

James P. Byrne, Padraig Kirwan and Michael O'Sullivan (eds)

AFFECTING IRISHNESS

NEGOTIATING CULTURAL IDENTITY WITHIN
AND BEYOND THE NATION



Introduction

The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performative of the present.

—HOMI K. BHABHA, *The Location of Culture*

‘I would but find what’s there to find,
Love or deceit.’
‘It was the mask engaged your mind,
And after set your heart to beat,
Not what’s behind.’

—W. B. YEATS, ‘The Mask’¹

In 2004 Ireland was ranked as the fourth most globalised country in the world, one place behind the United States.² A recent survey conducted by the European Union³ also reveals that 71 per cent of Irish people, compared with an EU average of 63 per cent, are ‘favorably disposed’ towards globalisation (O’Sullivan, 39).⁴ The culture of Irishness and the discipline of

1 The extract is reproduced with the permission of A. P. Watt Ltd on behalf of Grainne Yeats.

2 See ‘The Global Top 20’ at http://www.atkearney.com/shared_res/pdf/Globalization-Index_FP_Nov-Dec-06_S.pdf

3 See Eurobarometer, *Globalisation*, Flash Eurobarometer 151b, November 2003 (http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/index_en.htm).

4 Michael J. O’Sullivan, *Ireland and the Global Question*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2006.

Irish studies as mediated by the university have not remained impervious to the demands of this economic transformation. Fifteen years after John Guillory raised the spectre of ‘cultural capital’ in the American university, surely it is now timely that some important questions be asked of Irish studies. In the now economically savvy Irish university, how might Irishness as mediated through Irish studies engage with what Guillory describes as a ‘form of capital which is specifically symbolic or *cultural*’, and that inaugurates a “symbolic struggle” over representation in the canon’ (viii)?⁵ How has the new ‘globalised’ mind-set affected cultural and political markers of Irishness? And how, in an era of globalisation, does Irishness bear witness to such outmoded cultural cues as Joyce’s pleas for a ‘moral history’?

Despite being ‘favourably disposed’ towards globalisation, recent events suggest that the kind of globalisation being embraced in Ireland needs to be interrogated. In 2004, when Ireland ranked first in the table of ‘most globalised’ countries, the Irish government proposed a national citizenship referendum to eliminate an Irish-born child’s automatic right to citizenship when the parents are not Irish nationals.⁶ The public overwhelmingly passed this referendum. In the face of such contradictions, and at a time when globalisation and Eurocentrism elicit very different reactions from the Irish voting public, Irish studies needs to refocus its critical gaze. It must reconcile new aspects of Irishness that grapple with immigration policy and the loss of sovereignty with an established critical perspective that has consistently addressed questions of Irishness in terms of a postcolonial reading of emigration. It is also no longer adequate for Irish studies to confine its self-questioning to matters of national identity at a time when,

- 5 In *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) John Guillory argues that there is a degree of confusion in regard to what he describes as the ‘liberal pluralist critique of the canon’, a confusion ‘between representation in the political sense – the relation of a representative to a constituency – and representation in the rather different sense of the relation between an image and what the image represents’. Many of the papers in this collection interrogate representations of Irishness in the light of new forms of ‘cultural capital’ in Ireland.
- 6 According to the AT Kearney/*Foreign Policy* magazine globalisation index, Ireland ranked as the most globalised country worldwide between 2002 and 2004, being knocked into second place in 2005 by Singapore (O’Sullivan, 34).

politically, Ireland has been regarded as contributing to 'nation-building' abroad. It is important that the field of study works to accommodate the new, oft-times occluded, and yet powerful manifestations of Irishness that are in operation today in a globalised economy. It must reconcile the established critical perspectives with a forward-looking critical momentum that incorporates the realities of globalisation and economic migration.

In response to some of these questions Luke Gibbons has suggested a way forward for Irish studies in terms of an 'ethics of analogy' and an 'ethics of memory'. According to Gibbons, an ethics of analogy is bound up with the 'historical duty' argument that sees Ireland as having little excuse, given its history, for 'getting it wrong' when it comes to its response to immigration. He questions whether in 'the first surge of affluence' of the 1990s there was, in Ireland, a readiness to 'displace [the] past, not least by placing it in the quarantine of the heritage industry'.⁷ By corollary Gibbons wonders whether this 'readiness' partly arose from 'the protracted crisis in national memory precipitated by three decades of conflict in Northern Ireland'.⁸ To counter this, Gibbons postulates an ethics of analogy that would then resituate our encounter with a reconstituted and reconstituting past in terms of responsibility. By the same token, Mary Robinson, a former president of Ireland and UN Human Rights Commissioner, has also emphasised that Ireland must accept the responsibilities its new economic climate brings. At a speech made in 1994 in Grosse Île, Quebec, where 15,000 men, women and children died of 'Famine Fever' she spoke of a similar 'ethics of analogy': '[i]t is also due to our sense as a people who suffered and survived that our history does not entitle us to a merely private catalogue of memories'.⁹ The attempt to deal with these complex issues has thrown Irish studies into a frantic search for a critical vocabulary that can describe the cultural memory-loss or malaise afflicting a people struggling

7 These comments were made as part of a plenary presentation entitled 'From Celtic Twilight to Celtic Tiger' at the annual JASIL conference at Shinwa Women's University, Kobe, Japan on 26 October 2007.

8 Ibid.

9 See the full text of Mary Robinson's speech at Grosse Île at: www.ballinagree.freesevers.com/grosse.html.

to come to terms with cultural cues that ask them to embrace a dramatic discursive shift from 'Celtic Twilight to Celtic Tiger'. Gibbons reminds us that 'cultural memory is part of a society's continuing dialogue with itself'. However, Ireland's dialogue with itself has been somewhat schizophrenic, since it is struggling to reconcile the multiple accounts of Irishness being disseminated in this time of cultural transformation. The assumption and proliferation of various masks of Irishness may lead to a disciplinary shirking of responsibility in the face of such an 'ethics of analogy'. Such masks may also perpetuate face-saving cultural narratives that only muddy the distinction between idealised national stereotypes and the image of the nation that political realities have created for immigrants in Ireland and for the Irish Diaspora.

While the essays in this collection do revisit age-old themes of belonging and inclusivity, there is a marked shift in emphasis. Cultural belonging, for so long phrased in terms of the exile's nostalgic longing for an impoverished and conflict-ridden state, is today being 'renewed' within Ireland by minority groups as a challenging and 'insurgent act of cultural translation'. Irishness may find the cultural impetus to weather this transitional period in an unlikely source. If it can interrogate and interiorise the cultural enlightenment gained from shifting, economically, from a sovereign to a global mind-set, then it may yet hold the potential for a cultural renaissance. Irishness can then draw from a wealth of resources that the 'borderline work of culture' will always uncover in any cultural melting-pot. In doing so, Irishness would be replaying *in situ* the kind of 'cultural translation' that its emigrants and exiles have influenced elsewhere for centuries.

Beyond the National Paradigm

Ireland's location on the edge of the Atlantic figures the nation both as the beginning of an exciting frontier and as an ideologically and culturally separate state. As such, it is perfectly placed to challenge and disrupt both national and transnational ideological paradigms. Between what have

become fixed discourses for Irishness, there is a space ('interstitial' to Paul Gilroy, 'in-between' to Homi K. Bhabha) for interrogating, destabilising, and complicating the accepted antinomy of these positions. Here both the Irish Sea and the Atlantic appear as maritime pathways that carry myriad connotations of exchange, floating, and crossing whether in images of safe passage or haunted memory. While it might now seem axiomatic to point to the existence of trans-Atlantic systems of exchange between Ireland and other nations, it would appear necessary to examine, interpret and understand not only the considerable complexity of the relationships that have arisen, but also to continue to deconstruct the often hazy or totalised conception of Ireland's relationship to the world.

This work of deconstruction and reconstruction is best done, according to Fredrik Barth, by focusing on the cultural (and ideological) boundaries. As Barth argues it is the '*boundary*' that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses. The boundaries to which we must give our attention are of course social boundaries, though they may have territorial counterparts' (300). Homi K. Bhabha reconfigures Barth's argument as the 'borderline work of culture' and claims that it is here in these 'in-between' spaces that 'an encounter with "newness" that is not part of the continuum of past and present' can be found (7). 'Such art', Bhabha argues, 'does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent "in-between" space, that innovates and interrupts the performative of the present' (7). For Irish art and particularly Irish literature, this process has been ongoing. Ever since attempts by Yeats and the Irish revivalists to reclaim Irishness from its colonial construct through a re-witnessing and re-inscribing of the past, Irish literature and scholarship has been involved in the reconstruction of national identity through a 'renew[al] [of] the past.' The danger with this, as Declan Kiberd so tellingly points out in his cogent work *Inventing Ireland*, is that for the Irish this past was determined by the typologies and even the language of the coloniser, so that 'sometimes in their progress the revivalists ... seem[ed] to reinforce precisely those stereotypes which they set out to dismantle' (32). As such the revivalists' discourse, which has proven so central to any discussion of Irish identity, set in place dual paradoxes that continue to dominate Irish scholarship: the paradox of trying to determine a viable

and vital selfhood in a language of imposition which, according to Ngugi wa Thiong'o 'controls [our very] tools of self-definition'; and the paradox of trying to understand the present and even determine the future by re-visiting the past (1135).

Irish studies as a discipline has continued to engage and negotiate these paradoxes. It certainly continues to actively interrogate language's role in the construction of Irish identity. Contrary to the revivalists' dictum, however, it must now begin to realise that Irishness, far from being something constant, consistent and inherited, is reinvented and reinterpreted by each generation and each individual. As Harold Bloom reminds us: 'The authority of identity is not constancy-in-change, but rather the originality that usurps tradition and becomes a fresh authority, strangely in the name of continuity' (353). Engaging in Bhabha's 'borderline work of culture [that] demands an encounter with "newness"'. This process will unmask the culture of Irishness (which has grown exponentially with the rise of the Celtic Tiger and advance of market capitalism) as something that seeks to reimagine Irish identity as an *affectation* of nationhood in which one can be attired without being invested – the metaphorical Irish jersey worn only when suited and removed without consequences. For the contemporary Irish it seems that nationalism has become 'symbolic' in much the same way that ethnicity became for the third-generation Irish-American, becoming 'an expressive rather than an instrumental function in [American] lives, [thereby] becoming more of a leisure-time activity and losing its relevance ... to ... family life' (Gans, 435).¹⁰ In investigating and challenging this symbolism, Irish studies must do more than revisit and reclaim cultural texts as 'art [that] does not merely recall the past ... [but rather] renews [it]'. Ultimately, and in Bhabha's 'spirit of revision and reconstruction', it must expose the normally sacrosanct and immutable Irish past as something that '[must] be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past' (3; Eliot, 39).

10 For more on this see Herbert J. Gans, 'Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America,' *Theories of Ethnicity*. Ed. Werner Sollors. New York: New York University Press, 1996.

The Historical Context

While pre-Famine Ireland had a population of more than 8 million, by the beginning of the twentieth century there were more Irish people abroad than there were in Ireland. Between 1820 and 1920 almost 5 million people emigrated from Ireland to the United States; today 45 million Americans claim 'Irish' as their primary ethnicity.¹¹ Yet, for all these expatriate Irish people have contributed and continue to contribute to Ireland – financially, socially, politically, intellectually and culturally – their Irish cultural identity has largely remained unconsidered. More recently, the rise in fortunes of the Irish economy and the broadening of the European market has led to a dramatic increase in the number of 'non-nationals' living in Ireland; suddenly national identity is being defined as something more than that prescribed and proscribed by geographical landscape. The alienation that these two groups – the Irish Diaspora and the non-nationals – have encountered in their experience of Irish cultural citizenship, challenges scholars of Irish studies to augment the definition and understanding of Irish cultural identity, not merely re-inserting these experiences into our understanding of Irishness but rather using them to challenge, re-invigorate and re-conceive Irish cultural identity both within and beyond the national paradigm.

As the national paradigm for self-definition becomes increasingly radicalised or marginalised in an increasingly globalised world it is important, if not imperative, for Irish studies to move towards a critical rethinking of Irish cultural identity as something more than that simply defined by geographical space or racial inheritance. Irish studies must re-interrogate Irish cultural identity, opening up new avenues of inquiry that can begin to reconcile the historical perspective of a geographically and 'racially' fixed Irishness with the need for a more inclusive and even fluid definition of Irish cultural identity in the twenty-first century. Correspondingly, *Affecting Irishness* aims to move *between* locations – national and transnational,

11 Kevin Kenny, 'Diaspora and Comparison: The Global Irish as a Case Study,' *Journal of American History*, 90:1 (June 2003): 134–62.

contemporary and historic, realistic and surreal – and does so in a bid to not only underline the intricacy of long-established and ongoing patterns of cultural and political flux, but also to examine the formation of contiguous imaginary spaces, *and* explore self-imaginings at home. Indeed, in line with such a fluid vision of transnational exchange it is interesting to note that following one preliminary meeting the editors of this collection have kept in contact across the space of three continents, and this book is the result of constant communication between Boston, London, Nagoya, and occasionally Dublin and Cork. Contributions to *Affecting Irishness* have come from an equally dizzying selection of geographical spaces. Experimentally and theoretically both the editors and the contributors to the collection are committed to re-interrogating and re-invigorating the myriad notions of ‘Irishness’: positive and negative, accepted and obscure, tangible and imagined.

Irish Studies and *Affecting Irishness*

Irish studies is at something of a crossroads; having somewhat effectively applied the language of postmodernism, a language that sought to do away with identity politics, to revisionist readings of Irish history, it is now struggling to deal with the realities of twenty-first-century Ireland. *Affecting Irishness* offers an important response to this dilemma. First, it assesses the discipline of Irish studies by incorporating essays from leading scholars working both inside and outside the island of Ireland, and, second, it focuses on the dramatic role-reversal confronting a ‘globalised’ Ireland. Although recent works in Irish studies have sought to begin such a debate, they have either appeared as readers with classic essays on the state of Irish identity by leading scholars (*Theorizing Ireland*, 2003), or they have sought to introduce Irishness to a postmodern rhetoric that has dressed old themes in new clothes. If Irish studies rests content with employing a rhetoric of liminality, alterity and hybridity that it has lifted from postmodernism and deconstruction without investigating how interpretative

styles are themselves infused with distinct cultural traces, then it risks marginalising itself in cultural discourse in a debilitating fashion. For instance, *Ireland in Proximity: History, Gender, Space* (1999) makes a worthwhile contribution to the field of Irish studies, and offers a revisionist reading of defining moments in Irish history, primarily through the application of a postmodern rhetoric of 'space' to well-trodden avenues of research. While *Affecting Irishness* does not shy away from the postructuralist revolution that a rhetoric of liminality and hybridity will always connote, the editors of this collection believe that such language can only be truly effective in an Irish context if it is attentive to the genealogies and linguistic traces of the subordinated and diasporic elements of Irish cultural identity.

Other recent works in Irish studies have also been dominated by the discourses of nationalism (be it post-nationalism or pan-nationalism) and colonialism (be it postcolonialism or de-colonialism). Such works include Clare Carroll's and Patricia King's collection of essays *Ireland and Postcolonial Theory* (2003) and Gerry Smyth's *Decolonization and Criticism: The Construction of Irish Literature* (1998). Though these works have advanced the investigation of Irishness, the almost routine employment of the postcolonial paradigm in Irish studies may indirectly perpetuate a division in Irish cultural identity that Seamus Deane addressed many years ago. Deane writes in 'Heroic Styles: The Tradition of an Idea' that the disciplines of literature and history '[i]n Ireland [...] have been kept apart, even though they have between them, created the interpretations of past and present by which we live' (14). In privileging what they believe is a bold and challenging reading of how Irish culture mediates a new and visionary historical discourse, the above works may exacerbate the kind of division Deane describes. While these works offer challenging accounts of the 'postcolonial moment', they consistently read all forms of cultural expression according to the dictates of one privileged historical perspective and critical discourse. In other words, in attempting to seamlessly align the historical and literary fields these works of criticism can obscure important formal elements that mark these fields as distinct, thereby neglecting aspects of the genetic and textual archive that enrich the artwork's mediation of history. Something is lost when the work struggles to bear witness to the historical perspective it must somehow explain. *Affecting Irishness* does

not privilege any univocal historical perspective and it does not employ a postcolonial blanket approach to explore cultural identity, one that can work to eviscerate very real and experiential differences, differences that were enabling of the perception and voicing of the subaltern experience in the first place. If Irish studies persists in regarding itself as almost synonymous with postcolonialism to the detriment of other means for revisioning history then it risks reifying the connections between history and culture, thereby perpetuating the kind of division Deane alludes to above between literature and history. In bringing together important works by leading scholars in the fields of film studies, migration and Diaspora studies, travel literature, and gender studies, *Affecting Irishness* offers a twenty-first-century interrogation of Irishness that is a timely fusion of international perspectives on Irish cultural identity.

As such, *Affecting Irishness* hopes to initiate further critical analysis in the field, largely by offering readers a clear assessment of Irishness as it is expressed within contemporary literary, cultural and academic contexts. It begins this analysis by considering Irishness beyond the parameters of the island itself, by introducing current cultural and critical debates concerning Irish liminality, hybridity and identity, and by reassessing aspects of Irish identity and presence. To these ends the collection examines how cultural images and cultural memories – of Irish traditions, of the Diaspora and of forms of Irishness abroad – affect ongoing representations of Irishness depicted in literature, film, music and social studies, and it endeavours to construct a critical paradigm within which to re-assess Irish notions of ethnic difference, national exceptionalism and regionalism. Each of the essays in this collection consequently raises important questions concerning Irish identity and culture in the contemporary context.

The essays in this collection cover a rich variety, of perspectives, experiences and cultural forms. The editors have sought to arrange the essays thematically and in so doing they have tried to let the essays plot a cultural trajectory of their own. If we can resort to symbols, then it might be suggested that the essays cover all facets of cultural belonging in moving from the border, where identities are acquired, passports are stamped, and baggage is collected, to the ghostly and the spectral where what has passed is revisited.

Theorising Irish Studies

Raphaël Ingelbien's essay 'Irish Studies, the Postcolonial Paradigm and the Comparative Mandate' cuts to the heart of important issues facing the institution of Irish studies. Ingelbien argues that the emergence of the institution of Irish studies over recent decades, in line with the emergence of the discourse of postcolonialism, owes much to the demise of the discipline of comparative literature and to the relative stability of the discipline of English. He examines the inherent strengths and weaknesses of Irish studies as a discipline. A strict adherence to the postcolonial paradigm has led to a situation where, for Ingelbien, 'the postcolonial paradigm as a whole has positively discouraged the idea that Ireland could be examined in its relation to continental Europe'. If Irish studies can find its way towards developing a 'self-reflexive grasp of its institutional history' then, for Ingelbien, it may very well avoid the consequences of being too dependent on the postcolonial paradigm.

Oona Frawley's essay "'Who's he when he's at home?": Spenser and Irishness' also interrogates received notions of the canon of Irish studies, but from a very different perspective. In arguing that Edmund Spenser is, on the one hand, 'firmly situated in Ireland by virtue of much employed phrases like "Spenser's Castle" and "Spenser's Ireland"' and on the other, is 'utterly absent from Irishness, as he is not considered an Irish writer', Frawley makes a novel inspection of the constitution of the canon of Irish writing. Frawley questions the division that has arisen between his political writings and his more poetical work. Frawley's revisionist reading of Spenser examines how a writer's nationality is determined for inclusion in the canon of Irish literature, a consideration that surely informs all representations of Irishness.

Moving away from the engagement with the contemporary construction of the institution of Irish studies, Anne-Catherine Lobo's essay, 'Irishness and the Body: The Presence of the Body in the Debates on Poverty in the Early Nineteenth Century', investigates the institutionalisation of the Irish body in early nineteenth-century British discourse. Investigating the rhetorical use of a language of the body in discussions of Irish mendicancy,

Lobo's essay convincingly demonstrates how in early nineteenth-century British discourse the Irish as a body were not only perceived as distinct and exogenous to the British polity, but were often rhetorically represented in purely bodily terms with a mixture of fear, fascination and disgust.

Rebordering Territories

Linda M. Hagan's essay 'The Ulster Scots and the "Greening" of Ireland: A Precarious Belonging?' engages with the considerable tensions currently surrounding the issue of Scots-Irish identity in Northern Ireland. Most often, forms of Scots-Irish identity are interpreted, either rightly or wrongly, by commentators as a mish-mash of cultural forms and a contrived linguistic or historic presence that Unionists offer in response to the nationalist celebration of Irish and Irishness. In Hagan's essay Scots-Irish identity is reconsidered, as she argues for how traditional, more fundamental cultural influences shape, and are shaped by, the language of these Scots-Irish communities. Like Hagan's, Carol Baraniuk's essay, 'The Leid, the Pratoe and the Buik: Northern Cultural Markers in the Works of James Orr', investigates Orr's employment of his native tongue – Braid Scotch – in several poems which he wrote within the context of his support for independence. The essay insightfully explores how, viewed as a whole, Orr's work reveals that his Irishness was at once deeply patriotic, inclusive of all Ireland, and at the same time, distinctively northern.

Niall O'Gallagher's essay "'Ma Right Insane Yirwanny Us Jimmy?": Irishness in Modern Scottish Writing' examines the growth of Irish-Scottish studies as a discipline through an examination of a selection of recent Scottish writing. Despite the 'relative invisibility of the Irish experience in Scottish writing since the Great Famine' O'Gallagher argues that the situation has changed dramatically in recent years. In examining Irishness in the works of such writers as Irvine Welsh, Anne Donovan and Tom Leonard and through such themes as religion, sport and the Scottish Gaelic language, O'Gallagher gives a refreshingly clear assessment of how Irish

identity is being reappraised in modern Scottish writing. In a similar vein Aoileann Ní Éigearthaigh's "'No Rootless Colonist': John Hewitt's Regionalist Approach to Identity" examines images of social and aesthetic division in Hewitt's poetry. Ní Éigearthaigh specifically focuses on the poet's attempt to negotiate the spaces inhabited by Protestant and Catholic identities in Northern Ireland, largely by adapting a 'regionalist' approach.

'Other' Irelands

Maureen T. Reddy's 'Representing Travellers' extends the collection's attention to questions of cultural and national identity. Deftly assessing representations of Ireland's Travelling community in recent works of literary fiction, Reddy underscores the need to establish a greater plurality of voices within Irish society as well as emphasising the barriers to such an understanding. Notions of plurality and inclusion are a central theme in Jason King's essay 'Irish Multicultural Fiction: Metaphors of Miscegenation and Interracial Romance.' Comparatively assessing the fictional representation of immigrants to Ireland in novels by both Latvian and Irish authors, King gestures towards moments of intercultural connection and understanding, while also counter-pointing many of those moments with occasions of exclusion and racist vitriol.

Iris Lindahl-Raittila's essay, 'Subversive Identities: Femininity, Sexuality and "Irishness" in novels by Edna O'Brien', refreshingly re-appraises the work of one of Ireland's leading female writers in terms of the politics of femininity in her work. In exploring questions of femininity and sexuality in terms of national identity in the novels of Edna O'Brien, Lindahl-Raittila reveals how the representations of female identity in O'Brien's works constitute a cultural-political statement which refashions the role gender plays in the construction and reception of Irish national identity.

Transnational Irishness

In a bid to consider ‘Irishness’ beyond the borders of the nation Thomas W. Ihde’s ‘Irish-American Identity and the Irish Language’ interrogates the extent to which Irish-Americans can become alienated from both the often romanticised images of Irishness – exemplified by the infamous green beer of St Patrick’s Day – and even Ireland itself through their ‘vocational’ learning of the Irish language. To this end Ihde examines issues surrounding ‘linguistic performance and national identities’. Continuing this attention to the manifestation of Irish-American identity, William H. Mulligan explores the impetuses that regulated developing senses of Irishness in America after the 1840s. By paying particular attention to the experiences of Irish émigrés in the Michigan Copper Country from 1850 to 1900, Mulligan successfully locates and identifies evolving practices and/or opportunities, arguing thereafter that this evolution indicates a new ‘Irishness.’

By contrast, Justin Carville’s essay, “A Sympathetic Look”: Documentary Humanism and Irish Identity in Dorothea Lange’s “Irish Country People”, is a fascinating exploration of the American experience of Irish identity in the 1950s through the lens of Dorothea Lange’s photo-essay for *Life* magazine, ‘Irish Country People’. Produced for a largely American viewership, Carville argues that Lange’s photo-essay constructed an image of the Irish as not only a distant race in space but also in time. Drawing on theories of diasporic identity and photographic representation, this essay compellingly demonstrates how Lange’s photographs helped construct an image of Irishness tied to the discourse of universal humanism that dominated American documentary photography throughout the 1950s.

Extending the interrogation of transnationalism to consider the layers of nationalism in a globalised construct, Florence Schneider’s essay, ‘Muldoon’s Palimpsestic Irishness’, explores how, for Paul Muldoon, Irishness is both something changing and definite. Offering a compelling close-reading of Muldoon’s poetry, Schneider argues that by turning his poems into palimpsests, where every layer of meaning is important and present but is always covered by another layer of meaning, Muldoon exposes the limits of a shared background and knowledge in *reading* identity.