her readers. This quality aligns her with the moral and pedagogical ambitions of later Irish writers who sought to use literature as a vehicle for social awareness.

For educators and researchers, *Speranza: Poems by Jane Wilde* offers both a resource and an invitation. The edition encourages the integration of Wilde's work into discussions of Irish history, gender, and identity in the classroom, expanding students' awareness of nineteenth-century literary voices beyond the canonical male figures. By reintroducing Wilde's poetry to contemporary readers, Fitzsimons and Walshe open a space for renewed dialogue about literature's role in shaping civic and moral imagination. This review, written from an educational research perspective, highlights how Wilde's poetry – rich in empathy, justice, and idealism – continues to resonate within both literary and pedagogical contexts.

In sum, this finely edited volume not only restores Jane Wilde's literary reputation but also reaffirms the enduring importance of poetry as a form of social conscience. It stands as a fitting tribute to Wilde's vision and to the editorial dedication of Eleanor Fitzsimons and Eibhear Walshe.

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After the Train: Irishwomen United and a Network of Change
Evelyn Conlon and Rebecca Pelan, eds.
Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2025. 150 pages.
ISBN: 9781068502309

Reviewer: Timothy White (Xavier University)

After the Train highlights the efforts and achievements of Irishwomen United (IWU), a network of women who were critical to changing the role and influence of women in Irish society. These women came together after the famous contraceptive train ride from Dublin to Belfast on May 22, 1971, to lead the Irish feminist movement. This event brought great attention to the availability of contraception, one of the principal causes that ultimately led to the founding of IWU in 1975. While the first meeting was held in April, the group formally created a charter in June of 1975 detailing its objective of liberating Irish women from the oppression they experienced. This group met weekly for nearly two years until its last meeting in the spring of 1977. Ultimately, the IWU fragmented into a number of disparate groups with differing agendas. While not enjoying a long tenure, Irishwomen United transformed the role of women in Irish society by effective collective action.

Before IWU, the Irishwomen's Liberation Group (IWLG) had a less ambitious agenda from 1970 through 1971. This organisation helped serve as an incubator for ideas and leadership that emerged in the more radical Irishwomen United. IWU focused on reproductive rights, sexuality, representation for women, and rape crisis work. *After the Train* allows the women who were involved in this movement to reflect on their tactics and strategies to overcome a history of discrimination and disempowerment of women in Irish society. The skill sharing among the members allowed women with different agendas within the movement to learn from one another, especially how to raise awareness and attention to the issues women deemed important. The contributors to this volume emphasise the support each gained from the energy created by the numerous and varied women involved in IWU.

This edited collection of the perceptions of IWU participants was published by University College Dublin Press fifty years after the founding of Irishwomen United. The many issues that Irishwomen United confronted included decriminalising homosexuality, founding the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre (RCC), supporting existing agencies like Cherish, the Well Women Centre, and the Irish Pregnancy Counselling Centre, advocating for equal pay for women in the workplace, developing women's publishing and women's studies programmes, and promoting Irish reproductive rights. Of all the issues IWU took on, probably the most important and symbolic was the Contraception Action Programme (CAP). This action eventually led to the widening availability of contraception for women in Ireland.

The centre of the work of Irishwomen United took place in weekly meetings held on Sundays at #12 Pembroke Street. While the meeting place is reported to be quite modest, the ambitions of those who met there was nothing short of transforming Irish society and culture. While various members of the group concentrated their efforts in different aspects of Irish feminists' agenda, their collective effort concatenated in a series of changes that proved effective in overcoming historic cultural and policy-based confinement of women's freedoms and opportunities in Irish society. The collective support that these meetings provided encouraged the women involved in IWU to believe that their work was not being done in isolation but was part of a much larger social movement intent on women's liberation. The women in IWU had an expansive agenda from organising pickets, protests, and workshops to publishing a magazine, *Banshee*, and creating publishing outlets the Attic Press and Arlen House, and filing court cases aimed at liberating women and ending gender-based discrimination.

The importance of IWU was critical in achieving legal equality for women in the workplace, and this was achieved through the occupation of the Federated Union of Employees. This action prevented the Irish government from seeking and potentially gaining an exemption for the European Directive on Equal Pay. Subsequently, the Irish government passed the Employment Equality Act in 1977, ending legal discrimination in the workplace. While the efforts to achieve women's sexual freedom may have taken much longer, the efforts of the IWU and earlier groups had liberated women from exclusion in the workplace. A similar direct-action protest took place in the summer of 1976 when a group of women challenged their exclusion from the all-male swimming hole, the Forty Foot, in Sandycove. Initially, fifty women swam where men had exclusively been privileged to swim. Ultimately, women won the right to swim alongside men in Sandycove, and this right is taken for granted today. Other actions taken by women included their challenge to exclusion in pubs or the refusal of publicans to serve pints to women. As with their other protests and challenges to male only privilege in Ireland, women earned the right to be served in pubs based on their effective challenge to practices inherited from previous generations now antiquated by women's increased assertion of rights in Irish society.

Evelyn Conlon, one of the editors who wrote the first chapter, contends that the publication of this volume "is one step in the acknowledgement, remembrance and celebration of those who went before" (7). Her hope is that, by remembering history recorded in this volume, future generations of Irish women will not have to fight the same battle as women fifty years ago. Conlon and the others involved in IWU were not all of exactly the same mindset, and allowing nineteen women recollect in their own words provides a more comprehensive recollection than any effort by a single activist or historian to understand the numerous motivations and issues that confronted Irish women in the mid-1970s. This book builds upon previous important scholarship on the Women's movement in this period including Linda Connolly's *The Irish Women's Movement: From Revolution to Devolution* (2001). However, by providing first person testimonials and recollections, *After the Train* provides the reader with a recognition of the complex and nuanced views of its participants and will be of great service to scholars interested in the numerous issues and actors involved in the Irish women's movement of the mid-1970s. For example, Mary Dorney's chapter highlights the movement for gay liberation and advancement of lesbian sexuality that was part of IWU. Ger Moane stressed how Irishwomen United provided an outlet for her to pursue what she perceived as a radical agenda for social change advancing a myriad of women's causes. Anne Speed emphasised how Irish women were controlled by the state, society, husbands, and fathers in the 1970s and IWU empowered women, including in the area of employment and equality in the workplace.

Overall, the book demonstrates that social change does not occur by accident but the purposeful and effective organisation of those who lead movements which aim to improve women's status and equality in Irish society. Constructivism has stressed the importance of ideas and agency in understanding the politics of social groups. Irishwomen United was a group of motivated and talented women who sought to bring social change and whose ideas effectively transformed Ireland not only in the 1970s but in the fifty years since its inception.

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Irish Theatre: Interrogating Intersecting Inequalities
Eamon Jordan
London: Routledge (Paperback 2025). 266 pages.
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Reviewer: Natalie McCabe (Cameron University)

How are inequalities divided, discussed, and dramatised throughout Irish theatre? Who or what determines which inequities are theatrically bearable and which are not on the stages of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland? Eamonn Jordan explores these questions in his book *Irish Theatre: Interrogating Intersecting Inequalities*, published in 2024 as part of Routledge Studies in Irish Literature. In his book, Jordan draws on significant scholarship of past decades as he probes theatre of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries throughout the island, north and south of the divisive border.

After the Acknowledgements section, a comprehensive Introduction outlines the reasoning behind the book itself as well as each of the book's eight chapters, leading to a conclusion. Chapter One, titled "Methodology: Pivoting Intersections of Gender, Sectarianism, Ethnicity, Race and Class Towards Inequality", details Jordan's approach. In Chapter One, Jordon summarises the main ideas circulated throughout each subsequent chapter and notes questions asked of the plays. Jordan is firm that each chapter features plays that might enhance his argument within the chapter rather than listing the plays in a chronological fashion. He acknowledges the scholarship and scholars who preceded him and recognises that he has not read or interrogated every Irish play. He is particular that the book does not discuss or critique performances of the plays mentioned, but, rather, analyses the chosen scripts as pieces of dramatic literature.

Chapters Two through Eight interrogate a wide spectrum of Irish plays from different lenses and through different topics, including landholdings, wealth acquisition, inheritance, employment, education, sexual interactions, solidarities, and protests. The text includes discussions of works by playwrights such as Marina Carr, Teresa Deevy, Anne Devlin, Brian Friel, Conor McPherson, Tom Murphy, Stewart Parker, Lennox Robinson, and John Millington Synge, among many others. Plays examined in the various chapters include, but are not limited to, Carr's *Ariel* and *By the Bog of Cats*, Deevy's *Katie Roche,* Devlin's *After Easter,* Friel's *Aristocrats* and *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, McPherson's *The Veil*, Murphy's *The Wake,* Parker's *Pentecost*, Robinson's *The Whiteheaded Boy,* and Synge's *Playboy of the Western World*.

After Chapter 1, which focuses on methodology, Chapter Two, "Property Matters", discusses landholdings and associated wealth because "property is always political" (8) in plays. Chapter Three: "Everyday Entrepreneurial Capital", neither provides an explanation for the economies of Northern Ireland and the Republic nor the histories behind them. Rather, the chapter uses plays, investigating both how Irish playscripts interact with and represent diverse financial situations, and how characters in the scripts, both men and women of differing ages and socioeconomic statuses, intermingle with notions of meritocracy and individuals' ascension and descension between various socio-economic classes. Overall, the chapter questions why Irish plays often link wealth gains to corruption. Chapter Four: "Embodied Labour" considers diverse personified forms of labour, including paid and unpaid, voluntary and involuntary work, academic, domestic, cultural, and performative work by individuals across the age spectrum within and outside of the home. It highlights efforts that go unrecognised and unvalued, such as that put forth by female characters. Chapter Five: "Knowledge Economy" examines dramatic representations of various educational systems and entities across the island of Ireland and probes matters including hedge schools, school bullying, programmes for former offenders, teacher biases, and situations including "The Troubles" that impact educational quality and attainment. Chapter Six: "Sexual Encounters, Intimacies and Violations" explores topics surrounding consent, abuse, assault, romance, and fetishes related to sexual encounters and notes that social and legal ramifications related to sexual behaviours have changed in the years and decades covered by the chapter. Chapter Seven: "Intersectional/Intercultural Conflicts, Mésalliance and Irreconcilabilities" explores how plays handle conflicts related to class tensions, family concerns, trade unions and associated strikes and ethnic and immigration conflicts. Chapter Eight, titled "The Solidarity Paradox: Inter-Meshing Cultural and Social Capital in Lieu of Economic Capital?" asks how "solidarity is theatricalized" (15). The chapters are followed by a Conclusion and lengthy Works Cited section.

Jordan's wide use of sources is evident from the start. He cites a multitude of scholarship covering Irish theatre, history, and economy. The book utilises an "all-island approach" (1-2) to provide a broad perspective on the topics discussed in each chapter. It should be noted that there is an error regarding dates on page 5 in the Introduction section. It lists the Government of Ireland Act as originating in 2020 and being enacted in May of 2021. In actuality, the act was introduced and enacted a century earlier, 1920 and May of 2021, respectively. While a simple correction, it is important in the timeline of Ireland's history and a surprising error in an otherwise thorough tome that would be best consumed by Irish theatre scholars and used in graduate/post-graduate-level coursework related to Irish theatre theories and scholarship.

The book adds to the scholarship surrounding Irish theatre while asking more questions than providing clear-cut answers. While the plays are not sorted chronologically, future work might consider grouping the plays more specifically by time period or topic in order to make additional claims regarding theatrical trends and provide a path for the reader. Jordan notes that he has not seen all Irish plays, thus acknowledging an understandable limit to the work. That said, including plays before the twentieth century, if and as relevant, might provide additional points of discussion for future work in this area. A reader expecting a clear through-line outlining a consistent arc in the plays or concrete link from plays to social events and back again will be disappointed; Jordan is specific about his purpose throughout the book, from introduction to conclusion, questioning how various types of inequalities are seen as acceptable or unacceptable in Irish theatre without necessarily drawing direct links from inequalities evidenced in the plays to the social conditions in which those plays were written and which they represent.

In his conclusion, Jordan provides food for thought, asking if the dramatised ruminations on inequality are simply "preaching to the converted" (234) rather than instigating meaningful change. Perhaps this, an invitation to ask what inequalities have been and remain

theatrically tolerable in the drama of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, is the discussion that such drama needs, as dialogue around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) remains ongoing worldwide and provokes such strong responses across various sectors, from theatre to academe.

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Derek Mahon: A Retrospective
Nicholas Grene and Tom Walker
Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2024. 304 pages.
ISBN: 9781835537978

Reviewer: Ciarán O'Rourke (Trinity College Dublin)

Any critic, hostile or appreciative, who attempts to come to terms with the work of Derek Mahon must be impressed, in the first instance, by its wide-spanning vitality, shaped by and conversant with a truly eclectic variety of literary and historical discourses. One of the virtues of this essay collection is its implicit celebration of such imaginative scope and diversity. Contributions explore the "awareness of pervasive environmental challenges" that suffuses Mahon's writing (289), while also attending to what Matthew Campbell terms the poet's "embrace of the Yeatsian paradox" in his later years (30) – life and work, history and art, implicating but also catalysing each other in his creative praxis. Mahon's "syntactic grace and sonic resolution" are thus acknowledged (21), and his canonical revisions and interventions explored in detail, even as the modernity of the poems supplies a structuring motif for the volume as a whole.

In his early career, Mahon was viewed as a successor of sorts to Louis MacNeice – "both poets of elsewhere", as Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin observes (35), whose "ironies, allusions, and qualifications" complicate the terms of identity in which each is usually bracketed (47). In his maturity, he proclaimed himself a devoted fan of Björk and Joni Mitchell (Mahon 2017: 12): singer-songwriters rarely mentioned in contextual discussions of his work. Going some way to bridge this critical gap, Nicholas Grene foregrounds the poet's admiration for the balladry and "punk avant-garde" of Kirsty MacColl and Shane MacGowan (262), whose second name is misspelled as "McGowan". Grene is surely correct, however, to emphasise Mahon's consistent identification "with outsiders and outcasts, the dissolute and the disgraced", remarking that the poet harboured a particular concern for "the urban underclass" (259). The precarity and suffering of the latter impelled Mahon's empathy, he contends, while the "anti-establishment thrust" of their culture and social life – typified for Grene by the music of the Pogues – proved

inspiring. “Lost lives”, as Seamus Deane once noted, “are Mahon’s obsession. His poetry is an attempt to fulfil them” (Deane 1985: 162).

Mahon, incidentally, regarded MacNeice as a “wild man”; a “moonstruck artist”, he wrote in an essay included in his *Selected Prose*, lurked always “behind the urbane exterior” (125). For all his technical panache, Mahon himself had a talent for exulting in the wild and the wildering, celebrating those spaces that remained untameable and marginal – from “Huts and Sheds” to the landscapes frequented by New York’s homeless, an “alternative polity / beneath the ostensible, pharaonic city / glimpsed through rain or dust from an expressway” (Mahon 2021: 187). Analysing his “American” poems, Caitríona Clutterbuck presents Mahon as an excursive writer, whose gifts included a compulsive willingness to explore “modernity’s vibrancy alongside its dark shadow of desolation” (68): themes that may distinguish Mahon from his immediate contemporaries, for whom the sometimes atavistic terrains of Ulster (in the case of Heaney and Longley) and the twilit clarities of suburban Dublin (in the case of Eavan Boland) were grounding locales, in memory as in life, inflecting the language and tilting the observing lens of their imaginings.

Clutterbuck’s interpretation is refreshing for stepping outside of the national (Irish) and regional (Ulster) contexts in which Mahon is often situated. It is possible that the reflexive critical comparison of his work to that of his Ulster colleagues, indeed, obfuscates as much as it reveals (Campbell 2003: 137). When Gail McConnell suggests that Mahon’s poems feature “the mind thinking, the eye looking, but not the fleshy reality of the body”, the implication seems to be that Mahon seldom wrote in the Heaney mode (214). The inverse is also true, as a cursory juxtaposition of Heaney’s “The Tollund Man” with Mahon’s likewise excavatory “Lives” will show. But the comparison itself could be questioned. The point being that Mahon, in particular, was idiosyncratic and heterodox in his cultural affinities and identifications, an aspect of his work that is not always well served by critical discussions that regard his imaginative concerns primarily through the prism of the Irish and Northern Irish poetry scenes. If his prose collections are to be believed, the films of Bergman and Costa-Gavras were as creatively central to Mahon as the literary output of his peers (and rivals) on home turf.

As a miscellany of commentaries, the volume offers a range of distinctive readings, rather than a single interpretation, and this critical diversity is itself of interest. So Seán Hewitt describes Mahon as oscillating “between past and present, lost and loss, order and disorder, nostalgia and mockery”, as he waits in anticipation of the “contemplative silence” of a spiritual-ecological revelation (271) – while Haughton, in his contribution, focuses instead on what he terms “Mahon’s ferocious critique of ecocidal global capitalism” (312). The editors also register this dimension of Mahon’s work in their introduction, arguing that “it would be absurd to call [Mahon] an apolitical poet, given his resistance to global capitalism and its destructive effects on the planet” (10).

Although one of his chosen texts, “Ovid in Tomis”, opens with the image of a “can of Coca-Cola / knocking the icy rocks” (Mahon 2021: 146) – implying that globalised commodity culture, unlike the *RMS Titanic*, remains tenaciously “unsinkable” – Hewitt chooses not to dwell on this intellectual dynamic in Mahon’s writing. Instead, he ascribes “a paralysing self-awareness”, “a deep-seated and complex ambivalence” towards the creative act, and a tendency towards spiritual and emotional “vacillation” to the poet, a figure troubled, Hewitt argues, by his sense of a “deprivation in rationalism”, which his poetry attempts to mend “by making room for the non-rational” (271-82). Haughton, however, convincingly bridges the critical gulf between his and Hewitt’s respective readings, acknowledging the ambivalence that Hewitt outlines while also foregrounding Mahon’s perceptual brilliance, and suggesting that the poet’s late style blends both “affirmation and critique, resistance and celebration”, to fine effect (312). “We belong to this” world, said Mahon, “not as discrete / observing presences but as born / participants in the action” (Mahon 2021: 312). Whatever spiritual paralysis he may have felt at

different points in his life, he was, to the end, intellectually alert and ethically engaged, and the ecological attentions of his later poems reflect these attributes.

"Nothing to lose but our chains, our chains gone", Mahon wrote, quoting *The Communist Manifesto*, while surveying "the pastiche paradise of the post-modern" society around him, saturated with "the ersatz, the pop, the phoney" (Mahon 2021: 208). Unlike the young Marx and Engels, he continued, "we seldom love or hate, as once, with a full heart" (208). Marx's audacious incitements to social revolution also freight the language of "The History Train", a poem stalked by "the haunting spectre of a future lost" (372), a phrase that echoes both *The Communist Manifesto*, once again, and the closing lines of Percy Shelley's sonnet, "England in 1819". Without elucidating that particular connection, Edna Longley situates Mahon "in the tradition" of Shelley's "grand affirmation" of poetry's ethical power, *A Defence of Poetry* (146). "I'm more inclined to Shelley than to Auden", he told *The Paris Review* (Grennan 2000: 174).

"Every true poet speaks for poetry", Longley notes, "But Mahon is among those poets who speak with special 'intensity'" (146). She goes on:

> Shelley both defends poetry as an art and represents it as an art of defence: defence against the worst that can happen to human civilization. For Shelley, "the extinction of the poetical principle" is "connected with the progress of despotism and superstition". Mahon's exiles, reprobates, and the persecuted Akhmatova confirm this connection. (146)

"Ovid in Tomis", in fact, is one of a number of poems in which Mahon adapts Shelley to his own purposes (another is "Word to the Wise", referencing "The Masque of Anarchy" in its call for "the ownership of the country" to be devolved "to / the people of the country, not the few" [Mahon 2021: 514]). Offering a fluent variation on themes introduced in Shelley's "Ozymandias" and "Ode to a Skylark", Mahon reconfigures the sound of rising birdsong as a riposte to worldly power. "I often sit in the dunes", he writes (revising Shelley's famous desert vista),

> listening hard
> to the uninhibited
>
> viruosity of a lark
> serenading the sun
> and meditate upon
>
> the transience
> of earthly dominion,
> the perfidy of princes. (Mahon 2021: 146)

Contrasting the "uninhibited // virtuosity of a lark / serenading the sun" to "the perfidy of princes", these lines may also constitute a guarded literary salute to Bobby Sands, for whom, in the hunger striker's words, "the imprisonment of the lark" was "a crime of the greatest cruelty because the lark is one of the greatest symbols of freedom and happiness" (Sands 1981: 33). "Ovid in Tomis" was first published in the winter 1983/84 issue of *Stand* magazine, two years after Sands's death. Worldly, multi-faceted, and debonair, Mahon's poetry abounds in such resonances, earthing his lyricism in the realm of moral inquiry and historical understanding.

One certainty is that Mahon's "political sensibility", as Tom Walker suggests, was "long-standing" (251), and not merely an aberration accompanying his later work. *Derek Mahon: A Retrospective* adds depth and directionality to this recognition, mapping out the various terrains over which further investigations of the poet's oeuvre might be conducted.

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Body Politics in Contemporary Irish Women's Fiction: The Literary Legacy of Mother Ireland

Ellen Scheible
Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury, 2025. 192 pages.
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Reviewer: Hailey Haffey (Wilson College & University of Utah Spencer Fox Eccles School of Medicine)

The last thirty-five years have brought dramatic changes for gender-related rights in Ireland, including the legalisation of divorce, gay marriage, and abortion. Such advancements in marital laws and reproductive health are closely aligned with women's position in society, both informing and being informed by cultural metaphors for women's agency. Accordingly, tracing the trope of Mother Ireland in Irish culture and literature is key to understanding the meaning and potential of gender-oriented advancements in Ireland – in short, so we better can assess how gender politics, relationships, and beliefs are routed through our imaginations and back into our world. Ellen Scheible seeks to answer the call to critically appraise cultural myths of gender in contemporary Irish literature in her book *Body Politics in Contemporary Irish Women's Fiction: The Literary Legacy of Mother Ireland*.

In *Body Politics*, Scheible makes crucial strides in showcasing the Mother Ireland trope's legacy through a holistic analysis of its evolution since the late nineteenth century, with emphasis on fiction by James Joyce, Elizabeth Bowen, Emma Donoghue, Tana French, and Sally Rooney. In unravelling Mother Ireland's development, Scheible explores the political functions of fairy lore and Catholic iconography, gender and family dynamics of Irish cottage and Big House literary symbolism along with related gothic conventions, the constraints of "double binds" of Irish masculinity in the context of postcolonial nation building, and the shifting landscape of narratives about women's reproductive agency in the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger, Waking the Feminists, and the repeal of the Eighth Amendment. Scheible's discussions of the endurance of Joyce's work in the trope's development, the evolving political symbolism of domestic and interior spaces, and her examination of the adaptations of gothic conventions support her thesis that both before and after the Celtic Tiger period "woman-as-symbol remains consistent", although "the metaphorical relationship between feminine and national identity has not always produced the same stories and has not always made the same arguments about the role of women in Ireland" (11-12). Importantly, Scheible also correlates diversity in symbolism with diversity of texts – from high literature to popular fiction.

Framing Mother Ireland's literary arc, *Body Politics* begins with a reading of James Joyce's "The Dead", through which Scheible outlines a metaphoric "mirroring" relationship between Irish women and Ireland that correlates with "miscalculations and misunderstandings" in the shared vision of the Irish nation and patriarchy, represented by Gabriel Conroy (32). Accordingly, Scheible situates Joyce's "politics" of gender as central in the project of outlining and deconstructing an "Irish nationalism that is inseparable from its dependency on female otherness and oppression to validate Irish (Catholic, male) identity in the modern nation" (8, 13). Throughout the text, Scheible revisits the Joycean metaphor of misinterpreted reflections through her strategies (*e.g.*, applying Lacanian mirror stages to character development) and subjects (*e.g.*, discussing Sally Rooney's essay "Misreading *Ulysses*" as well as allusions to "The Dead" in Rooney's fiction). This consistent return to Joyce shows the significance of both his narratives and literary methods in perpetuating images of a Mother Ireland who signifies evolving identities and relationalities, whether they be in the writings of Edna O'Brien or Sally Rooney.

Further considering the dangerous functions of otherness for the trope, Scheible outlines a template for reading the often-abused symbolic body of Mother Ireland from Angela Bourke's retelling of Tipperary seamstress Bridget Cleary's 1895 murder. Scheible uses this story, "one of Irish literature's overarching metaphors that depicts or confronts the Irish domestic interior and the Mother Ireland image", to explain Mother Ireland's transmutations at precarious intersections of gender, belief, nation, and power (14). Scheible contends that "domestic metaphors" since the Cleary case "either expose the national push to suppress the fluid gendered power of interior space or openly resist the gender binary that produced feminine disempowerment and masculine violence" (45). Accordingly, with Cleary's story as a lens, Scheible evaluates metaphors of space in Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) and Pamela Hinkson's *The Ladies' Road* (1946).

Scheible's analysis of domestic spaces grafts effectively to her discussions of the Irish Gothic in literature emerging from the Celtic Tiger. Thus, Scheible's characterisation of the Celtic Tiger as a mediator of Mother Ireland's permutations is one of the text's most illuminating modes of analysis. Her observation that "the fear that Celtic Tiger wealth might have been a misleading illusion replaces the Protestant concern with property theft" previews the trope's gothic path of adaption to modern social dilemmas (67-68). Attention to depictions of disappointment with the Celtic Tiger's fallout clarifies this transformation, as Scheible shows that stories evoking the Tiger's remnant ghost estates are "built on the back of Big House histories" (77). Accordingly, Scheible argues that "women writers employ the contemporary

Irish Gothic to represent the global threat of domestic erasure to both nation and family as a revelation of the ironic expectations placed on the female body to reproduce the nation while simultaneously repressing an innately dangerous sexuality" (71).

Body Politics impressively organises an exacting collection of research, much of which is used to develop robust interpretative frameworks. However, literary, political, and cultural contextualisation often outcompetes close readings, limiting opportunities for analysis of women's fiction that could explore additional dynamics and manifestations of the Mother Ireland trope. Only short sections of *Body Politics* are dedicated to close readings of women-identified writers and characters representing the trope's history before the early 2000s (though many are referenced). For example, while the text addresses Edna O'Brien's fiction to a degree, descriptions are connected with discussions of Joyce. However, additional close readings of women-identified characters would also further elucidate *Body Politics'* analysis of texts by Donoghue, French, and Rooney.

While more time for close readings of key, earlier Irish women's fiction would help with tracing the literary and cultural lineage of Mother Ireland, extended engagement with gender and queer theory would support further disambiguation of these lineages. *Body Politics* discusses queer theorists Lee Edelman and Jack Halberstam briefly but invokes their language more broadly. Accordingly, detailed examinations of their theories (with other gender and queer theories), could contextualise *Body Politics'* sometimes overlapping uses of gender- and sex-related categories, such as "female" and "feminine", which at times seem to be characterised as ontologies, such as when Scheible explains that "Ireland's process of modernity is a history of interwoven ideological misconceptions about both female sexuality and childhood development", which the "Irish literary landscape" has combatted (4). Such phrasing seems to imply not only that a better understanding of female sexuality is on the horizon – but that female sexuality coheres as a truth as opposed to a construction. Accordingly, while Scheible is clear that the Mother Ireland trope results in varied arguments and stories about "the role of women in Ireland", the text seems to advocate for the trope's (and nation's) movement toward an ideal, liberated form of femininity, despite its many assertions about resistance to binaries and heteronormativity (11-12). Support of this trajectory toward an ideal is buoyed by descriptions of Joyce's and O'Brien's views, characterised by "vision" and "prophesy", as Scheible explains, "Joyce envisions a future Ireland where a recognition of the feminine as a signifier of cultural difference, not reproductive futurism, is essential to national development", and that Rooney evokes "O'Brien's prophecy that a liberated female sexuality is key to rewriting the legacy of Mother Ireland as both freeing and potentially reproductive" (155, 148). The alternative the text does not arrive at is that recognising latent queerness of gender and sexuality in Mother Ireland might be one path to navigating the oppression of gendered otherness.

Body Politics often situates narrative decisions, including the choice to have an abortion or not to bear children, as examples of Irish women characters resisting a heteronormative "reproductive futurism", a concept derived from Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive.* However, in *No Future*, feminist visions are not immune to the politics of "reproductive futurism", for as Edelman argues, "even proponents of abortion rights, while promoting the freedom of women to control their own bodies through reproductive choice, recurrently frame their political struggle, mirroring their anti-abortion foes […] as a fight for the future", which still "returns to the Child as the image of the future it intends" (3). Edelman's radically deconstructive paradigm does not neatly support hope for an Irish feminist future (even one repudiating colonial, Catholic, and nationalist aims). However, further engagement with his argument in this text could clarify Scheible's views and support a critique of *No Future's* limitations, which scholars including José Esteban Muñoz have made. Such work could also prompt new discussions of race and immigration related to the trope.

Overall, in *Body Politics*, Scheible does significant, meaningful, and successful work tracing and illuminating what is at stake in Ireland's persistent metaphor of gender, nation, and religion. In the process, she shows how the trope has a distinctive capacity to help readers reflect on the roles of power and gendered otherness in Ireland's past and present, thus bringing understanding to what has been an "unresolved homeland" in gender relations (146).

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The Routledge Companion to Sally Rooney
Angelos Bollas, ed.
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Reviewer: Thomas Korthals (University of Applied Sciences, Hamm (HSHL))

In little more than a decade, Sally Rooney has emerged as both a literary celebrity and a central reference point in discussions of millennial subjectivity, intimacy, and the contradictions of late capitalism. Her novels – *Conversations with Friends* (2017), *Normal People* (2018), and *Beautiful World, Where Are You* (2021) – have achieved international acclaim, with *Normal People* further extending her cultural reach through its widely praised television adaptation. Academic engagement with Rooney's work, however, is only now beginning to consolidate. *The Routledge Companion to Sally Rooney*, edited by Angelos Bollas, constitutes the first sustained scholarly effort to survey and critically assess Rooney's fiction and its reception, marking an important moment in the emergence of Rooney studies as a recognisable field of inquiry.

Bollas's editorial approach lends a distinct degree of coherence to a diverse collection of essays. The introduction situates Rooney within a range of literary, cultural, and theoretical contexts, while the arrangement of chapters examines both the thematic focuses and stylistic features of her literature, placing them in the context of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland and global societal changes. Rooney is presented as a significant voice in contemporary literature, reflecting on complex themes such as modern relationships, identity, class differences, and the

social upheavals in Ireland following the economic boom of the Celtic Tiger. The volume avoids both celebratory accounts of Rooney's popularity and dismissive readings that frame her work as a transient cultural phenomenon. Instead, it presents Rooney as a writer whose fiction merits sustained critical attention. Including work from both experienced and early-career researchers highlights the field's growth and broadens the volume's methods.

One of the *Companion*'s principal strengths lies in its broad interdisciplinary scope. Several chapters examine Rooney's portrayal of young adults navigating precarious labour conditions, economic instability in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, and complex forms of intimacy. The volume also addresses persistent difficulties of communication and self-articulation in a world increasingly characterised by digital (non-)communication. Thematic concerns such as gender, sexuality, and space are explored in depth. Essays by Sofia Alférez-Mendía, Elvira Aguilera García, Kübra Özermiş, and others focus on constructions of masculinity, female sexuality, and intimacy, demonstrating that Rooney's female protagonists navigate emotional vulnerability, power imbalances, and societal constraints. These works address the discrepancy between feminist theory and lived reality, questioning the dichotomy of action and suffering in intimate relationships and advocating for the recognition of vulnerability as the basis of genuine intimacy. Chapters by Marion Bourdeau, Melina Pereira Savi, and Alinne Fernandes attend to the representation and transformation of social and domestic spaces in Rooney's fiction.

In addition to these more familiar critical trajectories, the *Companion* includes essays that open up less expected avenues of inquiry. For instance, Sara Romero Otero's chapter on endometriosis in *Conversations with Friends* offers a nuanced analysis of embodiment and illness, extending existing discussions of gender and vulnerability and illuminating the physical and social challenges of chronic illness and its impact on identity and relationships. Paddy Brennan's examination of thinness, food consumption, and capitalism across Rooney's novels similarly demonstrates how bodily practices are embedded within broader critiques of neoliberal culture. At the same time, Bollas ensures that central areas of Rooney studies are well represented.

"The Dark Turn of Chick Lit in Sally Rooney's Works" by Eva Marie Heimers explores the underlying themes and ethos in Rooney's novels, analysing how Rooney deconstructs traditional romance narratives to reveal darker psychological and societal undercurrents. It is just one example of how the *Companion* does not shy away from including popular culture references and turns them into academic interest. The violence and negativity that pervade Rooney's novels are highlighted as the female protagonists are depicted as having destructive self-images and pessimistic outlooks on life. This negativity is not explained directly in the novels but is understood as a survival strategy in a sexist and fragmented world. Rather than offering a cure-all through romantic relationships, Rooney's novels destabilise the concept of romance and reject uncomplicated happy endings, focusing instead on the psychological development of characters.

Discussions by Zélie Asava and Elvira Aguilera García of screen adaptations further provide a valuable cross-media perspective, while Pilar Iglesias-Aparicio's feminist reading of the first three novels foregrounds contemporary Irish women's experiences, with particular attention to gender inequality, emotional abuse, and social expectation.

The organisation of the volume, however, occasionally results in abrupt shifts of focus. For example, Laura Vázquez González and Keah Amy Dixon's analysis of trauma in *Conversations with Friends* appears directly alongside Elvira Aguilera García's discussion of masculinities in *Normal People*. While this arrangement highlights the comparative scope of the volume, it occasionally disrupts the thematic continuity. A division of the volume by the individual novels would not have been feasible, given the comparative scope of many contributions, but some additional thematic clustering might have enhanced navigability.

In sum, *The Routledge Companion to Sally Rooney* represents a timely and authoritative contribution to contemporary literary criticism, offering an interdisciplinary, in-depth engagement with Rooney's work. The volume paints a multifaceted picture of Rooney's literary output, linking personal experiences with societal challenges and reflecting the complexity of young people's lives in the twenty-first century. By situating Rooney's fiction within an Irish literary context as well as broader debates about economics, intimacy, and media, the volume establishes a solid foundation for future scholarship. As it firmly positions Rooney in the context of Irish Literature, it will be of particular interest to scholars of Irish studies, contemporary fiction, and cultural studies, and it confirms Rooney's work as a significant object of ongoing critical inquiry for years to come.

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Inside Rural Ireland: Power and Change since Independence
Tomás Finn and Tony Varley, eds.
Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2024. 304 pages.
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Reviewer: Daniel Gallen (University of Galway)

Inside Rural Ireland is an insightful examination of an oft-overlooked dimension of Irish history and society. The work shines a light on the diverse, multifaceted, and often contradictory inner workings of rural Irish society and politics from the beginning of the Irish state right up until the present day, illuminating the myriad ways in which the Irish countryside navigated developments and power dynamics over the past century.

Following an introduction written by editors Varley and Finn, the book is divided into five sections, each inspecting unique elements of Irish rurality. The first of these examines the role of the state in its direct interventions and planning efforts in rural areas; in Chapter Two, Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh focuses on the changes in official intervention in the pre- and post-Independence period; and in Chapter Three, Peter Murray and Maria Feeney examine the developments of the 1960s during a period of nationwide economic recalibration. These opening chapters, taken together, show that – despite being separated by a generation and status-

quo-upending global war – there existed a noted disconnect between official plans for rural Ireland and their real-terms impact. This is exemplified in Ó Tuathaigh's essay through the case of the newly established Free State's dismantling of the Congested Districts Boards in favour of a system that treated all impoverished rural areas as a homogeneous mass; and in Murray and Feeney's chapter by the seemingly inverse correlation between the number and scale of enthusiastic proposals brought forward by groups like Muintir na Tíre, and the relative dearth of funding or support provided by the Irish government of the mid-century.

The second section addresses the means by which groups and individuals – in particular, Father John Hayes – attempted to organise rural civil society. Much of this section deals with the ideologies and activities of Muintir na Tíre, but analysis is also devoted to political organisation such as the mid-century farmers' parties like the National Farmers' and Ratepayers' League (NFRL) and Clann na Talmhan, and to civic groups like Tuairim. Chapter Four sees Eoin Devereux critically reassess the work and legacy of Father John Hayes, founder of Muintir, and present his role in defining the early ideological direction of the organisation along with its use of the parish as a vehicle for rural community organising. Further, Devereux invites us to ask if Hayes, in this regard, was representative of a real desire to shape and direct rural development, or merely to reinforce a conservative social hierarchy by providing a forum within which class differences could be ameliorated but never, ultimately, challenged. Tony Varley, in Chapter Five, then outlines the ways in which a number of groups – such as Muintir, the NFRL/National Centre Party, and Clann na Talmhan – sought to organise rural communities, how they did or did not manage class and gender differences, and their relationships with the political establishment. Varley also highlights the very interesting divergence in methodology between them, in that the latter pair sought to directly challenge the power of the ruling Fianna Fáil party by contesting elections whereas Muintir sought to collaborate with them from outside of the party-political system. In Chapter Six, Tomás Finn assesses the work of two groups: Muintir and Tuairim, the former a Christian, parish-centric, rural community development organisation; the latter a secular, urban, intellectual society seeking to effect change in Irish society by driving it in a more liberal direction. This chapter explores these groups' divergent approaches to tackling social change in mid-century Ireland, and their varying relationships to both the Catholic Church and the State.

The third section examines contemporary perceptions of rural Ireland in the mid-twentieth century. Caitriona Clear analyses the portrayal of rural Ireland in popular Irish fiction of the 1940s, and provides an interesting overview of the depiction of rural life and communities in novels of the time. Of note are the representations of entertainment, such as going to 'the pictures' or dancing, as well as the surprisingly (for the era) complex treatment of the experiences and attitudes of female characters. Bryan Fanning then provides an interesting insight into the broader theological and sociological theory through which Catholic intellectuals – and, by extension, their institutions – viewed and engaged with rural Ireland, its problems and its "decline", as well as their proposed "solutions". An interesting observation the reader may make is how many of these problems, and the anxieties that followed from them, were – to some extent – realised in modern Ireland, or how the issues identified in the pages of *Christus Rex in* the mid-century reflect those still present today.

The penultimate section focuses on the position of women and their relationship to – and challenges of – patriarchal structures of power in rural society. Anne Byrne and Tanya Watson track the evolution of the place of women in farming households in the twentieth century through careful analysis of anthropological and sociological studies carried out between the 1930s and 1990s. It particularly identifies changing externalities (economics of agriculture, sustainability concerns, etc.) as being of equal import to developments in their positions as changing conceptions of a "woman's place" in farming due to a growing feminist consciousness. Chapter ten, by Micheál Ó Fathartaigh and Anne Cassidy, charts the

development of female-led advisory bodies in the Irish agricultural sector and questions the extent to which these can be seen as challenging traditional structures of patriarchal power. One of the examples herein – that of the poultry-farming instructresses – was so successful that it created sufficient demand to warrant increased industrialisation of poultry-farming. However, because of the analysis by Ó Fathartaigh and Cassidy, the instructresses almost appear to have become victims of their own success: as poultry-farming became such a lynchpin of the agricultural sector – thanks in large part to the work of the instructresses – it stopped being seen as within the domain of women and, ultimately, became a more male-dominated field.

The final section turns its attention to the contemporary Irish countryside: synthesising, in a way, the work of all the preceding chapters to elucidate the current state of rurality. Mary Cawley provides an insightful statistical analysis of surveyed emigrants and returnees from rural areas, tracking their reasons for leaving and coming back. While it notes the overall importance of economics as a driving factor for migration, it also highlights the impact of "social causes" on both out- and in-migration and shows that emigration (and return) cannot be viewed through a purely economic lens. The decision to return she attributes to a desire to "settle down" and a perception of the Irish countryside as a preferable environment in which to start or raise a family, coming as it does with proximity to social support networks, while still recognising that improving economics "facilitated return" (152). Mary E. Daly rounds out the book with an overall hopeful chapter that dispels many of the myths and anxieties associated with the "decline" of rural Ireland. She tracks the many positive developments – both economic and social – that have affected the region, while still paying heed to the challenges it and its inhabitants continue to face. She also highlights that the traditional rural/urban divide has, in many ways, been diminished over the past century through advancements in infrastructure, connectivity and improved employment and education prospects. However, her suggestion that the COVID-19 pandemic's contribution to the prevalence of remote working could see "large city-centre office complexes […] become redundant" (163) would appear to overlook the myriad other reasons individuals choose to live in urban centres, beyond employment opportunities.

As a whole, the book excels in dispelling the perception of rural Ireland throughout the twentieth century as a cultural and economic monolith, to be viewed simply as a periphery of the urban centres of the island. Rather, it shows that the rural "hinterland" was anything but – and that many of the driving forces of change (or, at least, attempted change) were developed from within by an active and civic-minded rural public. Far from being a society averse to adaptation to economic and societal challenges, or one merely having said adaptations imposed upon them from without, *Inside Rural Ireland* demonstrates that rural populations, through their community groups and leaders, were more than willing to organise and campaign for these adaptations on their own terms.

However, the exact nature of these "terms" was hardly set in stone, and contributions to the book reveal the heterogeneity of thought and opinion even within groups that were, prima facie, broadly aligned ideologically. Varley's comparisons between John Hayes' Muintir na Tíre on the one hand and Frank MacDermot and Michael Donnellan's Farmers' Parties on the other is an excellent example: while both groups sought to organise rural communities generally and agricultural workers specifically, MacDermot and Donnellan sought to challenge the ruling party by engaging in electoral politics, whereas Hayes adhered to a strict doctrine of subsidiarity – one that would cooperate with the ruling party but stand apart from it. Furthermore, Finn's examination of Muintir's relationship with the institution of the Catholic Church (and with archbishop John Charles McQuaid in particular) in chapter six highlights that Muintir, whom one would be hard-pressed to argue was not heavily influenced by a contemporaneous current of conservative Catholic social thought, were seen by McQuaid as "not Catholic enough" because they self-described as a "Christian" organisation and allowed participation from

Protestants (77). The work is also careful to avoid viewing rural Ireland purely in terms of political alignment or agricultural output. While these elements are certainly tackled in many of the chapters, space is also devoted to such diverse themes as external perceptions of rurality; the position and agency of rural women; the contact and conflict between rural Ireland and a globalising economy; and the myriad, often idiosyncratic, manifestations of class dynamics in such a setting.

The term "rural" is, of course, not synonymous with "agricultural"' and while several chapters within the book do make an effort to engage with rurality beyond the boundaries of the farm (Clear and Fanning's chapters standing as notable examples of this), the lion's share of the text centres the experiences of agricultural labour within the farming sector. One cannot help but feel that this was a missed trick for a work whose primary raison d'être seems to be to challenge the perception of homogeneity within rural Irish life. For instance, it seems very likely that the experiences of rural communities, even rural farmers, located around the border would not – could not – have been the same as those on the Atlantic coast in Munster, especially during the IRA's border campaign of the 1950s-60s, or during the Troubles, or in the post-Good Friday Agreement era. Yet this is something left unexamined. Similarly, little mention is made of those involved in the fishing industry, despite this being a) a form of agricultural labour, and b) an economic activity predominantly centred in rural areas. The annual report on sea and inland fisheries from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (7 & 20) in 1974 recorded slightly over 13,000 people engaged in employment in the fishing industry. This was also an industry that would have been significantly impacted by Ireland's accession to the EEC in 1973, as well as by broader technological advancements in shipping and fish farming. However, this industry – and by extension the communities built up around it – are absent from any analysis in the book, despite such analyses being applied rather thoroughly to its landed counterparts. A further work covering such omissions could make for a compelling companion to this book.

Overall, *Inside Rural Ireland* is a well-researched, thought-provoking, and generally accessible foray into the history and sociology of a somewhat understudied – and certainly underappreciated – element of modern Ireland. It challenges us to view Irish rurality not as some kind of backwater: frozen in time and solely reliant on urban centres to drag it kicking and screaming into modernity; but rather as a vibrant, dynamic socio-cultural milieu brimming with life, ideas, personality and – most importantly – agency in its own development. This is of particular relevance to Mary E. Daly's final chapter, where a more careless reading thereof could give the impression that all the work laid out thus far – of Muintir; of Macra na Feirme; of feminist agitation – was ultimately "wasted effort" because everything "turned out fine". But rural Ireland, as has been demonstrated by the book, has been shaped in the modern day by all that which came before. The attempts, regardless of their levels of success, by those rural inhabitants to exercise their agency is brought to light within the text and demonstrates the importance of finding and analysing those historically overlooked and maligned voices so that we might listen to, and learn from, that which they have to say.

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Anthologisation and Irish Short Fiction: Magnitudes of Telling
Paul Delaney
London: Routledge, 2025. 224 pages.
ISBN: 9781032033969

Reviewer: Martina Chicco (Dalarna University)

Those familiar with short fiction often recognise the distinctive excellence of Irish writers among their international peers. Studying the Irish short story entails engaging with a genre "often hailed as the national prose form in Ireland" (D'hoker 2021) and confronting a pervasive mythology: the idea that the short form is somehow inscribed in the national DNA. Paul Delaney's *Anthologisation and Irish Short Fiction: Magnitudes of Telling* (2025) arrives as a timely and lucid intervention to interrogate this mythology.

Responding to Elke D'hoker's call for scholarships that explore the "complex mixture of influences which have shaped and continue to shape the Irish short story" (D'hoker 2015), Delaney turns his attention to the process of anthologisation as a structuring force within modern literary culture. The phrase "magnitudes of telling", which titles the book, encapsulates his central argument: that short stories not only tell in multiple ways, but are also continually retold through acts of curation, republication, and recontextualisation (1). As the first monograph to treat the anthology as a critical lens for Irish short fiction, Delaney's study reveals how editorial practice, publishing economics, ideological framing, and gatekeeping shape the canon and influence how readers and critics understand the genre. This interest in editorial mediation and publishing structures can be situated alongside recent work on Irish short fiction in periodical contexts, including Yen-Chi Wu's *Irish Writers and The New Yorker in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (2026).

The book opens with a striking remark from *The Irish Times* in 2010: "We may not be very good at economics or honest politics, but we certainly know how to write a short story" (2). This paradox of national self-definition in the post-Celtic Tiger years is emblematic of a broader cultural narrative. As Delaney argues, the ever-present influence of authors like Frank O'Connor, particularly his notion of submerged population groups, and the legacy of Seán Ó Faoláin and David Marcus's anthologies have helped construct, repeat, and institutionalise the trope of the Irish genius for the short story.

To grasp the "full complexity" of Irish short fiction (Estévez-Saá 2015), one must look beyond the texts themselves to the transnational nature of the genre and the infrastructures that shape its circulation: publishing houses, literary prizes, funding bodies, and the networks of editors and agents who determine what gets read and remembered. Drawing on scholars such as Elke D'hoker and Chris Mourant, Delaney foregrounds the "polytextual" environment of

short fiction, where each story exists in multiple iterations and within shifting frames of reference (D'hoker and Mourant 2021: 2). In this context, the anthologies' role is that of an archivist and at the same time a trendsetter: an aesthetic and ideological arrangement that produces meaning through inclusion, exclusion, and juxtaposition, becoming an active agent in cultural memory-making.

Delaney's first chapter, "Defining and rethinking 'the Irish short story'", starts to challenge the homogenising assumptions carried by this phrasing and discusses the way in which "the form – or rather, the forms – of short fiction have been discussed in Irish writing" (19). This chapter raises a fundamental question: which came first, the tradition of Irish short fiction or the anthology? Beginning with Ní Dhuibhne's paired short satires, "A Literary Lunch" (2007) and "City of Literature" (2017), to expose how gatekeeping operates within Ireland's literary institutions, he then expands outward to critique the mythology of Irish storytelling. While acknowledging the enduring influence of O'Connor, Ó Faoláin, and Lavin, he resists essentialist readings that link form to ethnicity or temperament. Starting by questioning the "gender blindness" (23) so pervasive in the first male-dominated anthologies from the 1960s and 1970s, where claims of neutrality often masked the systematic marginalisation of women writers, he also considers the seminal role of the *Exploring English* 1 (1967) anthology, after being introduced into English syllabi, in shaping certain tropes surrounding the Irish short story which have been later canonised, one of the most entrenched being "the impression that writing by women is a subsidiary concern for many readers of Irish literature" (54). He locates the Irish short story within transnational exchanges of form, genre, and publication, considering acts of translation, the "labyrinthine complexities of Anglo-Irish relations" (48) and their impact on Irish artistic endeavours.

In the second and third chapters, Delaney's strong theoretical knowledge works alongside an in-depth analysis of selected short stories, making these two chapters particularly useful for students of the form(s). The second chapter, "A Gathering of Possibilities: Acts of Anthologisation", forms the book's intellectual heart. Here, Delaney moves from theory to case studies, analysing how anthologies have shaped public taste and academic discourse. He reads landmark collections starting from Marcus's essential *Phoenix Irish Short Stories* collections and their role in shaping writers' and readers' aesthetics and expectations. He then considers four posthumous anthologies in Marcus's series, and the editorial choices made for each collection, alongside Sinead Gleeson's *The Long Gaze Back* (2015) and *The Art of the Glimpse* (2020), and Ken Bruen's *Dublin Noir* (2008). What emerges is a portrait of anthologisation as a cultural negotiation: each collection constructs its own imagined community through acts of inclusion and omission (10). Drawing on Gleeson's introduction to *The Art of the Glimpse,* Delaney shows how these curated volumes both democratise and delimit the literary field. The "gathering of possibilities" represents how an anthology is a stage where writers come together and tradition(s) are reinforced or challenged, a space where differences are articulated and networks created or contested between "authors, forms, styles, generations, and texts" (120).

"'Magnitudes of Telling': Portability and Revision" expands the book's argument into questions of textual fluidity and media circulation. The short story, he reminds us, has always been a movable form, migrating from magazines to collections to radio broadcasts and digital platforms (8). What distinguishes the contemporary moment is the acceleration and visibility of this movement. A single story might appear in a magazine, be republished in an author's collection, excerpted in a school anthology, and later adapted for a podcast: all these versions shape readerly expectations differently. Delaney reads this portability as a metaphor for the short story's openness: its resistance to closure and its capacity for renewal through retelling (193). Moreover, stories may be revised by authors after initial publication, and the surrounding paratexts may shift, influencing interpretation. Rather than resolving this by privileging a single authoritative version, Delaney argues that critics must engage with the multiplicity of a story's

forms. While anthologies exercise considerable power in determining which version "should be made available to readers" (129), he insists that criticism should engage with the "variety and the plasticity of its practice" (198), treating revision and circulation as constitutive features of the genre.

At the heart of *Anthologisation and Irish Short Fiction* lies an argument about relationality: between stories and their publication contexts, between national literatures and transnational networks, between the text and its paratexts. The notion of "magnitudes of telling" wraps the multiplicity of narrative forms and the social processes that sustain them. This approach flows into the growing stream of transnational approaches in Irish Studies. While earlier criticism often sought to define "the Irish short story" as a self-contained tradition, Delaney positions it within a global ecology of forms and media. The result is a model of Irish literary culture that is fluid, dynamic, and adjusted to the material conditions of production.

The book's contribution is dual. First, it reorients the field from author-centric or thematic readings toward a systemic understanding of how literature circulates. Second, it invites scholars to think transnationally and transmedially. This perspective has implications far beyond Ireland: it offers a methodology for reading contemporary literature as a set of processes rather than products. Delaney writes with the clarity of a teacher and the gaze of a veteran of short fiction. At times, the range of references, spanning decades, genres, and media, can feel dizzying, but he traces the paths of his arguments with agility. Thanks to this monograph, we are invited to observe how stories live, move, and multiply as if under a microscope. By focusing on anthologies, Delaney transforms what might seem a peripheral topic into a prism through which to scrutinise the evolving ecology of Irish literature. This book will undoubtedly prove useful for scholars of the short story form, both within Irish Studies and beyond, and for those interested in the intersections of literature, media, and material culture.

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Finnegans Wake – *Human and Non-Human Histories*
Richard Barlow and Paul Fagan, eds.
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2024 (Paperback 2026). 256 pages.
ISBN: 9781399529440

Reviewer: Jinan Ashraf (Dublin City University)

The collection *Finnegans Wake – Human and Non-Human Histories*, edited by Richard Barlow and Paul Fagan (Edinburgh University Press, 2024), pushes the disciplinary boundaries of literary studies by calling to question the limits of individual theoretical paradigms in accounting for the planetary scope and scale of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939). The collection interrogates varying theories of the nonhuman in its overview of the field in a bid to provide its readers with new methodological and interpretive frameworks which trouble and expand the readers' understanding of the *Wake*'s non-human imaginary. In the process, the collection brings into sharper focus the anthropocentric biases and failures of extant theoretical models in grasping the *Wake*. Richard Barlow and Paul Fagan situate new scholarship by veteran Joyce scholars broadly within the intersections of Joyce Studies (more narrowly, *Wake* studies), non-human studies, the New Modernist Studies, and Irish Studies, while retaining a critical interest in the wave of historicist readings of the *Wake*. Barlow and Fagan demonstrate that these critical overlaps are neither paradoxical nor dichotomous, and thus a productive field of inquiry. The "Introduction" provides a comprehensive and wide-ranging overview of the central debates opened up, not only by the *Wake*'s modernist and avant-garde form, but also by the *excess* of the non-human inflection of the Wakean storyworld. The ground-breaking interpretive models advanced in the collection are organised around the *Wake*'s dizzying planetary dimensions as well as key concerns in historiography, which are reflected in the apposite title of the collection. The collection contributes to novel conceptualisations of nonhuman subjectivities (thinghood, for instance, or geopolitical subjectivities) in the *Wake*.

Katherine Ebury opens the collection with an exhilarating reading of the *Wake*'s "energy unconscious" (29) informed by petrocultures methodology. Katherine O'Callaghan unpacks an "ecopoetics" of the storm (38) in glossing the Big Wind of 1839. Shinjini Chattopadhyay and Laura Gibbs bridge critical gaps in *Wake* studies and the blue humanities through an emphasis on female fluidity and agency in the *Wake* – through an application of Astrida Neimanis's theory of watery bodies. Chattopadhyay examines the "transhistorical riverine identity" of ALP against colonial and masculinist exploitations of nature (55, 59) as Gibbs interrogates the *Wake*'s gendered phenomenology through which a new female authority emerges (68); both readings expose and subvert the patriarchal associations between women and fluidity. Though the chapters until this point have responded in equal measure to reinterpreting and reconceptualising the *Wake*'s nonhuman imaginary through historicised readings, Richard Barlow's exploration of Joyce's *Wake* responds more strongly to the collection's interest in historiography, as much of the early sections of the chapter is devoted to Joyce's positioning and exclusion in Revival contexts, reading Book IV of the *Wake* as Joyce's corrective of the Revival's "flawed historiography" (91). The early sections interpret the nonhuman obliquely in gesturing toward regeneration and the corpse as motifs in the *Wake* (87), and concrete attention to the non-human imaginary (watery bodies and aquatic locations, for instance) is deferred until the final section of the chapter.

Paul Fagan examines the palimpsestic layering of parchment, sartorial, and topographic skin in the *Wake*, broadly imagined as an "unstable, permeable" threshold which reveals the materiality of the nonhuman world (99, 106). Annalisa Volpone extends the collection's interest in the role of the nonhuman in the modernist avant-garde through an examination of the role of wolves and werewolves in the *Wake* and the "animalesque" behaviour of Shem the Penman

(116). The next three chapters interpret the nonhuman from philosophical perspectives. Christopher DeVault deconstructs the "humanist foundations" of mourning in an exploration of nonhuman grief and the ethics of mourning in the *Wake* (134). Sam Slote invites readers to observe how thinking "beyond the human" still "posits humanity at the centre" (148). Ruben Borg charts atomic activity in the *Wake*. Drawing from sound studies, ecofeminism, and new materialism, Michelle Witen reads Mamalujo I.6 and III.4 in developing a "musical nonhuman framework" for reading the *Wake* (181). The final chapter by Ronan Crowley concludes the collection with a focus on the "inhumanity" of Joyce's expectations and demands in crowdsourcing the *Wake*.

The collection deftly teases out the tensions between classic (Campbell and Robinson 1944) and twenty-first century criticism (Brazeau and Gladwin 2014; Lacivita 2015; Grusin 2015; Chakrabarty 2021; and Mierlo 2023, to name a few), which in turn inform the work's timely interventions in Joyce Studies. Contributors primarily draw on theoretical frameworks advanced by Astrida Neimanis, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, and others. The radical novelty of the collection lies not only in the confluence and integration of new approaches and methodologies advanced in *Wake* studies, namely, petroculture studies, animal studies, sound studies, ecomedia studies, ecofeminism, and the blue and energy humanities – which stand out among the other foci of the collection – but also, and perhaps more significantly, its grounding in the twenty-first century, first, in terms of methods, discourses, and practices, and second, in its attention to contemporary readers of the *Wake* vis-à-vis Joyce's original audience, which lends the collections its edge. Such a vantage point allows its contributors to retrospectively examine what earlier scholarship could not have achieved (25, 148) or how conversations in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* are likely to be read differently in the context of the present, particularly in light of the climate crisis (27, 37, 106). This approach allows contemporary readers to take better stock of what has changed since the composition of Joyce's final avant-garde work, or how we might read moments from Irish history and Irish cultural memory retrospectively *with* and *against* ecological events.

While the collection expertly demonstrates the problems posed by the *Wake* and foregrounds the politics of inhabiting the planet, it gestures toward urgent planetary concerns but only fleetingly speculates on the responsibilities and roles of the historian in the context of ecological crises in the present time (12-13). These concerns and implications are gestured toward in the "Introduction" but not fully drawn out, and highlights the perceivable absence of any direct or concentrated reference to shared "vulnerabilities" (a word that came into better focus during the COVID-19 pandemic) in a capitalist world ecology in the Wakean storyworld as well as the world beyond the *Wake*. Considering the central nonhuman and ecological concerns underpinning the collection, the "Introduction" makes cursory references to, and reflections on, global change and uncertainty in the concluding section. The reality of the vulnerabilities shared by the human and the nonhuman and nonhuman resistance to human control and coercion are occasionally addressed by contributors (Ebury, O'Callaghan, Chattopadhyay, Gibbs, Fagan, and Slote for instance, each of whom interpret vulnerabilities in differing but significant ways). Given the twenty-first century focus on readers and the *Wake*, an attention to a reading of the *Wake* in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential of the *Wake* to speak to the themes of infection, vulnerability, and the non-human imaginary is missing in the collection.

Each of the contributions respond to the organising themes of the collection. The contents of the collection, however, are not arranged into specific clusters, arguably due to the critical overlap between nonhuman and historicist readings more broadly and the intersections between critical approaches more particularly. The robust research advanced in the collection invites readers and scholars to reconsider the untapped potential of *Wake* studies. *Finnegans Wake - Human and Non-Human Histories* contributes to new and emerging methods, practices,

and interpretive frameworks which expand any received ideas of the imaginaries at work in the *Wake*. In signalling toward energy futures or the mediation of technology in the *Wake*'s local and planetary ecoscape, the collection opens the field to a comparativism to come.

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Irish Shame: A Literary Reckoning
Seán Kennedy and Joseph Valente, eds.
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2025. 264 pages.
ISBN: 9781399546911

Reviewer: Brendan Fleming (Trinity College Dublin)

This strikingly titled volume of essays on the theme of shame in an Irish cultural and political context is a thought-provoking and important collection. The concept of "reckoning" as reassessment and "reckoning" as the problematics of representation is crucial to its explorations. It addresses vital questions: what are the relationships between the representation of shame and specific genres and forms? what is the measure and impact of shame in historical and cultural contexts? what role does gender play? The introduction by the editors, Joseph Valente and Seán Kennedy, is a very fine outlining of, in their words, "the phenomenology of shame" (2). It describes the very subtle, but important, distinction between shame as experienced by differing social identities depending on their relative power and status. Their description of shame as "indignity somaticized" (8) is a profound one.

A very noteworthy feature of the volume is the illuminating and skilful theoretical depth deployed in the essays. The collection is cleverly subdivided into six thematic sections: "Ethnic Shame"; "Religious Shame"; "Biopolitical Shame"; "Shame and Disability"; "Psychoanalytic Shame" and "Shame's Joyce". These give a sense of the wide range of material covered. There are essays discussing early modern Irish poetry, the Young Ireland movement, James Joyce's Stephen Hero, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and *Ulysses*, Susannah Dickey's *Tennis Lessons*, Emilie Pine's *Ruth & Pen*, Caitriona Lally's *Eggshells*, Samuel Beckett's *Not I*, Lisa McInerney's *Glorious Heresies*, Anu Production's performance *Laundry*, Erin Layton's *Magdalen*, and Grace Dyas's *We Don't Know What's Buried Here*. There are also important essays on shame and breastfeeding and the Irish Mother and Baby Homes.

The collection is opened by Sarah McKibben's "Colonial Emasculation in Early Modern Irish Poetry: From Shame to Humiliation". This is a very fine piece which highlights the gender

dynamics at work in early Irish poetry and their connection to the emergence of the aisling. The close reading of various poems is brilliantly done to demonstrate her argument. Marjorie Howes's essay "Young Ireland, Slavery and the Gender of Shame" is a fascinating examination of how the issues of slavery and abolitionism intersected with the Young Ireland movement. Some excellent archival material based on contemporary advertisements is powerfully used. The discussion of Frederick Douglass's visits to Ireland and Great Britain is excellent. The question faced by contemporaries as to the appropriacy of applying the term "slavery" to conditions in Ireland is illuminating and sensitive.

Joyce is the focus in Seán Kennedy's, Joseph Valente's and Kezia Whiting's chapters. Kennedy's "Recovering from Catholicism: The Internalisation Problem in Joyce" is a very skilful reinterpretation of Joyce's response to the process of interpellation imposed by the Catholic Church. It explores Joycean tropes such as epiphany through the work of Jacques Lacan and Pierre Bourdieu. It is immensely to its credit that much of the analysis focuses on Stephen Hero which adds an extra dimension to the discussion. While Valente's "Let us Prey: Clerical Sex Abuse and Catholic Bildung" is a coruscating analysis of the Catholic Church and its methods. This provides the context for a very fine reading of Joyce's "The Sisters", and the scholarly disagreements over its interpretation. It is an exceptionally brilliant analysis. Whiting's, "Flirting with Shame: Performing Narration in *Ulysses*" is a compelling and insightful essay arguing for parallels between Joyce's free indirect style and the Freudian super ego. The close reading of the interaction between Bloom's and Gerty's gazes on the beach is expertly and skilfully done. There is an apposite emphasis placed on the importance of being seen to a sense of shame that makes this collection an important intervention for Joycean scholars.

In her chapter, Claire Bracken brings a contemporary focus by putting Lisa McInerney's, *Glorious Heresies*, Anu Production's performance *Laundry*, Erin Layton's *Magdalen*, and Grace Dyas's *We Don't Know What's Buried Here* in conversation. The discussion is comprehensive and authoritative. The comparison of still or moving images of derelict former laundries to theatrical performances taking place in those spaces is very pertinent and goes right to the heart of issues around the limits of the representation of shame. This is furthered by Abby Bender's wide ranging and historically informed chapter: "Shame and the Breastfeeding Mother in Ireland". Particularly commendable is the exploration of the issue of breastfeeding in Direct Provision Centres. The essay powerfully places these within the legacy of Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes. The findings of the 2021 report from the Mother and Baby Homes Commission are very movingly discussed. This is expanded upon in Eve Watson's contribution, "The Shame of Ireland's Mother and Baby Homes", an exploration of the 2021 Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes and Certain Related Matters. The essay outlines the reception of the report and the opinion that the report's "principal failure was deemed to have been its inadequacy in handling and reporting the witness testimonies" (175). The essay's originality lies in its interpretation of this failure and occlusion within a psychoanalytic context. The argument deploys an excellent explanation of Freud's and Lacan's theories of the mechanism and meaning of shame. The essay brilliantly unites the original Final Report with a subsequent Alternative Report. There is also a very informed examination of Lacan's idea that the concept of shame has diminished and dwindled.

Alison Garden's "'you: are you complicit?': Shame, Trauma and Gender in Susannah Dickey's *Tennis Lessons*" explores the issue of shame and sexual violence, and sensitively addresses the valence of the novel's Northern Ireland context. The essay compellingly addresses the challenges of "writing shame" (120). This is a theme that runs throughout the collection, but it is commendable to have it foregrounded so emphatically here.

The representation of neurodiversity is the focus of Kathleen Costello-Sullivan's contribution "'Disability, Embodiment and Shame in Caitriona Lally's *Eggshells*". She very effectively incorporates reviews of the novel into her discussion and her exploration of the novel's main character, Vivian, is brilliant, sensitive, and genuinely illuminating. This discussion is expanded by Moynagh Sullivan's brilliant and authoritative essay: "'that old shame trick': Mothering, Trauma and Neurodiversity in Emilie Pine's *Ruth & Pen*" which expertly unfolds the novel's formal and thematic dimensions. Considering the influence of Joyce and Woolf on Pine's novel, Sullivan raises fascinating questions about modernism and the place of difference and neurodivergence.

Alexandra Poulain's, "'then die of shame': Reading Beckett's Not I with Lacan" argues that the play is "'a paradoxical performance of shame" (196). The discussion is grounded in Beckett's own experience of analysis. Very interestingly, it explores Lacan's "concept of "hontology" ("hontologie"), a portmanteau word which collapses the French words "honte" (shame) and "ontologie"' (205). The reading offered here genuinely illuminates the play.

The single bibliography for the entire collection is a very useful resource as it demonstrates the widening scholarship on shame in general, and the expanding research in the Irish context. This is a moving and courageous collection. The challenge for the editors was to structure and cross-integrate such a wide range of material. In this they have succeeded admirably.

Brendan Fleming completed his doctorate on the work of George Moore at the University of Oxford. He lectured on Modernism, Literary Theory, and Modern American Literature at the University of Buckingham (UK) for several years and is now a TA in the School of English, Trinity College, Dublin. His edition of *George Moore's The Story of Madeleine de Lisle* will be published by Liverpool University Press.

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Nietzsche and Irish Modernism
Patrick Bixby
Manchester: Manchester University Press (Paperback 2025). 288 pages.
ISBN: 9781526182630

Reviewer: Mahdi Kashani-Lotfabadi (University of Alberta)

Patrick Bixby's *Nietzsche and Irish Modernism* ambitiously delineates the Irish encounter with Friedrich Nietzsche across the long fin de siècle and the modernist decades, rethinking the genealogy of Irish modernism by placing Nietzsche at its centre. Ranging from theatre and newspapers to marginalia, the book maps how Nietzsche circulated as symbolic capital in a literature undergoing self-definition. At its best, it clarifies how Irish writers drew upon Nietzsche; at its boldest, it claims that he decisively shaped Irish modernism. Rather than presenting Nietzsche as a doctrinal philosopher whose concepts migrated whole into Irish

letters, Bixby insists on seeing him as a figure of provocation, a style of thought, and a rhetorical explosion that detonated across Irish cultural life. The book is a study of reception and reinvention: Nietzsche's fragments, often distorted, became cultural capital for Irish writers navigating crises of modernity, colonialism, and religion. Bixby's introduction frames Nietzsche less as a doctrinal thinker than as a performative catalyst – an "artist-philosopher" whose aphoristic style supplied Irish writers with a vocabulary and aura of resistance during the crises. His conclusion is categorical: in Ireland, Nietzsche functioned as a cultural presence and a resource; the persona mattered more than the doctrine; the task was one of use, not mastery (255, 257, 265).

From this performative framing, Bixby opens with Buck Mulligan's mock-Nietzschean posturing to dramatise the thesis – though it risks overstating Joyce's centrality – before turning to Shaw, Yeats, Egerton, and Joyce alongside clerical and wartime receptions. Rather than engaging in doctrinal exegesis, Bixby outlines how Shaw, Yeats, Egerton, and Joyce repurposed Nietzsche, while also examining broader reception contexts, including wartime propaganda and clerical denunciations. I find this receptional approach both productive and limiting: productive because it allows Bixby to trace the wide and surprising circulation of Nietzsche's name through Irish literature and culture; limiting because it underplays the degree to which philosophical ideas – eternal recurrence, perspectivism, critique of truth – might still structure or haunt Irish modernism, even when not explicitly cited.

George Egerton (Mary Chavelita Dunne) provides the most transparent case for this receptional method. Bixby briefly shows, in his "Introduction", how Egerton exemplifies Nietzsche's performative influence in Ireland. In *Keynotes* (1893), Egerton – who styled herself the first English writer to introduce Nietzsche – placed Nietzschean epigraphs and direct quotations at the head of her stories, staged heroines who rejected Victorian morality, and praised Nietzsche for teaching "the joy of living dangerously" (135). She translated Nietzsche's "free spirit" into feminist revolt, dramatising the transvaluation of values as women's emancipation from sexual and moral constraints. Had Bixby begun his genealogy with Egerton's feminist Nietzscheanism and then moved through Shaw, Yeats, Kettle, and Joyce, the arc would have delineated more clearly how Nietzsche mutates from feminist rebellion to dramaturgical experiment, prophetic nationalism, propaganda, and modernist irony – precisely the career of a resource.

Nevertheless, Bixby's genealogy begins with George Bernard Shaw, who deliberately styled himself as an "Irish Nietzsche", boasting, "I want the Germans to know me as a philosopher […] an English (or Irish) Nietzsche (only ten times cleverer)" (31). In *Man and Superman*, Bixby identifies a "drama of ideas" (43), where Shaw developed what he calls the "Shavio-Socratic dialogue", staging philosophical combat theatrically. Jack Tanner, Shaw's alter ego, channels Nietzschean irreverence but equally resonates with Schopenhauer, Butler, Spencer, and Westermarck. Mediated through these thinkers, Shaw's Nietzsche is a composite: his Superman is not Nietzsche's Übermensch, Butler's teleology jars with Nietzsche's anti-teleology, and the Zarathustra/Don Juan pairing alongside Tanner's composite voice (49-60) underscores divergence and shows Shaw staging collisions rather than doctrines. In the end, what emerges is less discipleship than rivalry and persona-building: Shaw constructs himself against Nietzsche even as he borrows his glamour. Bixby's phrase "drama of ideas" becomes a valid label for how an Irish encounter with Nietzsche differed from a British "rivalry": instead of moral horror (Max Nordau's *Degeneration*), the Irish wrote dialogic theater. That tension culminates in Bixby's claim that Shaw "contributed to the rise of Irish modernism by developing a sprawling new aesthetic form capable of accommodating a broad range of discourses and ideologies" (85). What endures is not doctrine but a hybrid dialogic form (85). If Egerton demonstrated how Nietzsche could be misused productively, Shaw reveals how Nietzsche could be staged, dramatised, and reimagined as a cultural provocation – precisely the

spark Irish modernism required. Critics such as Charles Sumner, comparing Bixby with Stewart Smith's *Nietzsche and Modernism* (on Kafka, Lawrence, Beckett), argue that Bixby's reading of Shaw is overly buoyant, privileging optimism over Nietzsche's darker nihilism (Sumner). Nevertheless, this criticism may miss the point: Bixby's very contribution is to show how Irish writers transformed Nietzsche into an optimistic resource, affirming life against colonial despair. As Shaw's *Man and Superman* demonstrates, the Irish engagement with Nietzsche was dialogical and performative rather than doctrinal, converting philosophy into cultural capital for the formation of identity.

If Shaw dramatised philosophy as contest, Yeats redirected Nietzsche into a Revivalist idiom. After John Quinn gave him *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (c. 1902), Yeats hailed it as a gospel of strength and claimed "Nietzsche completes Blake" (92), situating him within a Romantic lineage. Bixby's strongest case delineates Zarathustra's "gift-giving virtue" in *Where There Is Nothing* and *The King's Threshold*, recast as bardic generosity against English utilitarianism (94-103). What Yeats absorbs is ethos rather than system: the prophet-poet aligns with Blake and Shelley, while ressentiment, eternal recurrence, and the critique of truth rarely surface. By the 1910s, Nietzsche is one voice among many in Yeats's pantheon, domesticated into a bardic aura. As Zapin notes, this is a collaborative, not eccentric, uptake; Bixby persuades on absorption but underplays how directly Nietzsche's concepts might unsettle Yeats's cycles or truth-claims. Eternal recurrence could have unsettled Yeats's cycles, and the critique of truth his symbols, yet Bixby tends to treat such absences as conclusions rather than critical openings. From Yeats's prophetic absorption, Bixby turns to James Joyce. Joyce's own "James Overman" self-signature supplies both the boldest backdrop and most problematic case. *Ulysses* contains one explicit Nietzsche reference in "Oxen of the Sun", and Stephen's "all too Irish" echoes *Human, All Too Human* at the level of rhetoric rather than conceptual engagement. Bixby reads Bloom as "anti-Overman" and Joyce's perspectivism as Nietzschean, even suggesting Joyce "liberated" Irish literature (245), though the evidence is thin and key interlocutors are missing. Without fuller dialogue with this body of work, Joyce appears less the culmination of Nietzschean modernism than its ironist, parodying Nietzsche's figures rather than constructing with him. As Levitas notes, Bloom's Jewishness and Joyce's anti-antisemitism complicate the "anti-Overman" label; more compelling is Bixby's view that Stephen and Bloom intermittently perform Zarathustrian re-evaluations – best read as a convergence in perspectivism rather than direct influence.

Beyond individual writers, Bixby also explores the public reception of Nietzsche during wartime. His Chapter 4 traces how "Nietzsche" became propaganda shorthand during the First World War. Thomas Kettle cast the conflict as a duel "between Nietzsche and Christian civilization", clerics denounced his "poison doctrines", and newspapers branded him the "philosopher of the Huns" (100, 193). Bixby decisively corrects the misattributed slogan "Nothing is true, everything is permitted" as not Nietzschean but a reference to the *Assassins* (204), exonerating Nietzsche while showing how his aphoristic style left him vulnerable to misuse. It implicitly asks what becomes of philosophy when slogans escape textual fidelity.

Bixby concludes by delineating how postwar Shaw and Yeats redeployed Nietzschean motifs in mythic and cosmological frames, as Irish modernists "respond to Nietzschean provocations with their own array of provocative images, metaphors, and myths, which repeatedly traverse the borderlands between art and society, aesthetics and politics" (269). Nietzsche's "provocative generosity" (via Sloterdijk) enabled Shavian posthuman timescales in Back to Methuselah and Joycean futurity in *Finnegans Wake*, speculative horizons probing what is "possible, necessary, or desirable" (269). The book's reception has generally underscored the same balance: praise for its archival range, criticism of its uneven structure and overstated Joyce claims, but broad agreement that Bixby is most persuasive as a historian of reception rather than a theorist of philosophical influence.

Ultimately, *Nietzsche and Irish Modernism* is valuable not because it proves Nietzsche's decisive influence, but because it shows how his name, figure, and provocations became cultural capital in the making of Irish modernism. Irish writers used Nietzsche – faithfully at times, distortedly more often, but always inventively – as a resource for revaluing morals, aesthetics, and politics. What emerges is a plural genealogy: Irish modernism was as much Butlerian, Spencerian, Romantic, and nationalist as it was Nietzschean. Therefore, this monograph stands as one of the few works to reposition Irish modernism within a broader European philosophical frame – an indispensable contribution to Irish studies.

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