

Renée Fox, Mike Cronin and Brian Ó Conchubhair, editors. *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies*. Routledge, 2021. 502 pages.

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The *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies*, edited by Renée Fox, Mike Cronin and Brian Ó Conchubhair, takes the 2008 financial crisis as a starting point to examine the subsequent changes in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland as well as the evolution of the various disciplinary approaches to Irish Studies since the economic crash. Divided into seven parts that cover a variety of subject areas, the chapters in this volume offer a thorough analysis of the different ways in which the academic discipline of Irish Studies has responded to the political, economic, cultural, and social events that have transformed Irish society and the academic approaches aimed at understanding Ireland.

The first part of the book, entitled “Overview”, comprises three chapters. The first one highlights the major cultural, political and social changes that Ireland has experienced ever since the 2008 recession occurred. The editors of the volume, who are also the authors of this first chapter, explain how the *Handbook* aims “to consider how, why, and to what ends Irish Studies has changed in the years since the economic downturn” (8) and how, through the exploration of different fields, scholars are in a good position to observe the various ways in which Irish Studies might be re-examined in the twenty-first century. The second chapter focuses on the evolution of Irish Studies in the United States, from the Celtic Studies boom of the 1900-30s to the more recent feminist and postcolonial theoretical approaches. John Waters explores, among other aspects, the development of the first Irish Studies Centres, study programmes, and Irish Studies journals in the US, and leaves open the question how the academic study of Ireland in America will continue to unfold. To close the section, Michael Cronin’s chapter focuses on the writings on Irish culture by non-Anglophone scholars and their impact outside English-speaking territories. Cronin acknowledges the strong international reputation of Irish literature developed thanks to the translation of Irish literary works; he also examines the increasing

variety of language communities in Ireland, which has caused the Anglocentric dominance of Irish Studies to become untenable, since “English or Irish alone are no longer adequate to capture the multiplicity of lived experiences on the island of Ireland” (38).

The second part, “Historicizing Ireland”, focuses on some general trends in recent Irish history and on the understanding of Irish history itself as a force shaped by contemporary events. Chapter 4 analyses the value of the work of antiquarians. Guy Beiner argues for the use of antiquarian memory through a review of the influence of landmark antiquarian works, such as Post-Union ethnographic travel writing, and their contributions to the study of history and writing about Ireland. The fifth chapter examines how the writing of Irish history has developed since the 2008 economic downturn, as Timothy G. McMahon argues that the recent change in perspective towards Irish history and the availability of new materials of Irish life have led to an extensive understanding of history and a deeper comprehension of memory and the past. Kelly Fitzgerald’s chapter moves towards folklore studies as she examines how the access to folklore collections and recordings of oral histories as well as the new possibilities for their digitalization have mobilised a further form of history and regenerated an interest on such materials. In the seventh chapter, Brian Ó Conchubhair focuses on the political domination of the Irish language over the past two decades. He argues that “Irish is not dying, it is being abandoned” (84) as he looks at the survival of the Irish language in the Gaeltacht areas, examines the policies and initiatives implemented to preserve the language, and studies the position of Irish language in Northern Ireland and how it might be affected by Brexit. Eoin O’Malley’s chapter argues that the changes, successes and failures that took place during what he names the period of Great Normalization “can be attributed to political decisions made in Ireland, and specifically the political and economic context in which decisions were made” (97). Focusing on the 2008 economic crisis, O’Malley examines the subsequent political and economic reactions as well as the impact of the crash on the make-up of the Irish population, their attitudes, and their opinions. The final chapter in this section studies how divisions in Northern Ireland have evolved since the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998, and the changes that the Northern Irish society has experienced. As Dominic Bryan

and Gordon Gillespie consider both the remaining areas of division and the shared spaces that have developed in recent years, they argue how identity politics and the region's conflicting past, still have an impact on the society of Northern Ireland.

The third part, entitled "Global Ireland", deals with Ireland's global engagement in the world. Mike Cronin's opening chapter explores the strengthening of ties with the Irish diaspora after the 2008 crash. The author argues that through technology and the building of diasporic networks, different events and strategies helped reach a wide global audience that brought the diaspora closer to Ireland; similarly, they brought attention to the country as a place to invest, in an attempt to help Ireland out of its economic recession. In the following chapter, Liam Kennedy analyses different research approaches, including online surveys and field interviews in Chicago and New York, to explore why and in which ways contemporary Irish-American ethnicity persists, in order to explore how Irishness has remained an identity marker in the US. In her chapter, Mary J. Hickman turns to the Irish in Britain. She argues that "Irish experiences and identities in Britain (and especially England) cannot be understood outside of the parameter of specific nationalizing strategies" (150), and delves into the strategies and processes that were relevant to Irish migrants in Britain. In chapter 13, Diane Negra and Anthony P. McIntyre analyse two case studies, namely the post-crash Irish banking sector and property market, and the figure of former Taoiseach Leo Varadkar as a public embodiment of the confluence of corporate and civil citizenship. They argue that post-Celtic Tiger Ireland corporate interests have taken priority over social and individual concerns, but conclude that the 2020 February election results could perhaps be indicative of an emerging political and ideological recalibration in the country. The fourteenth chapter turns its attention to Irish economic relations with both the UK and the European Union. Martina Lawless examines the impact that Brexit could have on Ireland and the cross-border connections—where economic, political and peace risks are intertwined—since, although there has been a decline in economic links with the UK, "the two countries remain closely connected" (179). The last chapter focuses on the process that led Ireland, and especially Dublin, to become a centre for high-tech companies. Kylie Jarrett explores the main policy

decisions that shaped the emergence of the digital media sector in the country and its economic and social impact, and critiques the effects of this sudden change with reference to ongoing socioeconomic crises.

The fourth part, “Identities”, looks at the social, cultural, and political changes that Ireland has experienced since 2008 and how these have expanded the understanding of Irish identity. Lucy Michael’s chapter examines the context of immigration and citizenship in Ireland in recent years, particularly after the 2004 Irish Citizenship Referendum, commenting on impact of such referendum and on the experiences of migrants of different origins in the areas of work, housing, education, civic and political participation, as well as with regards to gender, hate crime and policing, and anti-immigrant politics. In the following chapter, Sarah L. Townsend looks at the case of the traditionally Irish neighbourhood of Corktown in Detroit. Townsend explores contemporary Irish multiculturalism with reference to the interconnections between race, urban renewal and upward mobility in mid-twentieth century Corktown, and compares the changes in that neighbourhood with the transformation of Parnell Street in Dublin during the Celtic Tiger years. In her chapter, Claire Bracken analyses gender scholarship in Irish Studies between 2008 and 2020, focusing particularly on what Gerardine Meaney has termed “new Irish cultural studies” (xi). Bracken examines recent developments in feminist and gender research as well as in immigration and race analysis within Irish Studies, and argues that these post-Celtic Tiger and post-2008 trends in publications about gender studies mark “gender scholarship of the period as being imbued by a new materialist turn” (230). Chapter 19 turns to a redefinition of Irish Queer Studies as a result of the 2008 recession. Ed Madden examines what “queer” means in contemporary Ireland, both beyond sexuality and as an antinormative cultural and political projects, and examines Annemarie Ní Churraín’s lesbian marriage poems “Weir View” and “Florida Wedding” and Sarah Devereux’s Anus Plate saucer to illustrate the intricate relations between cultural norms and sexual identity. Oliver P. Rafferty closes this section exploring how the transformation in Ireland’s relationship with Catholicism has affected the study of Catholicism in Irish Studies. Rafferty analyses the area of sexual politics and feminism, the scandals

of child abuse, and the role of the Church in the Northern Ireland Troubles to explore the meaning of Irish Catholic identity in a century where “Catholicism as an institutional influence on Irish life appears to be at an end” (260).

The fifth part of the volume, “Culture”, discusses a broad range of Irish cultural categories. Renée Fox goes back to the nineteenth century to question the critical frameworks of Irish Studies and to propose a reevaluation of the canons, genres, and narratives that conform Irish literary history. Fox explores three contemporary novels, Tana French’s *The Likeness*, Emma Donoghue’s *The Wonder* and Joseph O’Connor’s *Shadowplay*, to argue how these works both expand Irish literary canons and transform nineteenth-century Irish literature and history by questioning reading practices and literary presumptions. Eric Falci’s chapter analyses Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin’s poem *The Girl Who Married the Reindeer* as an example of how Irish contemporary poets have been experimenting with different narrative modes outside of the lyrical and male tradition where Irish poetry has been widely positioned, and to promote this new dynamic experimental poetry scene and the prominence of women poets. In the following chapter, Laura Farrell-Wortman discusses how Irish theatre, affected by the 2008 crisis, moved from a primacy of the playwright to a rise of the “theatre-maker” and how new techniques promoted a wider frame for issues of identity in Irish theatre, comprising queer and intersectional identities and acknowledging the gendered aspects of the industry. In her chapter, Kelly Sullivan discusses some of the main exhibits and works of visual artists produced in post-Celtic Tiger Ireland. She suggests the existence of a recent tendency in the engagement with material culture and determines how this trend “allows groundbreaking reorientations around what it means to be Irish or to engage with the Irish nation as subject and object” (312), encouraging the scholars working in the field of Irish Studies to devote their research to the study of material culture. Chapter 25 provides a review of music scholarship from post-Celtic Tiger until the present day. Méabh Ní Fhuartháin examines the 2016 “Mise Éire” performance as part of the Decade of Centenaries programme and argues that Mac Piarais’s poem has become a cultural container of identity and (re)imaginings of nationhood that moves between cultural platforms in a continuous process of re-signification. In the

closing chapter, Paul Rouse explores how different sports areas have developed as markers of Irish identity and the complicated distinction between the concepts of “national” and “international” in Irish sport. Moreover, he also examines the low level of engagement in physical activity on the part of the Irish population and the increase of online gambling in the post-Celtic Tiger years.

The sixth section, entitled “Theorizing”, introduces a range of theoretical perspectives that are beginning to emerge in Irish Studies. In the opening chapter, Nessa Cronin proposes that *environmentalities* are a key issue in the current climate crisis, and examines the relationship between capital, climate and culture through a variety of ecocritical works that represent or discuss such *environmentalities* in twenty-first century Ireland. Cronin proposes a re-configuration in the relation between people and the planet and brings forward a variety of areas that could be further examined in relation to the present ecological crisis. In her chapter, Maureen O’Connor reviews the works that have contributed to the emerging field of Animal Studies in intersection with other areas such as gender studies, queer theory and ecocriticism as well as feminist scholarship, and argues that the inclusion of Animal Studies within Irish Studies provides “opportunities to rediscover and reevaluate Irish cultural productions, old and new” (367). In the following chapter, Elizabeth Grubgeld discusses how recent Irish scholarship in the fields of the arts and the humanities has begun to consider questions of disability in both literature and the arts. Grubgeld provides a brief account of the different ways that Disability Studies have entered discussions of Irish literature and examines the new notions of form and language in the work of Christopher Nolan to illustrate how this area of study enables a more extensive reading of literary texts. Emma Radley’s chapter on Irish film and media studies explores how the years after the Celtic Tiger framed this area of study into more transnational discourses. Radley examines how areas of ecocriticism, industry studies, mediated identities, media activism and memory studies have developed within the field of Irish film studies in particular and Irish Studies in general. The last chapter encompasses a comprehensive study of Donal Ryan’s 2012 novel *The Spinning Heart*, set in the aftermath of the economic crash. Through a psychoanalytical examination, Seán Kennedy argues that the novel does not actually

reveal anything in relation to the economic downturn itself and discusses how this avoidance to criticise Irish involvement in a neoliberal capitalist economy, which led to the crisis, is portrayed in the novel by rooting the trauma of the crash in an old-time crisis of shame from Irish masculinity and misogyny.

The last part in the volume, “Legacy”, while acknowledging its past, focuses on contemporary Ireland and its imagined futures. Kathleen Costello-Sullivan examines the shift in engagement from representations of trauma after the 2008 economic crisis to a focus on paths to recovery. Costello-Sullivan produces an extensive analysis of Anne Enright’s 2015 novel *The Green Road* in order to argue how the narrative of recuperation of the parental body, a trend in twenty-first century Irish literature towards narratives of recovery, both recognises the legacy of the traumatised body and provides a space for this parental body and the history it embodies. In their chapter, Margot Gayle Backus and Joseph Valente analyse Sebastian Barry’s 2008 novel *The Secret Scripture* to argue that the traumas experienced by individual psyches are also socio-political traumas, and that the active repression of sexuality from the Irish State developed into an erotisation of the punishments for sexuality. The following chapter explores how contemporary Irish writing is contesting “ageist social assumptions by foregrounding the subjective, embodied experience of ageing” (435). Margaret O’Neill and Michaela Schrage-Früh analyse a number of works where Irish authors centralise the theme of ageing in order to show how social forces influence the way that the body is understood and managed, and examine how these works serve to both reclaim middle age and reimagine old age. Brian Ward’s chapter on Irish architecture focuses on how architectural practices have changed since the era of the Celtic Tiger until recent years due to the different economic, social and cultural narratives that were brought by the 2008 economic crisis. Ward explores different representations of Irish architecture and discusses the rise of a post-Celtic Tiger mode of architecture; he argues that, after the crisis, this could be reimaged as a more socially-engaged subject. In his chapter, Mike Cronin explores how the Decade of the Centenaries brought forward the possibility “to celebrate and commemorate almost every strand of political thought, ideological standpoint, and diverse experience of warfare that the island has witnessed in the modern period” (463).

Cronin discusses its focus on Easter 1916 and how its commemoration was used to appeal to and distract a nation emerging from economic austerity, leaving scholarly and artistic works to explore any alternative perspectives of history. The closing chapter of the section and the volume as a whole turns to a more recent event, namely the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Malcolm Sen explores how cultural and literary studies might respond to the current coronavirus crisis as he discusses different concerns, such as the climate crisis and systemic racism, while he argues the importance of humanist work on COVID-19 to confront sociocultural and biopolitical factors resulting from the pandemic.

To conclude, the *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies* constitutes a very comprehensive volume that explores a broad variety of study areas within Irish Studies and how these have evolved in the post-Celtic Tiger period. This volume, attending to the changes that Ireland has experienced in its social, economic, cultural and political spheres due to the 2008 economic downturn, provides valuable insights into different fields of study that appeal to a wide range of scholars and students not only within the field of Irish Studies but also within other disciplines such as history, economics, sociology, political sciences, cultural studies and literature. The essays that Fox, Cronin and Ó Conchubhair have skilfully brought together are well-researched and have a clear focus on the broad topics that they cover. Moreover, they are informative regarding the current interests of Irish Studies and the state of affairs in contemporary Ireland. Focusing on many different disciplines, the authors that have contributed to this volume offer an all-encompassing analysis of how Irish Studies have developed, giving way to the examination of new and alternative perspectives as well as to the exploration of a variety of areas of interest that are beginning to emerge. To sum up, the *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies* is a highly recommended reading for researchers as well as anyone interested in Irish Studies and how they continue to be re-evaluated in the twenty-first century.

Works Cited

Meany, Gerardine. *Gender, Ireland and Cultural Change*, Routledge, 2010.