An Isle in the Water’ and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on Ireland

INAUGURAL LECTURE BY PROF. MARGUÈRITE CORPORAAL
From the late-nineteenth-century Revival to today’s Irish Times, writers, literary critics, and readers have tended to read the literary cultures of the Emerald Isle primarily as expressions of a unique Irish identity. Such a nation-oriented approach blinds us, however, to the strong transnational dimensions of the literatures identified with Ireland. As early as the late eighteenth century, texts by Irish authors circulated around the world, through transatlantic republications or as translations. Additionally, past and present literary works by authors living or born in Ireland have explicitly imagined their country as part of a global network, and have problematised the idea that Irish literatures are essentially Irish.

In my talk today, I hope to show the added value of such a transnational perspective on the literatures of Ireland—a perspective that encourages us to reflect on such ongoing global crises as those around famine, refugees, racism, COVID-19, and Brexit.

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‘AN ISLE IN THE WATER’ AND BEYOND: TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON IRELAND
‘An Isle in the Water’ and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on Ireland

Inaugural lecture delivered, in abridged form on Wednesday 29 June 2022, to mark her acceptance of the post of Professor of Irish Literature in Transnational Contexts at Radboud University’s Faculty of Arts

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‘An isle in the water’- and beyond: transnational perspectives on Ireland

Fáilte roimh chách.

‘Near Ballymourne all paths led towards the sea. Not alone the fishermen found it a source of income, but from its shores the farmers drew their best and cheapest manure in the form of sea-weed.’¹ This is how young Essie, the first-person narrator in Mary Tench’s 1897 novel Where the Surf Breaks, remembers the environment of her childhood years near Ballybeg, in County Wexford, Ireland. Essie’s description of the coastal community reveals how the Irish Sea shapes the livelihoods of the local population, who rely on its marine life and its effects on the soil for sustenance, and whose rituals and traditions are informed by the proximity of ‘the cruel, treacherous sea.’²

Tench’s novel demonstrates the popularity of fiction about regional communities during the heyday of the Literary Revival, a cultural movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that was spearheaded, amongst others, by W. B. Yeats and Lady Gregory.³ Up till today, this conceptualisation of an ‘Irish literature’ that is rooted in unique traditions, identities and histories dominates media coverage, scholarship, and representations of heritage, such as the Dublin Writers Museum, which primarily focuses on ‘Dublin’s literary celebrities’ from a local as well as national perspective.⁴ The tendency to analyse the literary traditions of Ireland - whether in Irish or English - mainly in contexts of nationalism and nation formation can be attributed to Ireland’s status as a postcolonial nation, a controversial yet valid point addressed, amongst others, by Joe Cleary and David Lloyd.⁵

Such a nation-oriented approach blinds us to the strong transnational dimensions of the literatures identified with Ireland. The seascape in Tench’s novel is not an exclusively regional space, sealed off from the rest of the world. The ocean is the domain for local fisheries, but also an inherently transatlantic space of transport and trade: ‘there was generally craft of some kind to be seen, either a white-sailed steamer bound to or from New York, with a great trail of smoke streaming back from its funnels.’⁶ As I hope to show today, past and present literary texts written by authors living, born in, or identifying with Ireland often engage with worlds beyond it. They explicitly imagine their country as part of a global network. During the nineteenth century, in light of increasing multiculturalism, migration, cultural encounters, and diversity, they were already problematising the idea that Irish literatures are essentially Irish. Furthermore, as early as the eighteenth century, texts in English by Irish authors, such as Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels, circulated around the world through transatlantic republications or as translations.⁷

The transnational turn in the humanities has generated a stronger awareness of the value of examining Irish literatures in global contexts.⁸ In February 2020, a contribution by Claire Connolly and Marjorie Howes to the Irish Times to mark the launch of
the impressive *Irish Literature in Transition* series, argued for the need to consider how ‘various locations around the globe - not only in England and the United States, but in Europe, Asia and the Southern hemisphere - contribute to the making of a body of works, processes and practices we call Irish literature.’ My aim today is to join their chorus, but from different, novel perspectives. In arguing for the crucial significance of such transnational perspectives on the literatures of Ireland, I will also focus on under-explored genres, and stress the interactions between the regional and the global on various levels of cultural and literary production.

How can we define these transnational dimensions of Ireland’s literary and cultural traditions? Steven Vertovec imagines the transnational as ‘sustained, cross-border relationships spanning nation-states’, while Ann Rigney and Chiara De Cesari view transnationalism as ‘transcultural circulations, interactions and cross-currents’ that transcend national borders. The following analyses are rooted in this idea of transnationalism as dynamic, cross-border interactions. They are inspired by Wolfgang Welsch’s notion of cross-national cultural spaces that are shaped by dynamic transfers of repertoires, artefacts, and representations. As I mentioned, I will also look at the roles that translators, publishers, and reading communities play in situating Ireland’s literatures in transnational contexts, and hope to show that applying such an under-explored transnational perspective to literatures of Ireland enables us to reflect on such ongoing global crises as those around famines, racism, migration, COVID-19, war in Europe and Brexit.

**THE GLOBAL LOCAL**

Let us start with a literary genre whose transnational dimensions are perhaps least obvious: local colour fiction. The genre has often been interpreted as instrumental in processes of nationalism and nation building; or, as Josephine Donovan argues, as an expression of resistance from the peripheries against ‘the enforcement of national social norms.’ Just how problematic it is to read Irish local-colour literature primarily through this nationalist lens becomes clear from various examples of Irish regional fiction. The title of Katharine Tynan’s collection of short stories *An Isle in the Water* (1895) may create the impression that, as readers, we are about to sail off to an isolated, regional community off the coast of western Ireland that is shielded from any external influences. The stories themselves, however, create the image of an island at the crossroads of waterways and invaded by foreign travellers, even if the agrarian and fishing population tends to be notoriously inward-looking.

Thus the story ‘How Mary Came Home’ suggests that the islanders may ‘look coldly upon the stranger’ when it comes to marriage, but that foreign sailors looking for a spouse also disembark on their shore: ‘Swarthy Spanish sailors put in sometimes, and fair-skinned, black-eyed Greeks, and broad-shouldered Norwegians.’ The island is represented as a node of cosmopolitan travelling and trade, and though most of the
inhabitants refuse these foreign sailors’ courtship, Mary Cassidy, ‘the handsomest girl of the Island’ ties the knot with Spanish Jacopo and settles with him in Scotland’s Clyde. Mary is eventually taken back home to the island by her brothers, when, after many years of marital bliss, Jacopo deserts his young family. Although the narrative seems to confirm the locals’ conviction that they had better stick to their own kind, at the same time it pictures a seaside environment that intersects with Atlantic spaces invaded by traffic from abroad.

Tynan’s vision of Ireland’s coastline as a site where there are frequent transnational encounters fits in with points raised by scholars in oceanic studies. Gretchen Woertendyke coined the term ‘hemispheric regionalism’17 to denote the interconnections between regional communities across borders, and between local and global economies that are shaped by the Atlantic. However, in Irish local-colour fiction it is not just the seaboard settlements but also the inland areas that are depicted as spaces marked both by regionally specific traditions and by cross-border interactions. Not surprisingly in light of the massive emigration that took place during and after the Great Famine of 1845 to 50,18 many local-colour novels and stories also represent the region as transnational because it is inextricably connected to areas abroad, as a result of the outflux of population, especially to North America. Many of these tales show how the region has been transformed into a depopulated area as a result of emigration. Even more frequently, Irish local-colour fiction from the turn of the century gives shape to the ‘global local’ by addressing relationships between the local community and the Irish diaspora.

A recurring ‘narrative template’19 in these texts is the return of the village son or daughter to his or her native community from the New World, and the frictions that follow. Shan F. Bullock’s novel Dan the Dollar (1905), set in County Mayo, focuses on Daniel Ruddy who, after having made a fortune in America, returns to his native village of Shrule. Back home after more than 25 years, Daniel quickly settles his parents’ debts, and buys his mother new clothes, but his impatience with the slumbering state of his birth community and his arduous efforts to import American modes of improvement lead to frustration on both sides. His parents’ foster daughter Mary dislikes Dan’s ‘worship of money and success’, his ‘arrogance’ towards relatives and former acquaintances, and his criticism ‘of all things Irish’.20 Daniel himself feels that his native ‘God forsaken’ village ‘wants waking up….Everyone is half asleep.’21 He feels that his prosperity entitles him to impose ‘his foreign innovations’ on his family and community, but he finds that he is unable to do so. Moreover, since he is ‘so marked and transformed’ by his years in America, he can no longer adapt himself to the ways of Shrule, and is filled with irritation.22

Bullock’s novel presents a rather negative view of local-global relations, identifying migration with alienation on the part of the émigré and their failure to sympathise with the plight of the rural poor. By contrast, there are also examples of local-colour
fiction that suggest that economic ties with transatlantic host societies are pivotal to overcoming poverty, famine, and hardship in regional home communities. Jane Barlow’s story ‘Good Luck’ from Strangers at Lisconnel (1895) shows a Connemara village barely able to sustain itself through fishing, while the danger of drowning makes the job very unappealing. The blind widow Murrough lives in dire poverty and distress, not only because the land yields ‘only meagre and stunted growths,’ but also because her youngest son, Felix, cannot catch enough fish or gather enough seaweed to feed them. When plans are made for Felix to cross the Atlantic as his elder brother had done before, and the widow is left with the miserable prospect of becoming an inmate in the workhouse, a twist of fortune occurs. The widow’s eyesight is miraculously restored, and she sees her emigrant son Paddy, who has returned wearing a ‘fine new suit and gold watch.’ Paddy takes his aged mother and sibling with him to a large farm he has purchased in County Wicklow. The interactions between the local and global are here imagined as economically beneficial.

This idea of transnational economic exchange that features in the plots of Irish local-colour fiction reflects the fact that emigrant communities would send remittances home in order to improve conditions for their relatives in the homeland, or as the means to pay for their transatlantic passage. Additionally, this recurring plotline draws attention to the fact that these texts were embedded in transnational literary infrastructures of exchange. Local-colour novels and stories would reach audiences across the globe, especially in Europe and North America, in translation or as reprints. Rosa Mulholland’s novel *The Wild Birds of Killeevy*, serialised in *The Irish Monthly* between 1878 and 1880, was translated into German by Clara Commer as *Die wilden Vögel von Killeevy*, and published by Rudolf Abt in Munich and Vienna in 1899. Emily Lawless’s novel about the Burren, *Hurrish* (1886) was translated into Dutch by Anna Bok, was published by Gouda Quint in Arnhem in 1890, and became very popular among readers in the Netherlands: it could be borrowed from libraries from Appingedam to Haarlem and from Enschede to the Dames Leesmuseum in The Hague.

Even more often, these collections and novels would be made available to transatlantic readerships, in editions for the American or Canadian market. Tynan’s *An Isle in the Water* was issued by A. & C. Black in London in 1895, and by Macmillan & Co. in New York in 1896. Archibald McIlroy’s *The Auld Meetin’-Hoosie Green* - a collection of tales set among the Ulster Scots peasantry in Co. Antrim, was first issued by McCaw, Stevenson & Orr in Belfast in 1898, and subsequently by F. H. Revell in Toronto in 1899. Irish regions thus ‘travelled’ to readerships across the globe through acts of cultural mediation and transfer.
The ways in which these North American editions were marketed through paratextual material, such as prefaces and illustrations, explicitly convey the notion of cultural transmission in quite a few cases. Irish writers were not just construing what Joep Leerssen would call a self- or ‘auto-image’ of Irish regional life. They were also transmitting localised versions of ‘Irishness’ to reading communities abroad. The preface to the 1893 New York edition of Jane Barlow’s *Irish Idylls* comments specifically on transatlantic ties. Barlow directs her words to American readers, ‘to whose shores the wild boglands of Connaught send so many a forlorn voyager “over oceans of say”’. She expresses the hope that these readers ‘will perhaps care to glance’ at the Irish emigrant’s ‘old home, and learn the reasons why he leaves it, which seem to lie very obviously on the surface, and the reasons, less immediately apparent, why his neighbours bide behind’.27

Referencing her 1893 edition of *Irish Idylls* as ‘one emigrant more’ that may anticipate a warm reception across the Atlantic, Barlow situates her text not only in the history of Irish transatlantic migration, but also in a process of cultural transfer between what Stefanie Stockhurst calls ‘communicative communities’, which include the exchange of material as well as immaterial goods, such as traditions, representations, and memories.28 Barlow likens the ‘turf to be found in a bog’ in Connemara to the ‘human nature’, the regional character, that she is metaphorically digging up from its soil and presenting in her stories to her American readers. This phrase appears to concretise the ideas she transmits through her stories. This sense of geographical transplantation is also articulated by the shamrock-covered binding and frontispiece of the book. Additionally, the 1897 holiday edition, also issued by Dodd, Mead & Co., and which contains photographs made by Massachusetts ethnographer Clifton Johnson

![Fig. 1. Clifton Johnson, ‘Cutting Turf’, in Jane Barlow, Irish Idylls (1897).](image-url)
during his tour of Connemara boglands, includes his picture of an elderly man who is cutting turf in the presence of a young girl. This photograph enhances the trope of turf digging, used to convey a sense of cultural transmission, in the preface, and for American readers who never visited Ireland, the image makes the soil and landscape of the region almost tangible. Dodd, Mead & Co. probably aimed to provide their readers with the illusion of a transnational, geographical transplantation, and they may have catered especially to Irish diasporic communities of the second and third generation, engaging with what Svetlana Boym calls their ‘restorative nostalgia’ for the ancestral homeland.29

TRANSNATIONAL FAMINE LEGACIES
Let us briefly turn to the story ‘One Too Many’ by Jane Barlow, from Irish Idylls (1892). This tale centres on the struggles of the Connemara people as they face the recurring threat of potato blight and famine: ‘Lisconnel always breathes more freely when once its potatoes are down, and the earlier the better, for every reason.’30 The inhabitants feel compelled to send relatives over to America for better prospects, often against their will. The story thus draws attention to local poverty and hunger, and situates these problems in a larger global context of forced migration and exile. The story shows us that, like today - with the present emergence of a ‘next global hunger crisis’, as The New York Times wrote on 12 June 2020 and impending food crises across the world as a result of the Russian-Ukrainian war - local circumstances of destitution and the global displacement of people are inevitably intertwined. This is also an issue central to the literary texts that remember Ireland’s Great Famine, which illustrate that we cannot look upon Ireland as an ‘Isle in the Water’. Rather we should further investigate its transnational aspects and contexts, especially in literature.

For several years during the Great Famine, an unknown fungus affected potato crops - the main source of sustenance for Ireland’s rural population in particular -, thus leading to mass mortality and emigration.32 The Famine immediately left its traces on literary production on both sides of the Atlantic, where novels and short stories remembering the years of hunger appeared, as studies by Melissa Fegan, Margaret Kelleher have shown, and as I also demonstrated in detail in my 2017 monograph Relocated Memories.33 Often these texts circulated internationally in the form of reprints, and newspapers and periodicals played a significant role in this respect. Thus, David Power Conyngham’s Famine novel The Old House at Home (1859) was relaunched as Frank O’Donnell (1860) on the Irish literary market by Dublin-based publisher James Duffy. It was also serialised in Boston’s The Pilot from January to July 1863. Ten years later, the text was reissued under the title The O’Donnells of Glen Cottage for American and Canadian markets by the D. and J. Sadlier publishing house, based in New York and Montreal, and was subsequently serialised in The Harp in Hamilton, Ontario, between 1875 and 77.34
Additionally, Famine literature was translated into various languages. For example, William Carleton’s *The Black Prophet* (1846) was translated into German by Friedrich Gersträder in 1848; and the novel appeared in Dutch as *De Zwarte Profeet: een verhaal uit den Tijd van den Ierschen Hongersnood*, published by Bakker in 1847. Literary texts from the onset of the catastrophe onwards therefore transported cultural memories of the Famine not only across time, but also over national boundaries, as what Ann Rigney calls ‘portable monuments’. 35

Furthermore, literary memories of the Great Famine are transnational in that they situate the harrowing events in Ireland in contexts of emigration and settlement on new continents. Peter McCorry’s *The Lost Rosary* (1870) is set both in Famine-stricken Ireland, where due to high mortality ‘the reapers’ song was hushed’, 36 and in the US, where the main protagonists whom famine forced to seek their fortune across the Atlantic, eventually thrive and can purchase their own land at the Western frontier. More recently, Colum McCann’s novel *TransAtlantic* (2013) includes storylines that cover both sides of the Atlantic. Initially, the narrative is set in the Ireland that Lily Duggan leaves behind, where hunger has transformed the people into ‘spectral … remnants of themselves’. 37 The scene then shifts to America where - after several decades of hardship - she and her German-Norwegian husband Jon Ehrlich run a successful ice-delivery business in Missouri. As these examples illustrate, Famine literature frequently taps into American ‘from rags to riches’ discourses, while also engaging with Irish narratives of exile. As such, these texts mediate ideologies of identity formation beyond borders, in what Thomas Faist defines as transnational spaces of ‘affiliations […] shared by both immigrants and natives’. 38

At the same time, literary texts that mediate the Famine past, and that have been written on both sides of the Atlantic, are often situated in the liminal spaces of the ocean or of the emigrant vessels where the travellers have to endure tempests, seasickness, food rationing, uncleanness, and ship fever. Quite a number of literary texts deal with the outbreak of typhus and cholera on board these ships and in the quarantine stations on, for example, Grosse Isle near Quebec or the fever sheds in Montreal where Catholic orders nursed the diseased, thus putting their own lives at risk. 39 For example, this is the case in an anonymous sketch by ‘A Lady’ published in the Montreal based *Literary Garland* in November 1850 and entitled ‘The Emigrant Ship’. Originally written for a Protestant orphan bazaar raising funds to aid Irish children who had lost their parents on the transatlantic passage and published by Lovell & Gibson in Montreal in October of the same year, the story describes how the ship, ‘infected with the baleful fever’ is detained in quarantine upon arrival at Grosse Isle. Unfortunately, half of the surviving emigrants are already infected and die on board or in the fever sheds before ‘the ship was purified and suffered to proceed to Quebec’. 40

These literary recollections of epidemics on the so-called coffin ships and in the fever sheds are complemented by texts that recall the outbreak of cholera and typhus in
Ireland during the Famine years. A very recent Famine novel, Marita Conlon-McKenna’s The Hungry Road (2020), partly follows Dr Dan Donovan, a physician in Skibbereen who lived during the Famine and is here presented as a central character. Donovan struggles to have conditions improved at the overcrowded workhouses where ‘Though they are very sick, some must sleep three to a bed.’ Contagion spreads throughout, and Dan becomes anxious that ‘the fever somehow would spread from the poor and starving to the rest of the town’s population’; a fear that soon comes true, when the doctor and his family also get infected.

It is not difficult to see connections between these literary legacies and COVID-19. Indeed, the speech that the Minister for Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Josepha Madigan gave on the occasion of the 2020 Famine commemoration at St Stephen’s Green, Dublin, emphasised these analogies between the Irish crisis and the global pandemic, partly through a reading of lines from Eavan Boland’s Famine poem ‘Quarantine’ (2001). Moreover, on 14 July 2021 a monument paying tribute to doctors, nurses, and others who lost their lives while caring for the gravely ill Irish newcomers was unveiled at Grasett Park, Toronto. The attention paid on both sides of the Atlantic to infectious diseases during the Famine bears witness to a transnational memory culture that has also found its way into literature.

Famine literature can invite us to reflect on other global issues as well, such as the ongoing refugee crisis. In Conlon-McKenna’s novel, the Sullivan family reluctantly leave their homestead for America, as they are forcefully evicted by the landlord once the infamous quarter acre clause is introduced: Aye, what else can a man do if he is left with no roof over his head and no land to work on but travel the ocean in search of a new life away from this misery? The narrative of the Sullivans’ forced migration parallels similar plotlines of involuntary exile in earlier Famine literature. As such, these narratives of dislocation generate awareness of poverty-driven migration worldwide, a connection that has been evoked more than once in the media. Thus, Dominic MacSorley, chief executive of Concern Worldwide, argued in The Irish Times of 27 March 2017 that ‘Ireland with its own tragic experience of both conflict and hunger’ has both ‘an authoritative humanitarian voice, but also a responsibility’ in public debates about aid and the accommodation of refugees. Furthermore, the present war in Ukraine has sparked lively debates on analogies between Ireland and Ukraine as past victims of famine under imperial rule.

The literary legacies of the Great Famine also bear witness to what Michael Rothberg calls ‘multidirectional memory’: memory cultures of different communities that intersect, interact, and overlap, across time and space. As communities can address similarities between the Famine exodus and today’s refugees, we could argue that Famine legacies are malleable, and can be repositioned in different contexts and
dialogues. This already happened not long after the Famine years. In *The Struggles of Dick Massey* (1860), Reginald Tierney specifically addressed Harriet Beecher Stowe to convince her and his other readers that ‘for the one slave that has been lashed to death by his master, there have been a hundred Irishmen drowned by their landlords’ during the Famine, when the latter forced them to emigrate.49 Tierney’s novel thus raises awareness of both the plight of the black plantation slaves in the US and the harrowing circumstances of Ireland’s tenant farmers, before and after the Famine. Not everyone shared this view, however. In *Jail Journal* (1854), the Irish nationalist John Mitchel, who had been banished to Van Diemen’s Land for his involvement in the 1848 Young Ireland uprising and later settled in the US, compared the fate of black slaves in the Americas to that of Irish cottiers and concluded that the former were better fed and ‘not treated with contumely’ and that it was better to be ‘the slave of a merciful master and a just man’ than ‘serf to an Irish land-appropriator’.50

Mitchel’s text is extremely problematic in its suggestion of hierarchies of suffering and blatant racism, rather than the expression of more egalitarian forms of sympathy. In fact, John Mitchel became notorious for his staunch support of the slave system in the American South and for his view of African-Americans as racially inferior.51 Thankfully, Irish memory cultures shift under the influence of global political events and movements, in this case Black Lives Matter: an online petition to remove the statue of Mitchel in Newry, once erected in honour of him as a nationalist hero, gained 1,000 votes in June 2020.52 And while his statue stands to the present day, as what Ann Rigney would call a ‘toxic’ monument,53 at least we witness change. Yesterday’s Irish heroes are disavowed today, as both the Republic and Northern Ireland increasingly re-examine their pasts in relation to transnational issues such as human-rights violations, racism, poverty, and gender discrimination.

Irish literature today engages with these intersections between transnational communities and their histories. Literary works represent memory cultures that are competing for recognition, but that also coalesce, thereby creating opportunities for what Rothberg sees as essential components of multidirectional remembrance: ‘affect’ and ‘solidarity’.54 McCann’s *TransAtlantic* offers a prime example in its section about Frederick Douglass’s visit to Ireland at the end of 1845. Touring the country to promote his book and rally support for the Abolitionist movement as a former slave, Douglass encounters gruesome scenes of starvation, which lead him to compare and reflect on the conditions of the Irish and of American slaves. Douglass is strongly aware of the uniqueness of both contexts: the Irish are in his view poor but ‘not enslaved’ like the American slaves; an ‘ownership of man and woman’ he considers ‘beyond toleration’. 55 At the same time he feels immense sympathy and shock for the abject state of the Irish, and for the crowds who sense the Irish and former black slaves like himself share a common cause, and exclaim: ‘What about England? Would he not denounce England?
Wasn’t England the slave master anyway?’\textsuperscript{56} Even if the novel thus presents a political arena where interests may not always overlap, \textit{TransAtlantic} also suggests that pasts share common ground. It is this issue that Catherine Martin, Minister for Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media, addressed on National Famine Commemoration Day, 16 May 2021, when she cited the friendship between nationalist and abolitionist Daniel O’Connell and Douglass as ‘a powerful example of how we are always part of a wider world that struggles with human issues that transcend borders.’\textsuperscript{57}

\textit{TransAtlantic} also takes readers into another setting divided by competing memory cultures: Northern Ireland. One narrative strand focuses on US Senator George Mitchell, who played a crucial role in negotiating the Good Friday Agreement (1998). Obviously, we associate Northern Ireland primarily with a border that partitioned the island 100 years ago, that was the scene of sectarian violence from the late 1960s till the late 1990s, and that today is central to Brexit anxieties and to resentment on the part of Unionists who are frustrated by the alternative to the land border, that in the Irish Sea. Indeed, borders feature prominently in Northern-Irish literature. One example is Ciaran Carson’s poem ‘\textit{Jacta Est Alea}’ (1995), in which the persona becomes confused about his bearings and identity: ‘It was one of those puzzling necks of the wood / where the South was in the North.’\textsuperscript{58} More recently, Michael Hughes’s novel \textit{Country} (2018) remembers violence in the border regions in the aftermath of the 1996 ceasefire, in a narrative that is modelled on Homer’s \textit{Iliad}. While the ongoing warfare in the border zones ‘was all kept off the news for the sake of the talks and the ceasefire’, the brutality of sectarian strife has not been forgotten by those who ‘were around that part of the country’, and their alternative memories of those years resurface.\textsuperscript{59}

In recent years Northern Ireland has increasingly been imagined not just as an area haunted by geographical and communal restrictions, but as a place where borders can be crossed. McCann’s Senator Mitchell crosses national as well as sectarian borders frequently, in order to deliver peace. Mitchell himself, the novel emphasises, is from a multicultural background - his mother was a ‘Lebanese … textile worker.’\textsuperscript{60} This mixed background gains him nicknames such as ‘The Arab, The Yank, The Judge’, but also Mohammed and ‘Mahatma’,\textsuperscript{61} which situates him in a tradition of global historical figures known for their efforts to bring about peace. During the negotiations, Mitchell receives letters of support from Nelson Mandela and Václav Havel; the novel suggests a transnational political engagement in the Northern-Irish road to peace, as well as analogies to similar peace processes during the 1990s.

McCann’s novel also represents cultural memories of the Troubles as essentially transnational: while being driven through New York, Senator Mitchell sees a Bobby Sands mural with ‘Saoirse painted in bright letters above the hunger striker’s face’;\textsuperscript{62} and in Belfast he finds murals of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, and Che Guevara, amongst others. Whatever the future is for Northern Ireland, murals - other \textit{lieux de mémoire}—are more fluid than we may initially assume, and can be painted over
by new images and overwritten with new messages. This 2019 mural in Derry of the hugely successful TV comedy series *Derry Girls* (2018–19) is a case in point. The final episode of season 2 ends with Bill Clinton’s public appearance at Derry’s Guildhall Square and Waterloo Place in November 1995. For Northern-Irish writer Lisa McGee it was ‘a deliberate choice’ to end with Clinton’s message of hope and peace, in light of the current unrest in Northern Ireland over Brexit. In McGee’s retrospective representation of the Troubles, it is this image of transnational bonding for peace that prevails, rather than borders that divide communities.

With all the developments going on in the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland, it is an exciting prospect to lecture about and do further research on the transnational contexts of Irish literatures and cultures, through my current professorial position in this field. The Dublin Gate Theatre, under the directorship of Selina Cartmell, staged a black female Hamlet, enacted by Nigerian-Irish actor Ruth Negga, and directed by South-African Yaël Farber in October 2018. The Museum of Literature Ireland, opened in 2019, hosts temporary exhibitions and online events that place Irish literature in contexts of transnationalism and diversity, such as the pop-up exhibition on Kate O’Brien and her relation to Spain, and changing panels on the connections between Irish literature and international cities such as Paris. In other words, there is a vast array of subjects to research and engage with in an Ireland whose literary and cultural scenes are becoming increasingly conscious of the value of crossing borders. I feel privileged to enrich our understandings of heritage, literary infrastructures, identity construction, and genre reception as part of the Chair I am accepting. Thankfully, we are all leaving our islands of quarantine behind, and as communities of learning and exchange we can meet in person again.
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When I was a toddler, we crossed the German-Dutch border many times before settling in the north of the Netherlands. Papa, mama, I owe so much to you - to your love, your confidence in me and your wise lessons that one should always pursue the paths that lie close to the heart. Bart, it is great to have a brother who understands my ambitions.

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*Ik heb gesproken.*
Local-colour literature flourished in this period, because the Revival - even though far from fostering homogeneous political and poetical agendas - was inspired by a focus on a postcolonial 'Irish identity' that could be derived from folklore and rural traditions that they viewed as unaffected by English cultural influence. See Patrick Bixby and Gregory Castle, ‘Irish Modernism: From Emergence to Emergency’, introduction to A History of Irish Modernism (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2019), 6.


See, for example, Jonathan Swift, Voyages de Gulliver, trans. Desfontaines (Paris : Jacques Guérin, 1727).


Generally viewed as a genre which conveys local character, vernacular and traditions, literary scholars such as Dirk de Geest have rightly pointed out that it is very difficult to define the parameters of local-colour fiction due to the variety of narrative templates and themes within it, and its crossovers with other genres. See Dirk De Geest, Wiel Kusters, Tom Sintobin, and Eveline Vanfraussen, ‘The Case of Regional Literature as a Provocation of Literary Studies’, in In L. van Santvoort et al., eds., Sources of Regionalism in the Nineteenth Century (Leuven: Leuven UP, 2008), 92-3.

Josephine Donovan, European Local-Color Literature (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 68.


Ibid, 67.

During the Famine, but also in the decades that followed, many Irish settled in such countries as Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia, Argentina, and Brazil. For further reading see Marguérite Corporaal and Jason King, eds., *Irish Migration and Memory: Global Recollections of Ireland’s Great Hunger and Exodus in Interdisciplinary Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2017); Kerby Miller, *Ireland and Irish America: Culture, Class, and Transatlantic Migration* (Dublin: Field Day, 2008); Donald MacRaid, *The Irish Diaspora in Britain, 1750–1939* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).


A cutting-edge recent study on emigrant crossings during the Great Famine is Cian McMahon’s *The Coffin Ship* (New York: NYU Press, 2021).

*Mckenna, The Hungry Road, 67.*


This law no longer entitled people who held more than a quarter acre of land to relief. See Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland Before and After the Famine*, 110, 124. See also Peter Gray, *The Making of the Irish Poor Law, 1815-43* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009), 334.

*McKenna, The Hungry Road, 259.*


*McCann, TransAtlantic, 81.*

Ibid, 60.


McCann, TransAtlantic, 186.

Ibid, 194.

Ibid, 181.


In this respect, the Gate is continuing its tradition in transnational collaboration and as a theatre of emancipation. See Ruud van den Beuken, Avant-Garde Nationalism at the Dublin Gate Theatre, 1928-1940 (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2020).