
Introduction

Irish Studies in Taiwan

Anne Fogarty and Wei H. Kao

Ever since the creation of the Free State in 1922, Irish writers have been fascinated or troubled by how Ireland should be remembered, re-imagined, recreated or re-defined. The 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty ratified a border between Northern and Southern Ireland while aiming to undo the legacy of centuries of colonial domination. Freedom came at the cost of division.

In part to envisage a homeland that has turned a new chapter, and in part to prompt Irish people to have “one good look at themselves in my nicely polished looking glass,” as James Joyce put it when publishing *Dubliners*, Irish writers across the generations have constructed literary or theatrical spaces where different realities are tested, disrupted, reconfigured or transformed. Their creations often problematize the past and reproduce it as an unfixed, nonlinear temporality. What was recognized as politically correct or ethically acceptable, such as community memories, heroism, authority, and historical interpretations, would turn into fluid and intertwined entities that were questioned by Irish writers, critics, and theater practitioners.

This special issue aims to explore how modern and contemporary Irish literature and drama from 1921 to the present are reflective of changing notions of nation formation, gender values, political ideologies, and social arrangements, and how creative writers respond to or challenge the existing orthodoxies that have conditioned Irish people’s perceptions of home, place, and individuality. The four essays collected here simultaneously probe how Irish texts reveal how injustice,

Ex-position, Issue No. 48, December 2022 | National Taiwan University
DOI: 10.6153/EXP.202212_(48).0001

Anne FOGARTY, Professor, School of English, Drama and Film, University College Dublin, Ireland
Wei H. KAO, Professor, Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University, Taiwan

inequality, and repression, as well as political and domestic violence, are strategically normalized, disguised or resisted through different creative methods. They urge their readers and audiences to cross, transgress or demarcate borders, imaginary or otherwise, and to question fixed stereotypes and cultural assumptions.

The first essay, by Pingta Ku, “[T]he deprofundity of multimathematical immaterialities’: *Finnegans Wake* II.4 as a Parody of Mechanical Encryption,” takes seriously Philippe Sollers’s bold contention that Joyce’s novel is anti-fascist in nature. It uncovers radical aspects of Joyce’s final work and suggests that it, in a manner akin to Alan Turing’s decryption of the Enigma code, deconstructs the riddles of the “Tristan and Isolde” and “Mamalujo” episodes, and pits the unpredictability of linguistic heterogeneity against the thanatopolitical uniformity of computational algorithms.

Li-ling Tseng’s essay, “Exile, Cunning, Silence’: Stephen’s New Irish Art in *Ulysses*,” illustrates how Stephen Dedalus upends the principles he proposed in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to forge a new mode of Irish art in *Ulysses*. By re-shuffling the strategies of “silence, exile, cunning” that *Portrait* propounded as necessary survival skills and artistic strategies, Stephen makes momentary peace with the condition of domestic dislocation. He demonstrates his wit by creating the vampire-lover poem and the “Parable of the Plums,” and declaims his peculiar outlook on Shakespeare’s life and legacy, thus declaring an alternative and revolutionary Irish art which is ultimately embodied by *Ulysses* as a whole.

Yi-ling Yang’s essay, “Silence on the Border in Eoin McNamee’s *Resurrection Man* and Brian McGilloway’s *The Nameless Dead*,” interrogates the representation of the border in two Northern Irish thrillers. Drawing upon Henri Lefebvre’s notion of the spatial triad and Slavoj Žižek’s conceptions of violence, she argues that Eoin McNamee’s *Resurrection Man* reveals how the psychological boundaries between Catholic and Protestant communities are maintained through sectarian atrocities. The border, however, does not fade with the passage of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. As Yang continues to explain, Brian McGilloway’s *The Nameless Dead* illustrates how the Agreement constructs a temporal border that confines the violence of the past in post-Troubles Northern Ireland to a liminal state between past and present. Resembling Birte Heidemann’s idea of “liminal permanence,” such liminality fails to salve the collective conscience, leaving the voice of Troubles-related victims silenced by the Agreement’s rhetoric of progress.

Shan-Yun Huang’s essay examines how post-crash Ireland relates to the past by reading two contemporary texts, Donal Ryan’s *The Spinning Heart* and Mike McCormack’s *Solar Bones*, through the lens of nostalgia, one of the staple elements in Irish culture. He draws out the crucial function of nostalgia for maintaining self-

continuity and illustrates how nostalgic reflections in these texts may help individuals and even collectives to fortify their identity in times of crisis, be it the debilitating aftermath of the economic crash or even one's own mortality. Huang argues that the engagement with nostalgia in these post-crash texts facilitates a reimagining of Irish identity, which serves as a counterweight to boom-time deprecation of the past and, more importantly, provides a foundation for moving forward.

These four essays showcase the research interests and strengths of Taiwanese scholars working in the field of Irish literary studies. Their work is testament to the connection between the academy and the activities of foreign missionaries who brought Irish modernism to Taiwan during the Cold War. The scholars whose work is featured in this special issue returned with postgraduate degrees in Irish literature from Ireland, the USA, and the UK. Despite Ireland and Taiwan being geographically distant from each other and not even sharing a formal diplomatic tie, the two countries' difficult relationships with a (former) foreign dominator have prompted many Taiwanese students to compare the Irish experience with the Taiwanese counterpart. Their interest in modern and contemporary Irish literature—acquired initially in the undergraduate classroom in Taiwan—has therefore widened their perspectives on the troubled histories of the two island states and their politically divided societies. Although the four essays here do not particularly put the two countries under the same microscope, it cannot be denied that Ireland as a country on the periphery of Europe has played a pivotal role in this inter-cultural exchange. The inspiring impact of Irish writing lies at the basis of this special issue in *Irish Studies*—probably the first in any academic journal on literature written in English here in Taiwan.¹

The four essays that examine works by James Joyce, Donal Ryan, Mike McCormack, Eoin McNamee, and Brian McGilloway bear witness to the diverse interests of senior and younger Taiwanese scholars in modern and contemporary Irish literature. Not only do these essays show a kaleidoscope of issues, be they social, familial or personal, that concern Irish writers, but they also examine an array of literary symbols and patterns used to contour these fictional texts.

Tellingly, these essays are characteristic of what has been taught and researched in Taiwan during the past few decades and demonstrate how Irish studies have absorbed elements—in one way or another—from a different culture. Despite the

¹ One notable predecessor who introduced emerging Irish writers to university students in Taiwan was the late Fr. Frederic J. Foley, S. J. from this department. He was involved in the first production of Samuel Beckett's absurdist play, *Waiting for Godot*, in Taiwan in 1966. This pioneering production unexpectedly revolutionized the dramaturgy of local stage plays (in Chinese), allowing theater makers to have new imaginings about avant-garde theatricality—which was unprecedented in Taiwan. For details, see Kao.

fact that these essays are not engaged directly with the canonical Irish writers that have been topics of many theses and dissertations completed in graduate institutions in Taiwan, they do illuminate the enthusiasm with which local scholars have explored the changing faces of Irish literature and the directions it is taking at the turn of the twenty-first century.²

The wide range of research on Irish literature that has been conducted in Taiwan is thanks to the English language that gives non-native speakers access to modern Irish literature. What is notable is that the geographical distance does not seem to be a barrier but often serves as a vantage point from which alternative interpretations are propounded and inter-cultural perspectives encouraged alongside the new literary and cultural criticisms that were introduced to Taiwan simultaneously from Europe and the USA. As seen in many scholarly works by Taiwanese authors over the years, reading strategies informed by postcolonialism, ecocriticism, psychoanalysis, trauma studies, and gender studies are used to examine Irish writers and to show that they do not merely write for a local audience but suggestively reflect on controversies concerning every individual and community in this global village. It is evident that the study of Irish literature in Taiwan exemplifies intellectual interactions beyond geographical boundaries and provides “one good look at” the political and cultural paralysis of these two countries through some type of “nicely polished looking glass,” as James Joyce envisioned for his once notorious *Dubliners* (*Letters* 64).

The publication of this special issue is a long-awaited, not necessarily belated, showcase of Taiwanese academics and their cutting-edge research on modern and contemporary Irish literature. The multi-sided views of Irish texts presented here provide not only a platform for further debate and conversation but also an opportunity to evaluate the far-reaching impact of global Irish studies on countries on the periphery of Asia.

WORKS CITED

- Joyce, James. *Letters of James Joyce*. Ed. Stuart Gilbert. Vol. 1. New York: Viking, 1965.
- Kao, Wei H. “Samuel Beckett in Taiwan: Cross-cultural Innovations, Challenges, and Controversies.” *Journal of Beckett Studies* 15.2 (2006): 160-89.

² Authors who have been examined in theses and dissertations include, to name a few, Samuel Beckett, J. M. Synge, Sean O’Casey, George Bernard Shaw, Jonathan Swift, Oscar Wilde, and W. B. Yeats. Contemporary Irish authors studied include Eavan Boland, Anne Enright, Brian Friel, Seamus Heaney, Marie Jones, Thomas Kinsella, Patrick McCabe, Martin McDonagh, Frank McGuinness, Edna O’Brien, Liam O’Flaherty, Christina Reid, and more. For a comprehensive list of theses and dissertations on Irish authors by Taiwanese scholars—yet to be updated—see <https://is.gd/NqJe50>.