



Routledge Studies in Irish Literature

TRANSCULTURAL INSIGHTS INTO CONTEMPORARY IRISH LITERATURE AND SOCIETY

BREAKING NEW GROUND

Edited by
María Amor Barros-del Río



Transcultural Insights into Contemporary Irish Literature and Society

Transcultural Insights into Contemporary Irish Literature and Society examines the transcultural patterns that have been enriching Irish literature since the twentieth century and engages with the ongoing dialogue between contemporary Irish literature and society. Driven by the growing interest in transcultural studies in the humanities, this volume provides an insightful analysis of how Irish literature handles the delicate balance between authenticity and folklore, and uniformisation and diversity in an increasingly globalised world. Following a diachronic approach, the volume includes critical readings of canonical Irish literature as an uncharted exchange of intercultural dialogues. The text also explores the external and internal transcultural traits present in recent Irish literature, and its engagement with social injustice and activism, and discusses location and mobility as vehicles for cultural transfer and the advancement of the women's movement. A final section also includes an examination of literary expressions of hybridisation, diversity and assimilation to scrutinise negotiations of new transcultural identities. In the light of the compiled contributions, the volume ends with a revisitation of Irish studies in a world in which national identity has become increasingly problematic. This volume presents new insights into the fictional engagement of contemporary Irish literature with political, social and economic issues, and its efforts to accommodate the local and the global, resulting in a reshaping of national collective imaginaries.

María Amor Barros-del Río is Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of Burgos (Spain), and Secretary of AEDEI (the Spanish Association for Irish Studies). She has published widely on contemporary Irish literature and her work has been recognised by positive reviews in international journals, grants and awards received to date.

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First published 2025
by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

and by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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ISBN: 9781032549729 (hbk)

ISBN: 9781032549736 (pbk)

ISBN: 9781003428350 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003428350

Typeset in Sabon
by Newgen Publishing UK

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Contributors

Asier Altuna-García de Salazar is a Senior Lecturer in English and Irish Literatures at the Faculty of Social and Human Sciences at the University of Deusto, Spain. He is the former chairperson of AEDEI (Spanish Association for Irish Studies) and was a Basque Government postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Irish Studies NUI Galway, Ireland and Deusto University between 2003–8. He was involved in the European Project SPEAQ on quality assurance and enhancement, and a number of Ministerio de Economía y Competitividad projects on the dysfunctional Irish family and cultural practices of silence and, currently, on vulnerability in contemporary Irish fiction. He is also involved in European Commission TUNING projects on the enhancement of Higher Education in universities internationally. He has published on Spain and the Basque Country in 19th cent. Irish writing, silence, ageing and vulnerability, multicultural and transcultural Ireland. He has edited *Re-Writing Boundaries: Critical Approaches in Irish Studies* (PPU, 2007), *New Perspectives on James Joyce: Ignatius Loyola, make haste to help me!* (Deusto UP, 2009), *Rethinking Citizenship: New Voices in Euroculture* (Groningen UP, 2013) and *Ireland and Dysfunction: Critical Explorations in Literature and Film* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017).

María Amor Barros-del Río is Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of Burgos, Spain. She holds degrees in English, Cultural Anthropology and Gender Studies, and her research focuses on Irish literature, gender studies and second language teacher education. She has published extensively on Edna O'Brien, Anne Enright, Emma Donoghue and Sally Rooney, and her work can be found in international journals and edited volumes. She has been involved in several national and international research projects and she was principal investigator of the Erasmus+ project "A VIRtual Solution for a Comprehensive and Coordinated Training for Foreign Language TEACHERs in Europe,

VIRTEACH” (2018–2021). She is a member of the Banna/Bond Centre for Irish Studies and she is currently the Secretary of AEDEI (Spanish Association for Irish Studies).

Mariana Bolfarine teaches at the Federal University of Rondonópolis and at the Postgraduate Program at the Federal University of Mato Grosso, Brasil. She holds a PhD from the University of São Paulo and was a research fellow at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. She is a researcher at the WB Yeats Chair of Irish Studies and head of the Brazilian Association of Irish Studies (ABEI). She has translated into Portuguese *Roger Casement in Brazil: Rubber, the Amazon and the Atlantic World 1884–1916* (2010) and the *Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* (2016) and has published the book *Between Angels and Demons: Trauma in Fictional Representations of Roger Casement* (2018).

David M. Clark is Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of Coruña in Galicia, Spain. He has held executive positions in both national and international Associations for Irish Studies and has published widely on contemporary Irish and Scottish writing. He is Director of the “Amergin” University Institute for Irish Studies. The aims of the “Amergin” institute are to promote cultural contact between Galicia and Ireland and to foster academic works and cultural production from the Atlantic periphery. Clark’s most recent publication is the edited volume (with Eduardo Barros-Grela) *Post-Urban Spaces in Contemporary Irish Fiction: Transcultural Spaces and Places* (TIR, 2023). *Dark Green: Irish Crime Fiction from 1665–2000*, the first in a two-volume study on Irish crime writing, was published by Peter Lang in 2022, to be followed by *Emerald Noir: Irish Crime Fiction since 2000* to be published by the same publisher in 2024.

Margarita Estévez-Saá is Associate Professor of English and American Literature at the University of Santiago de Compostela, Spain. Her research interests include the work of James Joyce and, more recently, contemporary Irish fiction by women. She has published with Anne MacCarthy the book *A Pilgrimage from Belfast to Santiago de Compostela: The Anatomy of Bernard MacLaverty’s Triumph over Frontiers* (2002), and has co-edited, among other volumes, *Silverpowdered Olivetrees: Reading Joyce in Spain* (2003), “Ireland in the Coming Time”: *New Insights on Irish Literature* (2007). Estévez-Saá is Secretary of the Spanish James Joyce Society, has been member of the AEDEI Executive Board, former editor of the academic journal *Papers on Joyce* and current editor of *Estudios Irlandeses*. Estévez-Saá has published widely on James Joyce, Eilís Ní Dhuibhne, Elizabeth

Wassell, Mary Rose Callaghan, Anne Haverty, Deirdre Madden, Anne Enright and Sara Baume. More recently, she has co-edited the volume *The Ethics and Aesthetics of Eco-caring: Contemporary Debates on Ecofeminism(s)* (Routledge, 2019), and the special number of the journal *Estudios Irlandeses* 15.2 (2020): “Ecofictions, The Animal Trope and Irish Studies”.

Shannon Kuta Kelly is a doctoral researcher and poet at the Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen’s University Belfast; her research is funded by AHRC-Northern Bridge. She received her bachelor’s degree in literature from the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, and her master’s degree in creative writing from the University of Galway. Her research revolves around contemporary poetry, translation studies, Eastern European studies, and censorship and conflict studies. Her poetry and translations have been published in various international publications and performed in conjunction with the Romanian Con Tempo String Quartet and the Embassy of Romania in Ireland.

Stephanie Schwerter is professor of Anglophone literature at the Université Polytechnique Hauts-de-France, France. Previously, she taught Comparative Literature and Translation Studies at the École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris. Before moving to France, she spent six years in Northern Ireland, working at the University of Ulster and at Queen’s University Belfast. Her research interest lies in Northern Irish Film and Fiction as well as in the intertextual links between Irish, French, German and Russian poetry.

Iria Seijas-Pérez is a predoctoral researcher at the University of Vigo, Spain, under a predoctoral grant from the Galician Government (Xunta de Galicia). She holds a BA degree in Foreign Languages and an MA degree in Foreign Language Teaching at Secondary Level from the same university. She is a member of “Feminario: Feminisms and Resistances”, within the established Research Group “BiFeGa: Literary and Cultural Studies, Translation and Interpretation” (Ref. ED431C-2020/04), and she is affiliated as a predoctoral researcher to the Interuniversity Research Centre on Atlantic Cultural Landscapes (CISPAC). Her PhD thesis studies the representation of female LGBTQ+ adolescents in young adult literature written in English by Irish women. Recent communications include “A History of Violence within Ireland’s Architecture of Containment in Moira Fowley-Doyle’s *All the Bad Apples*” (21st AEDEI Conference) and “Queering Girlhood: Lesbian and Bisexual Female Protagonists in Contemporary Irish Young Adult Literature in English” (IV AEDEAN Doctoral Seminar), and she has also published several articles and reviews; the most recent is “Irish

Girlhood and Female Sexuality in Claire Hennessy's *Like Other Girls*", published in the journal *Estudios Irlandeses*. Her research interests include Irish literature and culture, LGBTQ+ and feminist studies, and young adult literature.

Gerry Smyth is Professor of Irish Cultural History at Liverpool John Moores University. He has published widely on fiction and popular music. His most recent books are *Joyces Noyces: Music and Sound in the Life and Literature of James Joyce* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021) and *Serpent, Siren, Maelstrom and Myth: Sea Stories and Folk Tales from Around the World* (British Library, 2023). His new book on environment and national identity in English popular fiction between 1890 and 1940 will be published by Bloomsbury in 2025. He is also an actor, playwright, musician and composer.

Burcu Gülüm Tekin is Lecturer at the Department of English and German Philology of the University of Zaragoza, Spain. She completed her PhD dissertation on the representation of motherhood in Roddy Doyle's work in July 2017 at the University of Granada. Her main research interests include contemporary Irish literature and versatile gender representations in the Irish context. She has presented papers in several international conferences on the aforementioned topics. Her work has appeared in various academic journals, including *Estudios Irlandeses*, *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, *Studi Irlandesi*, and *The European Legacy* as well as in the edited volumes *Words of Crisis, Crisis of Words: Ireland and the Representation of Critical Times* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), *Ireland and Dysfunction: Critical Explorations in Literature and Film* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017) and *Trauma, Memory and Silence of the Irish Woman in Contemporary Literature Wounds of the Body and the Soul* (Routledge, 2023).

Melania Terrazas is Senior Lecturer in English Studies at the University of La Rioja, Spain. She is the author of *Relational Structures in Wyndham Lewis's Fiction: Complexity and Value* (Lincom, 2005). She is Head of the Centre of Irish Studies Banna/Bond (EFACIS). She was editor of *Journal of English Studies*. She also guest edited the special issue *Gender Issues in Contemporary Irish Literature* (vol. 13.2. 2018) of *Estudios Irlandeses*, edited *Trauma and Identity in Contemporary Irish Culture* (Peter Lang, 2020) and co-authored a Spanish translation of Marina Carr's *By the Bog of Cats* (2022). Her recent essays on Irish poetry, fiction, theatre and film have been published in international journals, such as *Irish Studies Review*, *English Studies* and *Life Writing*. Her latest book chapters appear in edited collections by

Cambridge UP, Routledge and Brill, among others. She is a member of the research project: “Posthuman Intersections in Irish and Galician Literatures” (Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation and the ERDF (PID2022-136251NB-I00)).

J. Javier Torres-Fernández is currently registered for a PhD and working at the University of Almería, Spain, as a predoctoral researcher funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (FPU21/01232) in the Department of Philology within the Women, Literature and Society (HUM-874) research group and the Communication and Society I+D Research Centre (CySOC). His fields of interest include Women, Gender, Sexuality Studies, Popular Culture, Irish Literature, and North American Literature. His thesis delves into the literary production that emerged from the HIV/AIDS crisis both in Ireland and the United States in a comparative study of the genre tackling stigma, shame, sexuality, identity, trauma, and cultural politics.

Introduction

María Amor Barros-del Río

We live in an age of ever hastier transport and communications and the changes to the world around us are almost happening too quickly to be fully comprehensible. Interconnectedness and transferability, core concepts for business, information, and knowledge, are often too complex for ordinary people to assimilate. All too frequently, we find ourselves reacting late to events whose origins back in the distant past bring consequences that have up until now passed by unnoticed. The ramifications of those events quite often take us by surprise and we are forced to adapt as best and as quickly as we can. The rock of Ireland is a paradigmatic example of an island that has been rapidly changing over the past few decades, experiencing political highs and lows, and economic crises and growth, in equal measure. A relentless tendency towards globalisation has generated incoming and outgoing migratory flows and exchanges of ideas that have rapidly been reconfiguring both industry and society. Ireland's gaze towards both Europe and across the Atlantic to the USA, together with easier interconnectedness beyond its frontiers has added to the increasing diversification of a growing and multifarious population.

Fifty years ago, after Ireland had been welcomed into the European Community, the third largest island of Europe could begin to modernise. Added to expectations of economic prosperity and security, Irish European Union (EU) membership served to counteract Ireland's for their geographical and historical isolation, and to re-affirm a sense of identity, setting its colonial past aside and becoming an active member alongside other European countries. Despite a period of crisis in the 1980s, the 1990s marked a significant change in Ireland, with the proliferation of independent agencies and the implementation of European regulations, including those oriented towards social cohesion in the fields of gender rights, environmental protection, and health and safety. Spurred on by globalisation,¹ towards the end of the twentieth century up until 2008 the country enjoyed some years of economic boom, commonly known as the Celtic Tiger years, in reference to other fast-growing Asian tiger

economies. However, these unprecedented economic, social, and cultural transformations, among which a considerable influx of migration must be counted,² were followed by a severe downturn linked to the international financial crisis that affected real estate, banking, and fiscal measures. While the recession hardly affected Ireland alone, the scale of the debacle led international bodies to impose urgent austerity measures and the country, in exchange for a bailout, was forced to cede a major part of its financial and economic sovereignty to the troika of the EU, European Central Bank, and International Monetary Fund, a *fait accompli* that demonstrated the interconnectedness of contemporary economies and the weight of supranational institutions. The period of austerity that followed plunged the country into recession, leaving a fractured society with severe cuts, high rates of unemployment and emigration, and greater inequality.³ However, as from 2013 onwards, Ireland was firmly back on the road to economic recovery and prosperity and had even been rebranded as the Celtic Phoenix.⁴

The exit of the UK from the European Union or Brexit, in January 2020,⁵ continues to have lasting effects on the United Kingdom and Europe as a whole. It has also had significant repercussions on the Emerald Isle and for the repositioning of the Republic within the EU, the renegotiation of British-Irish and EU relations, and the daily interactions on the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The border that divides the island, once a site of conflict where many lives were senselessly lost, has now become an “open border” after the Northern Ireland Protocol of the Brexit withdrawal agreement in 2019, with discussions ongoing at present.⁶ In today’s interconnected world, every decision a country takes can affect another in a myriad of ways. Nowadays, economic prospects for the country are promising based on strong export turnover and full employment. Two other booming areas are tourism and the English language education sector, whose economic impact can hardly be overlooked, with an estimated net worth of almost €1.2 bn to the Irish economy in 2022.⁷

Together with Ireland’s alignment with European interests, which remains unquestioned, the country also maintains close relations with the United States of America. There are several reasons to explain that historical relationship which is essentially based on emigration. Since the late twentieth century, investment from across the Atlantic has been notable, with American structural funds and business profiting from Ireland’s low-tax economy and fluency in the English language.⁸ Later on, investors have also sought to avoid the turbulence linked to Brexit with Ireland replacing the UK as the natural door to European markets from across the Atlantic. Today, the United States is Ireland’s top export destination and Ireland has become a favourite location for American high-tech firms. Indeed, those

trans-Atlantic relations, initially based on the Irish diaspora and its subsequent transnational networks, have become even stronger through intense two-way trading.

Notably, the government's interest in keeping those historical ties alive became evident two decades ago with the publication of the *Ireland and the Irish Abroad Report* (Government of Ireland, 2002). Since then, the Irish have turned what used to be seen as a weakness into a strength, and subsequent reports such as *Global Irish: Ireland's Diaspora Policy* (Government of Ireland, 2015), have proved that the national strategy has been adapting to the realities of the Irish diaspora, especially with the expansion of low-cost airlines and telecommunications technologies. As President Michael D. Higgins affirmed, Irish migrants "have allowed Ireland to have global connections far beyond our size",⁹ and in that sense the Irish diaspora was weighed up in a quite unprecedented way in *Global Ireland: Ireland's Diaspora Strategy 2020–2025* (Government of Ireland, 2020). Irish citizens living overseas, born in Ireland or abroad, people of Irish descent, people living, studying or working in Ireland, are all gathered under the umbrella term "reverse diaspora"; and any person holding a deep appreciation for Irish people, places and culture is placed in the "affinity diaspora" group.¹⁰ The broad goal of this national strategy speaks of "embodied, material and politicised mobilities" (Blunt, 685). It refers to a series of implications affecting cultural, economic, and social spheres that are worth exploring. The geographical position and cultural heritage of Ireland have accrued profits and become a distinct advantage over the past few decades, turning the island into a sort of cultural causeway. Furthermore, the identity of Irish people and Irish culture today stretches beyond the boundaries of any geographical territory, reaching out towards limitless abstractions within the collective imagination. That very idea is embedded in the *Diaspora Strategy*, where physical distance from local and national Irish spaces does not necessarily imply detachment from and disidentification with Ireland and belonging to the Irish community. On the contrary, the link between place and belonging is elongated in unprecedented ways, binding people to an emotional construct of the homeland. In addition, such an inclusive policy entails what could be a utilitarian vision of the Irish diaspora in economic terms. Human capital that has emigrated is regarded as an economic and intellectual asset that the small peripheral island is determined to use to its best advantage. However, above all else, the philosophy underlying this policy is a timeless and spaceless comprehension of the Irish community in the broadest sense. This logic, which contests the idea of "culture" as a discursive category and discrete entity historically linked with the modern nation, paradoxically goes hand in hand with romantic and traditional products that identify Ireland as a static and wholesome notion, with Irish pubs, postcards of

a cottage in green fields, and the mythical Riverdance as profitable iconic cultural products. In today's Ireland, uniformity and continuity go hand in hand with diversity and change.

Falci and Reynolds have acknowledged that “Irish culture on both sides of the border has emerged as a global phenomenon” (1), and the vibrant dynamism of Ireland has over recent years not only attracted companies, but also people. According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), in 2022 the Irish population was slightly over the threshold of five-million for the first time in 171 years. That figure included non-Irish citizens living either temporarily or on a permanent basis in Ireland, Irish citizens who had returned home after some time abroad, and asylum seekers, all pointing to a multidirectional reading of mobility.¹¹ The cultural encounters on the island resulting from those migratory flows, and stimulated through digital technologies and leisure mobility, have a direct effect on public policies and individual practices.

The numbers of non-Irish citizens currently registered with the CSO in 2022, of unprecedented diversity in terms of origin, race, and faith, were summed up in a figure of 12%.¹² This is hardly devoid of problems and contentious issues:¹³ a widening gap between rich and poor, irregular immigration, poor quality of public healthcare and education, and exorbitant property prices, among others, remain problematic destabilising forces upsetting social cohesion.¹⁴

Currently, the relations that Ireland maintains with Europe and with the USA, together with the demographic transformations within Irish society, are three significant arteries along which the lifeblood of Irish transculturality flows. Unceasingly affected by dynamic internal and external pressures, Irish culture today is relational rather than self-contained. Diverse ideas, and beliefs, foreign practices and unexpected exchanges produce new cultural expressions that give shape to an ever-evolving society. A good example of Ireland's comprehensive assimilation of cultural change can be detected in relation to activism in women's rights. The Marriage Equality referendum in 2015 and the liberalisation of the divorce laws in the 2019 referendum were milestones that affected the family, the most sacred institution in Irish history. The Repeal of the Eighth Amendment in 2018 marked the end of years of social campaigning and numerous legal cases challenging restricted access to abortion.¹⁵ At the same time, Ireland has also become a multi-ethnic and multi-racial country. Added to increasing interracial partnering, the election of Leo Varadkar, an Indian-origin and gay Irish politician, as Taoiseach in 2017, is a paradigmatic sign of a multicultural and secular society. In addition, the crisis within the Catholic Church, the Magdalen “asylum” scandals, and Pope Francis' plea in 2018 for forgiveness for abuses in Ireland, alluding to the clergy who were involved in or who covered up

child abuse, have all contributed to shape a more secular society.¹⁶ The different faiths celebrated by the population of diverse origins, appear to confirm a distancing within Irish society away from the Catholic faith, which not so long ago was one of the distinctive pillars of the nation and had entered into a symbiotic alliance with the Irish political elite, as the Catholic church had done in so many other European nations during the central decades of the twentieth century. Today, the increasing secularisation of Irish society and the diminishing role of the nation state attest to such a paradigmatic shift.

Ireland's embrace of globalisation has situated the country at a moment of "acceleration and flux" (3), to use Paige Reynolds' words, but the complexity of this process and its effects upon the Irish society have made scholars wonder "what makes Ireland Ireland" (O'Loughlin, O'Neill and Owens 306). Already two decades ago, Honor Fagan contended that "[...] Neither Irish culture nor identity can be seen as self-contained, immutable or closed. A new state of flux, typical of postcolonialism and globalisation, opens up a new era of more fluid and uncertain constructions of cultural identity" (117–118). Indeed, Fagan's intuition stemmed from the paradigmatic shift that has shaped modern Western societies and Ireland's in particular, and that has posed some core questions, still unresolved as of today: What is today's "Irish" culture? Is the concept of identity, defined as "a cultural tool-kit that people use to construct an image and understanding of themselves" (Inglis and Donnelly 140), still valid or does it need to be reformulated? How to address new configurations of cultural identity in a society that is changing as rapidly as the Irish one? These and other related questions come to mind as issues of major concern for which there is no simple or single answer except for the acknowledgment that today "[...] multiple, overlapping geographies and peoples constitute Ireland" (Falci and Reynolds 15).

Reputed scholars have pointed to Irish literature as a privileged site where the intricacies of society are mirrored from a variety of angles (Foster; Harte and Parker; Kiberd). In fact, it has been shown in some studies that contemporary authors have actively engaged with the cultural, political and social transformations that have taken place on the globalised island throughout the upheavals of the past two decades, from the Celtic Tiger years (Flannery), to the subsequent years of recession (Jordan; Kelly; Mianowski), and the articulation of contemporary multicultural Ireland (Villar-Argáiz "Literary Visions", and "Irishness on the Margins"; Falci and Reynolds).¹⁷ Frank Schulze-Engler suggested that the relationship between literature and globalisation needs to be reassessed "to cover not only the new dynamics of a global cultural ecumene and its significance for an emerging transnational public sphere, but also the politics of civil society and the micropolitics of modernity" (59). Today, Irish

literature has turned away from tropes typical of the Irish literary canon in anticipation of a certain departure towards what Ralf Haekel has termed “post-national” literature, a statement that Falci and Reynolds also defended, claiming that Irish literature needed to be appraised “outside of the history of colonialism, decolonisation, and nation-making” (15). Evidently, the idea stems from the country’s progressive openness and intercultural interactions. In an attempt to shed light on the current momentum that Ireland is experiencing, this volume applies a dialectical approach to interpret the dynamic nature of contemporary Irish society through its literature, and to evince the continual reworking of what it means to be and to feel Irish, through the study of specific literary works. It is my belief that the transcultural approach to literary works provides comprehensive dialogical insights into authors, their choice of topics, and society as a whole.

Transculturality is a relatively new term in literary studies. Broadly developed in the fields of anthropology, sociology and philosophy, in recent years it has received widespread acceptance in other disciplines. It was coined in the 1940s by the Cuban anthropologist, Fernando Ortiz, who studied cultural transformations within colonial settings and considered that the term acculturation was insufficient for all the mutual inter-cultural influences that he had observed. His vision, which detected the emergence of new blended cultural phenomena, challenged colonial theories of domination and racism and entailed a broader and dynamic understanding of cultural encounters. The concept found fertile ground in two seminal works within the field of post-colonial studies: Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994) and Mary L. Pratt’s *Imperial eyes: Travel writing and transculturation* (1992). Bhabha’s notion of a “third space” and Pratt’s understanding of “contact zone” speak of the complexity of cultural processes. However, it was with the philosopher Wolfgang Welsch that this approach took off in the humanities. Welsch detected that both cultures and the individuals within them are affected by contemporary forms of interconnectedness, mobility, and hybridisation. As a result, he contended that the old concept of culture misrepresents cultures’ actual forms, which are characterised by “entanglement, intermixing and commonness” (209). More recent developments have challenged Welsch’s approach to cultures as segregated and static, highlighting that cultures are intrinsically entangled, porous and ever-changing entities. Those perspectives incorporate nuanced insights into the complex processes within such encounters, more in accordance with the fluid interactions that take place in contemporary globalised societies.¹⁸ At the same time, this shift has prompted the application of the transcultural lens to an array of research fields, providing new readings and opening up many avenues of inquiry.¹⁹

Transculturality focuses on “the problematics of contemporary culture [...] in terms of relationships, meaning-making, and power formation” (Lewis 24), to illuminate our understanding of societal dynamics.²⁰ The transcultural lens, essentially dialogical in nature, moves beyond outdated dichotomous relations – local-global, native-non-native, national-international, colonised-coloniser, and many more –, as much as it acknowledges collective and individual experiences of exclusion and resistance, adaptation and belonging, practices of multi-directional mobility, and ongoing debates on borders and boundaries, all of which abound in Irish literary manifestations. It also encompasses the detection and the bringing to light of concealed practices and interactions, connections, and flows, regardless of national borders. Consequently, this lens de-centres the focus of attention from established Western assumptions and illuminates alternative narratives that more often than not pass by unnoticed. But this processual approach is neither steady nor progressive. On the contrary, “instances of intensified transitionality” or “transcultural moments”, in Hans Harder’s terms, are also significant and worth looking at wherever interconnections can be detected and multiple factors coalesce and flux. Finally, transculturality encourages a “processual and multi-sited perspective” (Abu-Er-Rub, et al. xxvi), because as Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna have affirmed, “transculturality is about spatial mobility, circulation or flows, an insight drawn from studies of globalisation, but is neither synonymous nor reducible to these” (2013, 25). Hence, the interest in transculturality is its applicability to past and present alike, because transcultural processes of cultural formation can be traced back to past historical events. Another vantage point of transculturality is its flexibility and appropriateness within varied fields of study, two features that speak of interdisciplinarity, pluralism and relatedness and that are very well suited to address globalisation processes.

Admitting that “a neat categorisation of transcultural literature is hardly feasible” (82) as Sissy Helff affirmed, it is worth recalling the many ways that the application of the transcultural paradigm has operated in the field of literary studies and the analytical tools therein designed. The unstoppable diversity and mobility of contemporary societies has prompted the publication of relevant works on the utility of the transcultural lens for fathoming literary works (Nordin, Hansen and Zamorano Llena; Nordin, Edfeldt, Hu, Jonsson and Leblanc), both past and present. More particularly, Arianna Dagnino has focused on the idea of transcultural writers as creators whose personal experiences of mobility lead to what she has called “creative dispatiation” that emerges from biographies “no longer located in relatively stable/fixed cultural frameworks and where individuals find themselves to be negotiating, compromising (or in conflict with) several cultures on a daily basis, affecting their cultural dispositions and

imaginations". Helff has also identified certain features that characterise what she calls the transcultural novel, such as the presence of "more radically individualised realities" (82) and their difficulty to identify with a community. She has contended that it results in narratives that distil a notable degree of uncertainty and high levels of unreliability. This "Narratology of Otherness", to use Ruth Gilligan's term, has been produced by transcultural authors who either write about what they have experienced themselves, or set out to explore new ground and inhabit "subject positions that are not in fact their own" (107). More recently, Jonsson, Berg, Edfeldt, and Jansson have confirmed the need for a cross-disciplinary approach when seeking to compile narratives concerning the crossing of borders. If literary texts are to be understood as (inter)relational and as entities crossing boundaries and borders, a careful examination of how narratives migrate and are translated is also imperative.

This volume, which stems from the complementary perspectives discussed above, is the first collective work entirely devoted to approaching Irish literature through a transcultural lens.²¹ Its content provides new insight into the engagement of Irish literature with political, social, and economic issues, and illustrates how literature accommodates the local and the global, resulting in a re-shaping of individual and collective imaginaries. Through the transcultural perspective, which involves "departing from the traditional" (Benessaieh 11), this volume questions the concept of "Irishness" as fixed and immutable and takes into consideration the ability of literature to embed the complexity and multiplicity of Irish society, warning against the dangers of a single story, as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie would say. As a result, the way that Irish literature integrates cultural encounters and exchanges and handles the delicate balance between authenticity and folklore, and uniformisation and diversity in an increasingly globalised world, is clearly elucidated in the following chapters. Ultimately, the aim of this collection of essays is to offer tangible proof that literary texts act as vessels of transcultural dialogue and can be instrumental for social change in critical issues such as political violence and imperial practices, feminism, racism, social fragmentation and marginalisation, among others. Bearing that in mind, a diachronic approach is followed in this compilation that is divided into four distinct sections.

Part I. Texts that Blur Frontiers: The Emerald Isle of Ireland and Beyond opens with a section that looks back at twentieth-century literature, both in the Republic and in Northern Ireland, to re-interpret some writers' works through a transcultural lens. Following the perspective of the Heidelberg Cluster "Asia and Europe in a Global Context", "earlier historical forms of mobility and connectedness that have been characteristic of cultures over centuries, pre-dating the advent of modern communication and global capital" (Juneja and Kravagna 24) are explored in

this section. Hence, the contributors unveil the existence of transnational connections embedded in the literary works of James Joyce, Ciaran Carson, and Seán Dunne, suggesting a transcultural intention, despite political, geographical, and linguistic obstacles. In each chapter, the importance of transculturality is demonstrated as an analytical framework to transcend cultural essentialisms. Whenever the ideas of “nation” and “culture” serve to underpin differentiation for nationalistic purposes, it is at times still possible to trace out ideological transactions and transcultural interactions that slip through the net of nationalistic censorship. Spatial and cultural displacements are at the core of the analyses, and intertextuality and translation are highlighted as useful strategies to overcome geographical borders and challenge ideological constraints. In other words, these contributions display unexpected examples of “textual contacts” (Thorner) that have gone unnoticed in the works of the selected writers. Mariana Bolfarine’s assessment of James Joyce and Roger Casement as transcultural figures, both born in Ireland but living elsewhere, inaugurates this section. Their encounters with different peoples and cultures, she contends, were key in their attachment to their homeland, with the former writing about Ireland, and the latter becoming an Irish nationalist. But their connection, evidenced in the presence of Casement in the “Cyclops” episode of *Ulysses*, was also ideological. Bolfarine’s analysis of ‘Cyclops’ brings both now distant figures into a sort of dialogue, to stress the underlying affinity between *Ulysses* and Casement’s reports as containers of a shared critique of British imperialism, colonial practices, and colonial injustice. It also reveals the inherent fault lines within nationalistic discourses of which both Casement and Joyce were well aware. In short, Joyce’s rescue of Casement in *Ulysses* accounts for a transcultural sensibility that defied spatial and time constraints. Another example of transcultural transfer can be found in Shannon Kuta Kelly’s study of Ciaran Carson and Marin Sorescu’s poetry. Her study shows proof of mutual influence between their poetry, despite the severe isolation enforced through censorship in both countries, and their active and relentless roles as transcultural agents. Amidst the “Troubles” of North Ireland and Ceaușescu’s dictatorship in Romania, Carson and Sorescu’s respective commitment to writing, publishing, and translating is highlighted as a force of resistance that effectively crosses borders and defies isolation. In particular, for Kelly, their translations are the opportunity to open a “third space” where negotiations and transformations abound. Despite their geographical distance and very different political situations, both authors used defiant language to challenge border controls and to make thematic and symbolic connections that transcended languages and frontiers. So, as Kelly affirms, their poems become sites of encounter, contact zones where two distant and different worlds meet. Likewise, Stephanie Schwerter delves into poet Seán Dunne’s intentions

when translating the poems of Anna Akhmatova, a victim of repression under Communist rule. Carried by his interest in Soviet Russian history and culture, Dunne's ignorance of Russian was no obstacle to him translating Akhmatova's poetry in his own versions, departing from D.M. Thomas' English translations. In Akhmatova's poems, Schwerter affirms, Dunne was able to explore his own cultural environment through a transcultural lens. Adhering to clarity and precision, he exerted a sort of "domestication" in his translations, adapting Russian cultural concepts and values to his own culture. To that end, he chose to translate the universal topics contained in Akhmatova's poetry such as life and death. Political violence, which pointed to the trauma of the Gulag and the suffering of the Russians under Stalin, was also a preferential issue for him that he related with the Troubles and the Maze Hunger Strikes. Through the use of the free verse, which added a certain degree of creativity to the resulting texts, his search for social justice found fertile ground in active and politically committed translations of Akhmatova's poetry. As concluded at the end of the chapter, Dunne's translations sought to dissolve cultural differences and national boundaries to make the Soviet literary scene accessible to the Anglophone reader.

In 2004, Zygmunt Bauman explained that borders are the middle element in between different cultures and humanity and that in a fast-globalising world, borders become less and less effective but, at the same time, they paradoxically acquire greater significance. Following the same line of argument, *Part II: Transcultural Writers and Global Entanglements* presents reviews of a selection of works that display an uncanny use of location and mobility as vehicles for cultural transfer. It also revolves around their use of external and internal transcultural traits and how blurring physical borders and transnational encounters lead on to diversity and hybridisation. Accordingly, the selected authors are appraised as agents of transculturality who have moved beyond the shores of Ireland and inhabit multiple geographies. Some engagement with social injustice and activism is also shown in the selected texts, whose marginal characters serve to display the underlying conflict between cultural change and the continuation of tradition. For example, Burcu Gülüm Tekin analyses Leland Bardwell's *Different Kinds of Love*, a collection of short stories first published in 1987 and reprinted not before time in 2011. Daringly, Tekin reclaims the proto-transcultural essence of Bardwell, whose life and oeuvre always moved in and out of the margins. In particular, her contribution underlines Bardwell's critique of Irish social order and morality through her portrayal of marginalised individuals at the centre of her plots. Her stories are quick to challenge physical and ideological limitations, and to contest the very nature of social borders and their underlying transgressive intention, calling into question conventions and creating significant uncertainty

with regard to institutions and their normalising roles. Furthermore, her multifarious use of public spaces as sites of both encounter and isolation opens up a world of possibilities and lays bare the intrinsic frictions upon which any social order is supported. An outsider herself, Bardwell brings the outcasts to the forefront, a shift in perspective that anticipates signals of a different emergent cultural mode even if actual transformation fails to occur in her stories. Melania Terrazas and María Amor Barros-del Río approach selected short stories from Evelyn Conlon's latest collection *Moving About the Place* (2021), reconsidering the author's re-appraisal of historical figures and boundary-crossing. Their assessment of Conlon as a transcultural writer and of some of her stories as contesting narratives of physical borders and social limitations provides a multi-sited perspective on women's migration as a key agent of change, both past and present. Their scholarly analysis surpasses the repeatedly underscored and biased historical relation between Irish women and public spaces and delves into the inherent interstices of mobility to highlight elements of connectivity and resistance in the selected stories. Particularly enlightening is their examination of Conlon's use of contact zones as ambiguous sites of realisation and resistance that take place within and beyond the boundaries of the isle, as well as their close attention to letters and personal documents that assume relevant roles as cross-cultural material objects and act as frail and arguable witnesses of their owners' stories. Finally, Terrazas and Barros-del Río's study of the borders described in the selected stories brings to the surface the Irish writer's concern over dismantling single views of domination and separation. Her satirical rhetoric of inquiry, they affirm, avoids closure and shifts attention from unreconciled binaries to discontinuity and resistance, two constitutive aspects of transculturality. Irish crime fiction, a genre that has received increasing interest in the last decades, also shows evident transcultural patterns, as David Clark has demonstrated. In his chapter, Ken Bruen's extensive production is thoroughly scrutinised under the lens of transculturality, and some marginal sectors of society, such as migrants in Ireland, travellers, and other minority groups, are given special relevance in relation to the changing economic context of the island and beyond. Clark makes it clear that both Bruen and his characters' biographies epitomise cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism in a constant and challenging dialogue between differing cultural norms. If the "London" novels are dotted with manifestations of popular culture and individuals striving to come to terms with their own positionality in that cultural melting pot, in the Jack Taylor series, set in Galway, the author excels at depicting Ireland at the height of its economic boom. Here, the plots are often secondary to sharp and critical depictions of the Celtic Tiger boom, which coexist alongside the shadows of the Magdalen "asylums" or laundries, political corruption, and racism, revealing a land in open conflict

with itself. Finally, Bruen's "American" works offer valuable insights into the complex and multi-faceted experience of being Irish and what that means today in the USA. Clark's contribution concludes with an analysis of intertextuality in Bruen's works which, in the form of epigraphs, contain transcultural references and concrete examples of translingualism. In brief, this analysis confirms the writer's ability to enmesh the cosmopolitan and the traditional that generates a radiography of Ireland and the Irish in the first quarter of this century.

Part III: Irish Social Diversity and Contemporary Literature in Dialogue shifts the focus towards Ireland's current ethnic and racial diversification and the way that instances of hybridisation, diversity, and assimilation are depicted in the literature. If the role of Irish scholarship is to "reflect the times, in terms of what it includes, and also what it excludes" (Pine 2), attention to the dynamic and rapidly changing configuration of society on the part of authors and literary criticism accounts for a non-essentialist and self-reflexive perspective. Literary representations that express the intricacies of mobility, diversity, and mutual understanding in multifarious ways account for an amplification of the historical homogeneity that has characterised Irish literary spaces.²² Hence, the dissenting, alternative, and innovative literary expressions that are studied here pose a challenge to social unity when identifying both the synergies and the resistance that are unleashed when negotiating the identity of the "Other", the identities of individuals inhabiting marginal spaces due to their race, gender, sexual orientation, and class. Iria Seijas-Pérez's close look at teenage pregnancy and abortion in Irish literature for young adults discloses the underlying currents of pro-life ideologies that had until recently frustrated any progress on this issue in contemporary Ireland. Thanks to a thorough analysis of the legal framework that led to the 2018 referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment, Seijas-Pérez is able to situate the reader within the current debate on the matter, only after warning against the unnoticed role of American lobbies and interests. Her review of YA literature reveals not only the good health of the genre, but also the limited number of texts that struggle with what in Ireland have been very controversial issues: teenage pregnancy and abortion. Among the few that may be found, Seijas-Pérez's timely selection of Claire Hennessy's *Like Other Girls* (2017) and Moïra Fowley-Doyle's *All the Bad Apples* (2019) show two novels that portray teenage efforts to access abortion in pre-Repeal Ireland. Her close attention to both texts situates them at the crossroads between resistance to tradition and innovation and she dissects the cultural context in which they were published, revealing significant signs of transcultural activity. At the level of text analysis, Seijas-Pérez underlines the daring and open treatment of the topic, the particular use of foetal iconography, and the modern portrayal of the protagonists. Culturally,

she also highlights how the novels reflect social resistance to change in Ireland, very much supported by tradition and religion, both nationally and from abroad. Seijas-Pérez completes her study, giving consideration to the sociological aspects of the narratives and their circulation, scrutinising the circumstances that surround the publication of the novels, assessing the authors' transcultural traits, and drawing critical attention to the relation between Irish literature and the global marketplace. It all provides a complete approach to Hennessy and Fowley-Doyle's works as cultural products, forming part of an ongoing debate on abortion that is far from closed, as Seijas-Pérez's comments clearly confirm. Next, Margarita Estévez-Saá's insightful contribution is a critical assessment of two recent novels: *Flight*, by Oona Frawley, and *Strange Flowers*, by Donal Ryan. She connects them with two historical landmarks that have deeply affected contemporary Ireland, the 2004 Irish Referendum on Citizenship, and Brexit. In this contribution, Estévez-Saá offers a sharp overview of the reception of Irish literature in the UK and the diverse implications of Brexit for Irish writers, thereby unveiling the ambivalent relation of Irish and British alike towards the other, the dissimilar, the foreigner. With that in mind, the contribution sets out to scrutinise Frawley and Ryan's novels, highlighting spatial mobility in contemporary societies and the subsequent complexities of conviviality, particularly in the Irish and the British contexts. The plots transcend cultural and national borders and negotiations of inclusion and exclusion are highlighted as constituent components of migration and mobility. Nationality, race, class and sexuality are the most evident prejudicial forms of differentiation. In like manner, Asier Altuna-García de Salazar approaches the representation of second-generation Irish communities in literature, an understudied field that opens the door to many avenues of interpretation under a transcultural lens. Negotiations of belonging, social acceptance, and identity are made evident in his analysis of Patrick Kimba, the protagonist of Susan Ryan's *The King of Lavender Square*. It is a thoroughly informed contribution that highlights the increasing multicultural essence of Irish society where varied processes of amalgamation take place. At the core of the novel is the re-definition of Irishness, which entails tensions between the native Irish and the immigrant "other". This analysis, strongly underpinned by notions of diversity, processuality, and re-territorialisation, considers the physical and cultural spaces in *The King of Lavender Square* as contact zones and offers an insightful approach to sports, particularly football, as contemporary sites of transcultural practices. In her debut novel, ambivalence between nationalism and diversity, and the liminal space that second-generation Irish occupy are at the core of Ryan's re-definition of Irishness. Finally, in "Resistance and Activism in Queer and HIV/AIDS Irish Theatre", J. Javier Torres-Fernández offers an analysis of the way that

queerness and HIV/AIDS have been treated in Irish theatre, highlighting the stigmatising cultural narrative that has stained the LGBTIQ+ community and their problematic identification with Irishness. As is related in the chapter, official narratives used to associate HIV-positive people with some form of divine punishment, or illness imported from abroad. Hence, the exploration of queerness in Irish theatre that first emerged quite timidly and only recently more openly cannot be traced back to any earlier than the mid-1990s. Giving an informed account of the social advances, Torres-Fernández opens a dialogue on Irishness and HIV/AIDS, with special attention to the representation of queerness in selected plays by Hughes, Barry, McMahon, and Bliss. First, the study, which covers a span of thirty years, detects a very marginal use of HIV/AIDS in Irish theatre, and the varied and deep inherent resistance within Irish society against foreign influence. At a second stage, a more evident presence of AIDS and queerness is detected. Spatial mobility and exchanges are found essential for this change and the analysis delineates the transcultural traits from the American stage that have shaped the more open and direct treatment in recent plays of AIDS and LGBTIQ+ issues. All in all, the process of transculturation, not without its forces of resistance and inclusion, that Ireland has undergone is revealed in this chapter through the progressive perception and understanding of HIV/AIDS and queerness that has been witnessed in Irish theatre.

Naturally, scholarship and academia are also affected by the process of globalisation that Ireland has been undergoing in the last decades. In the *Coda*, Gerry Smyth offers a critical and informed approach to the past and the present of Irish Studies and suggests potential modes of re-orientation. Under the compelling title “*The Past, the Present and the Wonderful, Worrisome Future: Transculturalism, Memory and Crisis in Irish Studies*”, Smyth gathers personal and collective memories and crises that bring meaning to what we call Irish culture, acknowledges its transcultural strand, and advocates for a renewed interest of Irish Studies in the idea of crisis, the modern configurations of Irish identity, and the environmental challenges ahead in order to display a more impactful and responsible mode of operation.

Finally, the thoroughly informed contributions contained in this edited collection reassess past literary works and cast light on contemporary literature elucidating the fast transformations and undercurrents moulding Irish society. Taking the island of Ireland as a paradigmatic example of a rapidly changed territory, in this volume established and emerging scholars put into question the concept of “Irishness” as something fixed and immutable, and scrutinise the workings of cultural encounters amid forces of cooperation and resistance in Irish literature. Issues of power, identity, and belonging permeate the works that are analysed, which acquire unexpected nuances

under the light of transculturality. While these contributions provide new insights into Irish literature and society, they also raise many questions that might otherwise have gone unnoticed. Despite the limitations on both space and the number of authors and works that have been selected, this volume seeks to spur scholarly work in the field of transculturality and advocates for its utility for the advancement of Irish studies.

Notes

- 1 This introduction adheres to Michael O’Sullivan’s understanding of the term globalisation as “the increasing integration and resulting interdependence of markets, economies, societies and political system” (31).
- 2 It is interesting to note that not only were Irish emigrants accepted back during that period, but also asylum seekers, particularly from Nigeria and Romania. However, as Elaine Moriarty explained, as from 2003 onwards, asylum applications declined, due to the increasing stringency of EU and Irish state border controls.
- 3 For a more detailed account of the time of the Celtic Tiger and its notorious crash, see Bufacchi; Donovan and Murphy; Kirby “The Celtic Tiger”; Maher; Murphy.
- 4 For a historical review of the term “Celtic Phoenix”, see Aran Ward Sell’s article.
- 5 As Kevin O’Rourke explained in detail, this historical event did not emerge out of nowhere, but can be traced back to the nineteenth century and the complex relations between Great Britain and Europe. Complementarily, Michael Keating detected the double conflict between the UK’s inner tensions with its own secessionist movements and the incompatibility of shared sovereignty between Westminster Parliament and the European Union.
- 6 The economic consequences of this new configuration are yet to be assessed, but the move has affected the delicate equilibrium in place since the 1998 Good Friday Agreement in terms of politics, peacefulness, and social order, which, according to Colfer and Diamond, embodied such EU values as reconciliation, cross-border cooperation, and the rule of law. Furthermore, it has stimulated the idea of a United Ireland, a possibility of interest to the Irish government in light of the report “Brexit and the future of Ireland: uniting Ireland and its people in peace and prosperity” (2017) commissioned by the Irish Parliament, and the campaign “Shared Island Initiative”, with some €500m in funding to be expended between 2021–25. This controversial and very lively debate is already sparking heated discussions and negotiations.
- 7 The *ELE Student Statistics Report 2022* described an expanding English language market in Ireland with some 44.4% of adult learners from within and the remaining 55.6% from outside the EU. For more details see <https://mei.ie/ele-student-statistics-report/>
- 8 Although the Irish corporate tax rate was raised from 2.5% to 15% in 2021 to align it with the minimum European corporate tax rate, Ireland is still an attractive location for American multinational subsidiaries. For a qualitative

study, see Delaney. For a more detailed explanation on the economic relations between Ireland and the USA, see Hayward and O'Donnell, respectively.

- 9 The government's straightforward campaign to attract interest from abroad reads: "Make 2023 the year you discover Ireland's open community – where you can live, learn, create and innovate at the heart of Europe". This invitation encapsulates a desire for growth and expansion. For more information go to www.ireland.ie and www.dfa.ie/media/globalirish/Diaspora-Strategy-2020-English.pdf
- 10 As Bryan Fanning accurately contended, the Irish government has actively promoted immigration into Ireland to meet the demands of the labour market. For example, skilled workers were needed at the turn of the century to satisfy the voracious appetite of the Celtic Tiger or The Phoenix. Consequently, notable demographic change ensued that, in Fanning's view, fell short in terms of integration.
- 11 Irish emigration has been the object of study for decades. For more than two centuries, the Irish have emigrated in unparalleled numbers, with peaks at critical periods, and with the USA and Britain as their preferred destinations though, by the end of the last century, other European locations became attractive too (Miller). As economic prospects improved, the green island became a site of interest and inward migration, especially during the Celtic Tiger and the current times of prosperity. Accordingly, studies on this phenomenon have considered not only the points of departure and arrival, but also its scales and duration, the consequences that these movements have for individuals and societies, and their implications in terms of belonging, identity and successful or failed settlement. For more information see (Gilmartin; Villar-Argáiz "Literary Visions"; Morales-Ladrón and Elices-Agudo).
- 12 To understand the extent of Ireland's appeal, it is interesting to note that, in 2022, immigrants from India and Brazil were the largest groups according to the Census of that year. For more detailed data, see www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/keyfindings/
- 13 Asylum seekers are a poignant case with regards to census population. The controversial implementation of Direct Provision, in 2001, prompted criticism in so far as human rights organisations described the legislation as degrading and some critical voices claimed that the Direct Provision system isolated asylum applicants and left them invisible (Lentin). Another critical issue is the right to Irish citizenship of children born in Ireland to parents with no immigration status. The 2004 referendum sought approval to limit the right to citizenship of the offspring of undocumented migrant parents. A measure that was reformed after some social pressure and the Regularisation of Long-Term Undocumented Migrants scheme opened on 31 January 2022, only to close on 31 July 2022. At present, the applications of over 600 young people born in Ireland have been successfully processed.
- 14 In view of the asymmetries between economic success and social and developmental progress, there is some ongoing controversy surrounding support for the neoliberal regime and the extent to which Ireland has welcomed it. Emeritus Professor Peadar Kirby ("Vulnerability") is one of the leading voices warning against the societal impact of globalisation upon increasingly larger swathes

- of the population showing vulnerabilities to neoliberal demands. Other voices (Smyth) have advocated for a moral vision that is not dominated by economics.
- 15 Regarding social advances, transcultural patterns can inevitably be seen when looking at recent events where restricted access to abortion in Northern Ireland became available, likewise, after public pressure. Although part of the UK, the 1967 Abortion act never included Northern Ireland. It was only in October 2019 that abortion was decriminalized, becoming lawful on 31 March 2020. Similarly, same-sex marriage in Northern Ireland has only been legal since 13 January 2020, following the enactment of the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019. Many claim that the Republic's social mobilisation and referenda had much to do with Northern Ireland's process.
 - 16 Although Catholicism remains prevalent among the population, in the 2022 Census, 14% identified as non-denominational. It is indisputable that a growing tendency towards secularisation is spreading among the Irish population, with an increase of 63% of non-denominational subjects since 2016.
 - 17 Irish literature not only stands as a privileged witness to both personal and social transformations within Irish society, but it also contributes significantly to projecting an image of the country overseas. The importance of the arts for Ireland's interests is evidenced in the Culture Ireland scheme, which has been actively promoting the Irish arts scene worldwide since 2005. Its initial budget of €2M rose to €6.6M in 2023, a significant increase that reflects the efficacy of the arts at publicising Ireland internationally.
 - 18 One of the most relevant hubs on transcultural studies in Europe can be found at The Cluster of Excellence "Asia and Europe in a Global Context", at the Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies, Germany, where art historian Monica Juneja is one of its leading scholars. Another leading research group can be found at the English School of Language, Literatures and Learning at Dalarna University where Irene Gilsenan Nordin is a prominent voice.
 - 19 In a very enlightening article, Daniel König and Katja Rakow offered a detailed account of the use of the transcultural approach within an array of disciplines including gender studies, international relations and communication, migration studies, literary studies, visual and media anthropology, art history, urbanism and environmental studies, and political theory. Similarly, Lisa Gaupp provided references on a variety of fields concerning the study of culture into which transculturality has spread. On a cautionary note, and acknowledging the utility of transculturality for our understanding of society and culture, Sissy Helff has detected some limitations to this framework of analysis, especially when dealing with liminal groups for instance, such as gypsy clans and asylum seekers, whose experience with non-places problematizes modern transcultural life.
 - 20 The prefix *trans* refers to fluid border demarcations and porosity. Benessaieh warned against identification with other terms such as "transculturation", "multiculturalism", and "interculturality". Transculturality is a separate concept that designates specific processes that other terms capture inadequately. Its focus on processes, dynamics, change and diversity within societies is what distinguishes it from other approaches.

- 21 Although transcultural studies have developed and enjoyed a great reception over the past few years, the transcultural approach towards Irish literature has not followed a consistent pattern.
- 22 Recently, several scholars have raised their voices to reclaim the political purpose of Irish Studies and literary scholarship, especially in relation to diversity and minorities. For a more detailed discussion see Penney and Mulhall, respectively.

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