Introduction:
'Remapping Irish Literary and Cultural Landscapes in the Mid-Twentieth Century'

Yen-Chi Wu and Phyllis Boumans

Critical discussions surrounding mid-twentieth-century Ireland have shifted from narratives of isolation and cultural philistinism to a more nuanced understanding of the period as a time in which contraction meets expansion. Eve Patten, in her introduction to the seminal publication *Irish Literature in Transition, 1940-1980* (2020), states that the volume is 'alert to the geographies of Irish cultural production' in the mid-century. In particular, the collection examines 'the impact of alternative spatial and political formations – trans-local and transatlantic, cross-continental and cross-border – in the shaping of Irish literary tradition'.[1] This calls for continued critical attention to the shaping and reshaping of Irish literary and cultural landscapes in the middle decades of the previous century.

Over the past few decades, critics have drawn attention to the various ways in which Irish writers engaged with the war despite war-time censorship, negotiated the legacies of Revivalism and High Modernism, and wrestled with nationalism and its conservative policies. Recent literary and cultural theories also helped reshape the contours of the literary and cultural spheres of mid-twentieth-century Ireland. The New Modernist Studies and middlebrow culture studies have richly complicated the geographies and cultural strata of mid-century Irish cultural productions by blurring the rigid distinctions between high art and so-called mass culture. In that regard, the widening of the canon has led to long-overdue attention to mid-century writers such as Walter Macken, Maeve Brennan or Teresa Deevy. Cultural geographers, drawing on ecocriticism and the 'blue humanities', have highlighted the ways in which archipelagos and coasts – meeting places of land and sea – underpin Ireland's literary imagination, which suggest a more elusive geography than its island confine.[2]

Literary and cultural historians have recovered once well-known figures whose popularity had diminished through time, providing missing pieces to help us better see the fuller picture. They have also pursued materialist understandings of the publishing venues where literary work and cultural debates took place. Periodical studies scholars have examined how literary magazines like *The Bell, The Irish Statesman, Ireland To-Day* and *Envoy* flourished during this period, how they offered important space for literary, cultural and political conversations, and how they recalibrated genre conventions. Irish writers also sought publishing opportunities abroad – in avant-garde little magazines as well as commercial

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[1] Eve Patten, 'Introduction', *Irish Literature in Transition, 1940-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1-24 (3).

[2] See, for instance, John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014) and Nicholas Allen, *Ireland, Literature, and the Coast: Seatangled* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

publications – in continental Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States, and beyond.[3] Conversely, with the 1953 International PEN in Dublin, Ireland was at the centre of the literary world.[4] These transnational and transatlantic connections again attest to the rich and elusive geographies of mid-century Ireland.

Policy changes and technological advancement also shifted the terrain of Irish literature and culture in a material sense. With the introduction of free secondary education (1967) and grants enabling university education (1968), groups that previously were denied access to education began making their mark in the publishing world, shifting the gender and class dimensions of the cultural sphere. New technologies and media – film, radio and TV – contributed to the emergence of popular culture, which competed with traditional forms of publication for public consumption. Conversely, film adaptations of literary works, radio plays and TV shows on books also introduced literature to a wider audience, bringing reading culture closer to the mass and the marketplace. Consequently, the male-dominated elitist mode of cultural production began to make room for new voices from previously marginalised cultural strata.

This themed issue of *RISE* defines the mid-twentieth century as from the 1930s to the 1970s – roughly coinciding with the conservative years of 'de Valera's Ireland', starting from the ratification of Bunreacht na hÉireann in 1937 supervised by de Valera through Seán Lemass' programmes of economic expansion which led to Ireland's European Economic Community membership in 1973. It understands literary and cultural landscapes in the broadest terms: horizontally as a geographic space with borders real and imagined; vertically as a space where high and low cultures clash and commingle. The cover image – reproduced with kind permission by Irish photographer Conor Corbett – accurately captures this act of remapping Ireland that animates the different contributions to this issue. The photo, taken at Muckross Head in County Donegal, depicts one of the more than eighty different EIRE markers that were installed all over the coast between 1939 and 1942 to demarcate Irish borders in an attempt to signal to World War II aircrafts they were now approaching neutral terrain. If the accompanying Look Out Posts (LOPs) were intended as landmarks signifying Irish independence and self-governance, some were later revealed to mark a secret corridor allowing Allied Forces access over Irish airspace, calling into question Ireland's neutrality and implicating Ireland within the contemporary geopolitical geographies.[5]

This issue includes six essays by contributors based across the globe: Ireland, the UK, the Netherlands, Canada and Hong Kong. They show us the various forms of border-crossing – geographic, linguistic, generic – that contribute to a fuller map of Irish literature and culture in the mid-twentieth century. In the opening essay, Katherine M. Huber takes an audionarratological approach in her examination of four radio plays by Teresa Deevy. Huber demonstrates how attending to the sound elements and audiophonic choices in Deevy's radio work allows us to see the subtle ways in which these plays seek to challenge patriarchal

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[3] For Irish writers' transatlantic connections with the U.S. magazines, see Sinéad Moynihan, '"Like a Homing Bird to Its Nest": Irish Writers and Mid-Century U.S. Magazines', *Éire-Ireland* 57.3&4 (2022): 311-338.

[4] See Deirdre Brady, '"Writers and the International Spirit": Irish PEN in the Postwar Years', *New Hibernia Review* 21.3 (2017): 116-130.

[5] See Anna Teekell, *Emergency Writing: Irish Literature, Neutrality, and the Second World War* (Northwestern University Press, 2018), 1-2.

societal norms and offer alternative modes of being for mid-century. Huber's reading of these radio scripts also points to the way simplistic understandings of mid-twentieth-century Irish writing as mostly naturalist or realist in nature fails to recognise the late modernist aesthetics that animate much of the literary production of this period. By drawing attention to the feminist agenda that underlies Deevy's radio work, Huber shows how Deevy's work smuggled in feminist concerns onto the male-dominated and state-mandated airwaves and uncovers a much-overlooked feminist Irish radio modernism. Moreover, Huber alerts us to the affordances of the aural turn in literary studies: as Chris Morash has noted, radio, unlike any other medium, quickly became part of the fabric of everyday Irish life.[6] Huber's study, then, is a timely reminder that remapping the contours of the mid-twentieth-century literary landscape is incomplete without taking into consideration the wider media landscape available to writers from all sides of the literary spectrum which offered an important financial and creative outlet.

While Huber's essay demonstrates how mid-century writers such as Deevy offered literary challenges to patriarchal systems of suppression and claimed a space for women's voices on the air, Loic Wright zooms in on a strand of mid-century writing that examined the way in which writers responded to the constrictions of state-sanctioned masculine ideals. If much of the state's efforts went to the upholding of a particular version of a postcolonial Irish masculinity that justified Irish independence and economic sovereignty, Wright demonstrates how writers such as J.P. Donleavy and John Broderick offered counter-hegemonic depictions of Irish manhood. His reading of Donleavy's *The Ginger Man* exposes the underlying debilitating psychological anxieties inflicted by the pressure to conform to such normative gendered conceptions onto those failing to live up to these ideals; by contrast, Wright shows how Broderick's *The Pilgrimage* carves out a space for queer masculinities and offers a counternarrative to heteropatriarchal norms that pervaded Irish society. In showing how these writers turned to narrative techniques such as perspectivalism, narrative fragmentation, epistemological uncertainty and relatively underexplored modes such as the picaresque genre, Wright demonstrates how ideological recalcitrance and formal innovation went hand in hand. As such, Wright's essay is evidence of a much richer tapestry of different literary modes present in mid-century writing that has only recently come into sharper focus, transcending previous assessments of this period as stylistically pedestrian – an outmoded but persistent critical observation that still too often serves as a straw man in mid-century scholarship.[7] Wright's essay, then, not only builds on the recent critical reappraisal of masculinity in Irish Studies of the past two decades, but also contributes to existing scholarship that recognises the flowering of a domestic Irish late modernism at mid-century, in which ideological engagement and formal experiment were no strange bedfellows.[8]

In the next essay, Will Fleming draws our attention to the meaning of poetic translation from Irish into English in the context of (post-)Lemass-era Ireland, specifically the

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[6] Christopher Morash, *A History of the Media in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 131.

[7] Patten, 15. See also Gregory Castle and Patrick Bixby, *A History of Irish Modernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

[8] As Tyrus Miller notes, late modernists were 'deeply troubled by their inability to keep [their social context] at a manageable distance' and he argues that 'for late modernism, we would have to speak of a failure to repress, a failure of the forms to contain the turbulent historical energies that sweep through late modernist works'. See Tyrus Miller, *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction and the Arts Between the World Wars* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 30, 32.

way in which translations became entangled with new economic models of progress and nationalism. Fleming studies the reception and compositional evolution of two translations from Middle Irish – Thomas Kinsella's *The Tain: Translated from the Irish Epic Táin Bó Cuailnge* and Trevor Joyce's *The Poems of Sweeny Peregrine* – through the lens of Raymond William's concept of residual nationalism, showing how these works were either co-opted and harnessed by the hegemonic version of nationalism for political gain, or sought to subvert it. In his perceptive readings, Fleming arrives at a more complex and nuanced view of the old traditional nationalism/repression vs. post-nationalism/modernisation dichotomy; in doing so, the article contributes to a growing body of historiographic scholarship which has argued for a more differentiated and variegated understanding of social change in the 1960s and 1970s and specifically emphasises the role played by cultural production and translations in these processes.

While Fleming's essay focuses on the socio-economic aspects of Ireland's transformation in the mid-twentieth century, Niall Ó Cuileagáin's contribution engages with the ways in which the New Modernist Studies offers new paradigms in which to reconsider mid-century Irish writers' relationships with modernism and the issues of modernity. Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz's field-defining essay 'The New Modernist Studies' extends the temporal, spatial and cultural scopes of Modernism.[9] The reconfigured understanding of modernism/modernity has allowed for dynamic critical discussions on Ireland's mid-century literary production.[10] A noticeable strand of scholarship in this field shows us the critical valence of shifting focus from modernism's urban association to peripheral and rural areas.[11] Drawing on the idea of 'rural modernism/modernity', Ó Cuileagáin offers a compelling study of Máirtín Ó Cadhain. Examining the ways in which Ó Cadhain's *Cré na Cille* and 'An Bhliain 1912' complicate James Joyce's modernist legacies, Ó Cuileagáin's essay shows a mid-century Irish landscape where the uneasy tensions of tradition/modernity and of rural/urban undo the isolationist narrative, gesturing toward a new understanding of an Irish iteration of rural modernism.

Expanding beyond the rural/urban divide of modernism, Moonyoung Hong's essay builds upon an international comparative framework in which to examine Irish and Korean women playwrights' struggle with the totalising and gendered narratives of nation-builidng and postcolonial modernity. Ireland's postcolonial experience, as Maud Ellmann points out, has offered a particularly engaging comparative framework: 'This approach has shown how the concept of the nation, often enshrined as orthodox, can also function as a heresy by putting regional specificity against imperial hegemony'.[12] Studies of postcolonial comparative paradigms have arisen from a wide range of regions including African countries, the Caribbean

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[9] Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, 'The New Modernist Studies', *PMLA* 123.3 (2008): 737-748.

[10] See, for instance, Mark Quigley, *Empire's Wake: Postcolonial Writing and the Politics of Modern Literary Form* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013) and John Brannigan, *Archipelagic Modernism: Literature in the Irish and British Isles, 1890-1970* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015).

[11] See Neal Alexander and James Moran, eds. *Regional Modernisms* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013) and Kirstin Bluemel and Michael McCluskey, eds. *Rural Modernity in Britain: A Critical Intervention* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), among others.

[12] Maud Ellmann, 'Introduction: Out of Ireland', *The Edinburgh Companion to Irish Modernism*. Eds. Maud Ellmann, Siân White, and Vicky Mahaffey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 1-31 (9).

states, and India.[13] More recently, such a comparative framework of Irish postcolonial studies has been extended to East Asia. Before the Celtic Tiger, there were the four Asian Tiger economies (Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan) from the 1950s to the 1990s.[14] These Asian states experienced accelerated modernisation while redefining their national identities against their former rulers, which richly resonates with Ireland's development. Contributing to this growing scholarly interest in global comparative approaches to Irish studies, Hong's essay is an original examination of how the intersection of nation-building, the ideologies of modernisation, and the feminist movements in the mid-century offer an intriguing comparative case study of Irish and Korean women playwrights.

The final essay in this issue highlights the extent to which the changing global geopolitics in the mid-century may help us reassess Ireland's literary landscape. Ireland's neutrality during World War II was a major contributing factor to the conventional narrative of Ireland's isolation during the mid-twentieth century. Éamon de Valera paying condolence to the German consulate at the wake of Hitler's death has been used as a particularly poignant example of how 'de Valera's Ireland' was out of touch with the rest of the world. Recent cultural historians and literary scholars have challenged this isolationist view by pointing out Ireland's covert political alliance with the Allied forces. They have also shown us how wartime censorship resulted in an elusive and dynamic wordplay that characterises Irish late modernist writing.[15] Despite Ireland's neutrality, the island was never a bystander in the global war. Geopolitics played a long hand in Ireland's national and economic developments. Keelan Harkin's contribution extends the geopolitics of the Second World War to the often neglected Cold War period. Focusing on William Trevor's short story 'The Ballroom of Romance', Harkin offers a compelling reading of how the younger characters' vision of their futures is shaped by the competing ideologies of the Cold War era and America's soft power and economic investment. Reading Trevor's story as Cold War fiction, Harkin convincingly argues, redresses the narrative of Ireland's exceptionalism. Despite its neutrality and wartime censorship, the island was never unfettered by international politics and geopolitical tensions.

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[13] See, for instance, Glenn Hooper and Colin Graham, eds. *Irish and Postcolonial Writing: History, Theory, Practice* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[14] A worthy mention in this recent area is Shan-yun Huang's article that traces how the tensions between Irish Revivalism, nationalism, and modernism, embodied in Joyce's work, offer a telling paradigm in which to examine the debates of Taiwan's nativist and modernist movements. See Shan-Yun Huang, 'Modernism Against/ For the Nation: Joycean Echoes in Postwar Taiwan', *The Edinburgh Companion to Irish Modernism,* Ed. Maud Ellmann, Siân White and Vicki Mahaffey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 182-199.

[15] See, for instance, Donal Ó Drisceoil, *Censorship in Ireland, 1939-1945: Neutrality, Politics and Society* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1996); Clair Wills, *That Neutral Island: A Cultural History of Ireland During the Second World War* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), Dorothea Depner and Guy Woodward, eds. *Irish Culture and Wartime Europe, 1938-1948* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2015) and Anna Teekell, *Emergency Writing: Irish Literature, Neutrality, and the Second World War* (Northwestern University Press, 2018), among others.

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