

ABSTRACTS

Black Irish, White Jamaican: Real and Imagined Irishness in Caribbean Literature – Evelyn O’Callaghan

In 1998 the Jamaican writer, Erna Brodber, asked “What did the Irish contribute to the Caribbean creole literary mix?” I want to revisit her question but from a different angle: “What has the Caribbean creole literary mix contributed to representations of the Irish in the region?” Drawing on a range of literary genres from the fictional account of indentured servitude, Kate McCafferty’s *Testimony of an Irish Slave Girl* to Brodber’s own *Myal*, Marlon James’s *The Book of Night Women*, Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* and Niamh O’Brien’s memoir *Black Irish White Jamaican*, I point to the widely divergent range of Irish protagonists and the quite different functions they serve in the various texts, and what the *absence* of the Irish in West Indian fiction tells us about the history of marginal groups.

What to Do about the Irish in the Caribbean – Robert Johnson

The Irish relationship with oppression is increasingly used as a set piece in the emerging American cultural transition from a dignity culture to victimhood culture. This dovetails with traditional Irish narratives of oppression in a political and cultural context, playing into the critique of an Irish exceptionalism used to escape culpability for participation in colonialism’s many sins. Examining the meme of the Irish as “slaves” in the early Caribbean as used in cultural manoeuvring in the US in the context of Irish narratives of the same period, allows us to touch on structural problems in the academic narrative and highlight those issues’ interplay with public history as an emerging part of the discourse as well as their bleed over into social media.

Franco-Irish Saint-Domingue: Family Networks, Trans-colonial Diasporas – Kate Hodgson

This paper looks at a number of Saint-Domingue planter families of Irish descent and seeks to follow their trajectories as merchants and/or sugar plantation owners in Saint-Domingue during the period leading up to 1791, and their often dramatic reversals of fortune during the subsequent years of upheaval, revolution and exile. Drawing on materials such as colonial records, correspondence, maps and compensation claim records, this paper asks: who were the Irish-descendent planters of Saint-Domingue? What happened to them during the Haitian revolution and subsequently? How can historical research attempt to reconstruct these lives, which span continents, empires and world revolutions?

The Irish-Jamaican Plantation of Kelly’s Pen, Jamaica and the Rare c. 1749 Inventory of Its Slaves, Stock and Household Goods – Finola O’Kane

Researching the Irish country house is frequently challenging, not least because many of the houses, together with their ancestral families and archives, are gone. With many estates broken up and sold as either Encumbered Estates in the nineteenth century or by the Land Commission in the 1920s, when compared with many English, Scottish and Welsh estates a piecemeal

record remains. The evidence that can be gleaned suggests that Irish families, like all landowning families of Great Britain, were involved in settling, designing and exploiting the Caribbean and its enslaved workforce from its original Cromwellian conquest in 1655 through to the emancipation period of 1833–36 and further into the decline of the sugar plantation in the nineteenth century. The interpretation of Ireland's role in this transatlantic web of commerce, improvement and monoculture agriculture continues to be complicated by a pronounced victim identity, whereby the Irish are invariably exploited rather than the reverse; the overwhelming watershed of the Irish famine of 1845–49 which distorts the interpretation of events that predate it; and the incorrect correlation of Cromwellian indentured servitude with inherited matrilineal chattel slavery.

The c. 1749 inventory of the personal estate of Edmond Kelly of Jamaica, who died in London on 01 Mar 1727/28, goes some way towards reframing Ireland's role in this history. A list and valuation of the 64 named male and 106 named female slaves that Edmond Kelly owned when he died, it also recorded the number and value of his animals together with a description and valuation of the house he had built at Kelly's Pen plantation, St Dorothy's parish, Jamaica. This paper will use this rare surviving inventory, and the great house to which it relates, to analyse the Irish-Caribbean plantation before such families became absentee.

An Irish Governor of Jamaica in the 1890s: Irish and Jamaican Self-Help, Colonial Modernity, and the Tropico-politics of Henry and Edith Blake – Alison Harvey

This paper will deepen and complicate our understandings of what Michael Malouf calls "Irish globality" by looking closely at how the writings of Irishman Henry Blake (governor of Jamaica from 1889–97) and his wife Edith Blake adumbrate the complexities attendant on Irish governance in British colonies, especially Ireland and Jamaica. Taken together, the Blake's reflections on empire reveal shifting conceptions of race and relations between Anglo-Irish cultural nationalism and imperial agency in the 1890s. Recognising their complex "tropico-politics" furthers and recasts our understandings of Irish-Caribbean connections, transatlantic contacts, and the histories and circuits of the global nineteenth century.

The Grafted Tongue: English and Comparisons of the Caribbean and Ireland – K. Brisley Brennan

While linguistic and social practices involving English in Ireland and the Caribbean vary, indeed internally to themselves, the island regions share a deep, historically developed experience of the imposition of the English language that no other former British colonies share. In the course of this exploration, a working conceptualisation of English as a grafted tongue will be proposed, as well as indications as to a discussion of how notions of language are used in establishing concepts like race, gender, class, nation, and culture. This paper provides a framework on which Caribbean and Irish literatures can be compared and evaluates other comparisons, including those by linguists.

Walcott, Joyce, and Planetary Modernisms – Aaron C. Eastley

This paper explores the James Joyce-Derek Walcott connection in light of the tenets of planetary modernisms. In recent scholarship Joyce increasingly inhabits modernity both as a European cosmopolitan and a colonial subject. On the flip side, Walcott's work is modernist.

Viewed through a planetary lens, writers like Walcott and Joyce become contemporary compatriots. Sarah Lincoln urges critics to link authors/texts “not by tracing a genealogy of influence ... but by locating the shared material experience that underwrites formal resemblances”. This paper both theorises such a relationship between Walcott and Joyce and concretely explores it through analysis of perhaps their greatest works: *Omeros* and *Ulysses*.

Dracula and Tropic Death: Imagined Maps, Transnational Communities – Louise Walsh

The history of scholarship surrounding what manner of threat Bram Stoker’s *Count Dracula* represents to Britain has been a colourful and contested one. Though that threat is more often consigned to Britain’s east, Britain’s often overlooked colonial interests to her west, particularly those interests in Ireland and the Caribbean, also form part of the cross hatch of the count’s composition. Though *Dracula* is traditionally read as a novel which seeks to solidify the integrity of national bounds, Stoker in fact works diligently throughout to map transnational spaces and identities which defy national and ethnic borders. Eric Walrond’s short story collection *Tropic Death* (which includes Caribbean strains of vampire mythology), is sketched in similar shades: all the stories collected are haunted by the spectre of British colonisation (though from the perspective of the colony) and the threat posed to any vestiges of Empire by anticolonial assertion. Additionally, Walrond demonstrates an analogous interest in spatial and identity penumbras which resist ethnic/cultural absolutes and push the collection beyond the regionalism of its Caribbean settings. Walsh’s article suggests that in plotting ever ‘widening gyres’ of geographic coordinates, and pausing in ‘cross cultural’/global spaces like Panama and London, Walrond and Stoker ‘imagine [transnational] communities’ in the vein of Benedict Anderson. Both map spaces which speak towards globalising notions of citizenship, identity and belonging made larger by the ever-widening reach of capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Black British Soldiers in Northern Ireland: Martin Stellman’s For Queen and Country and Neil Jordan’s The Crying Game – Hengameh Saroukhani

With reference to Martin Stellman’s *For Queen and Country* (1988) and Neil Jordan’s *The Crying Game* (1992), this essay investigates how filmic depictions of black British soldiers stationed in Northern Ireland work to critique dogmatic forms of national identification. The films unconventionally turn to the black British soldier of Caribbean descent, a militaristic figure of oppression for both black and Irish communities, as a means to capture the complicated intimacies between black soldiers and their Irish counterparts. The ensuing formal and contextual “entanglement” (to borrow a term from Sarah Nuttall) between these two minoritarian subjectivities, demonstrates how a national symbol of conservative, neocolonial power can be recovered for critically transnational, anti-colonial and cross-cultural purposes. While a militarised version of black corporeality transforms into a “theoretical theatre” (*à la* Althusser) where conservative conceptions of nationality and difference are dismantled, the necessary death of the black British soldier at the hands of the state in both films ultimately deflates this critical energy. Their mortality signifies the impossible existence of transgressive black bodies in the realm of the nation. In order to depict the cross-cultural promise between black British, Irish and Caribbean subjectivities, the black body must carry the burden of this critical transnationalism through the ways in which it is mercilessly rendered outer-national.

Lorna Goodison: Poet of Crossings – Jahan Ramazani

The justly celebrated code switching of Lorna Goodison's poetry is one of the many different kinds of crossings – linguistic, historical, generic, geographic, literary, cultural, racial – that define the texture, vision, and achievement of her poetry. In their inter-art and intertextual crossings, Goodison's poems implicitly define the special capacities and affordances of poetry – what it is especially good at. At least some of her poems can be mapped along two intersecting axes: the horizontal, playing off and refashioning themselves in relation to adjacent genres and art forms, and the vertical, looking to the literary past, echoing and remaking earlier poems. Goodison's poetry reveals its self-understanding in continually incorporating and fending off the charms of other genres, such as painting, song, and prayer, while taking on a still more vexed intergeneric dialogue with the law. Goodison's work also evinces its self-understanding by foregrounding poetry's vertical axis, its relation to earlier poems, including works by Caribbean poets and by modernist poets such as the Irish poet W.B. Yeats and the Anglo-modernist T.S. Eliot. Engaging with historical personages, other genres, and earlier poets, her poetry also stages its interactions with the otherness-in-sameness of her community of origin in the West Indies.