

**Book Review – *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies*, edited by
Renée Fox, Mike Cronin, Brian Ó Conchubhair.**

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Dr. Brian de Ruiter

Brock University

The primary goal of the *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies* is to outline, chart and engage with the shifting ideas of what Irish Studies is in the post-2008 period, as austerity measures following the Celtic Tiger, relations with Northern Ireland, Brexit and COVID-19 have created significant changes and uncertainties. These changes, in conjunction with how Irish Studies has been previously conceptualised through a narrower lens, have contributed to an ‘identity crisis’ that has affected the field. The editors of this volume, Renée Fox, Mike Cronin and Brian Ó Conchubhair, correctly contend “what it means to be Irish has been transformed” due to the economic, social, cultural and demographic shifts that have occurred within the last two decades (p. 6). This handbook, which presents an interdisciplinary approach to Irish Studies, is divided along the following thematic lines: ‘Overview’, ‘Historicizing Ireland’, ‘Global Ireland’, ‘Identities’, ‘Culture’, ‘Theorizing’ and ‘Legacy’. Although organised in this way, there is some degree of overlap as issues and topics, including the critiques of neo-liberalism and Direct Provision, resist such clear-cut categorisation and are covered across these categorial lines. Given the length of the book, this review will not provide coverage of all 37 chapters, but it will engage with some of the main ideas expressed in the volume.

The ‘Overview’ charts the development of Irish Studies in the United States and presents an intriguing discussion regarding Irish Studies from the perspective of the non-Anglophone world. One of the goals of the book is to present ways in which Irish Studies has been and can be (re)conceptualised, which the second chapter by Michael Cronin accomplishes. It highlights the diverse ways in which the non-Anglophone world can shape Irish Studies that extends beyond the narrow confines of perspectives towards Irish literature. In addition, Cronin recognises such engagement “offers the most obvious growth opportunities for Irish Studies” (p. 33).

‘Historicizing Ireland’ engages with ideas of “what history means and how it is made” by focusing on the work of antiquarians, folklorists, memory studies and oral history (p. 45). This section invites the reader to consider different types of sources that can allow us to broaden our own understanding of Irish history in innovative ways and charts the changes that have occurred in Irish Folklore Studies within the last fifteen years. This point on methodologies is important, particularly given the criticism directed at Irish historiography for largely being slow in adopting “cutting-edge methodological or conceptual innovation” (p. 47). The editors of this volume attempt to address such criticism by including chapters that suggest new ways to engage in historical inquiry, and, on a broader level, to conceptualise Irish Studies in different and fresher ways.

‘Global Ireland’ engages with various aspects of the diaspora, including its use as a tool to help stimulate Ireland’s floundering economy in the post-Celtic Tiger years and Irish diasporic identities in Britain and the United States. One of the issues highlighted in this section is the idea of belongingness and/or self-identification in Ireland, Britain and the United States. This section also includes a chapter that examines global capital and the transformation of Dublin as the government sought to attract multinational digital companies through its tax policies and the creation of a digital zone within the Irish capital. As Kylie Jarrett illustrates, the presence of these multinational digital companies in Dublin has affected smaller indigenous ones and has had social repercussions for Dublin residents and, more broadly, for Ireland.

‘Identity’ is designed to fracture ideas of binarism that have traditionally been used to simplistically conceptualise Irish identity, as it invites the reader to examine it in more multifaceted and nuanced ways. This section presents multiple avenues in which to explore Irish identities, including immigration and demographics, gender and reconceptualising the meaning of *queer* and how it can be further applied in Irish Studies. Furthermore, Oliver P. Rafferty’s chapter assesses the role of the Catholic Church in Ireland, as he contends “Catholicism no longer epitomises broader Irish culture” (p. 260) due to “its inability to move beyond past regulations and systems” (p. 268) in a changing Ireland. This section of the volume reflects on some of the changing realities that have occurred in Ireland in the last two decades and informs readers what directions more recent scholarship in these fields has taken.

‘Culture’ assesses aspects of the cultural sector in the post-2008 period and includes discussions on strategies to engage with nineteenth-century fiction; sports, with a concentration on rugby and soccer; material culture and music, with a focus on *Mise Éire*. Returning to the previous criticism of Irish historiography and its failure to lead the way in adopting innovative approaches, Kelly Sullivan outlines that “material culture was slow to gain prominence in fields

beyond folklore and archaeology” (p. 313). This engagement with material culture is important, particularly since Ed Madden, whose work is featured in the ‘Identities’ section of the volume, recognises that “[b]oth Irish Studies and Queer Studies have been arguably uneasy with material things” (p. 252), which he attempts to address in his chapter. This volume looks at the importance of examining material culture and how it can be used in a variety of different fields, with Sullivan exploring *Asylum Archive* in her chapter. Méabh Ní Fhuartháin’s assertion regarding the importance and value of Music Studies to Irish Studies is certainly valid, particularly to specific fields of inquiry, such as identity, commemorations and tourism.

‘Theorizing’ invites readers to consider the further possibilities for Irish Studies if more of its scholars adopted “theoretical perspectives that reshape the relationship between the human and the world” (p. 346). Taking this focus on relationships as well as the need to adopt diverse perspectives as points of departure, this section explores issues of eco-criticism, film, Disability Studies and Animal Studies, which allows one to chart these fields of study and some of the more recent contributions they have made within Irish Studies. One issue highlighted by Nessa Cronin in this section is the need for the cultural sector to create ‘new languages’ to help mobilise change on some pertinent issues affecting Ireland and the global community (p. 358). This is certainly a valid point and aligns with similar sentiment from those in the film sector, who believe in arts’ power to invoke emotion within the audience and create interest in a specific subject matter to mobilise the public.¹

‘Legacy’ is used to bookend this volume as it attempts to “discern the intricate new shapes that the present often makes of such histories and to trace the ways these shapes change over time” (pp. 403–404). This objective is accomplished by examining the shift of some Irish novelists, who have “redirect[ed] their attention from trauma to recovery”, as illustrated in *The Green Road* (p. 408). That said, writings about trauma and “the unspeakable” still have a presence in Irish novels as shown in *The Secret Scripture* (p. 421). This shift is also evident in the ways that recent literature has been active in reconceptualising what aging means for males and females by entering dialogues with stereotypes, assumptions and attitudes towards middle and old age. ‘Legacy’ also includes a chapter by Mike Cronin, who examines how the centennial commemorations related to the 1916 Rising are not politically neutral and have political and social capital in the present day. Cronin highlights that these commemorations

¹ Filmmaker Ryan Boyko discusses this in relation to educating about the internment of Ukrainians during the First World War in Canada. Consult, TheMark Newsvideo. (2010) *Educating Canadians about Internment Operations*. [online] Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uPHU99jXJA> [accessed 19 Feb 2023].

can also create forums for criticism due to the exclusion of voices, as demonstrated by the #wakingthefeminist campaign.

This book achieves one of its goals of examining Irish Studies in more complex ways than has traditionally been the case because of the diverse topics employed to discuss each theme. The interdisciplinary approach lends itself to presenting new frameworks to (re)conceptualise Irish Studies and allows for the use of diverse approaches and underutilised methodologies. This is the case regarding material culture. The chapters that survey a given field also identify key texts for undergraduate and graduate students to review, identifies gaps within the existing body of literature and propose future directions for research. The wide range of topics found within the 37 chapters of this volume indicates its usefulness to diverse fields of scholarship and enhances its marketability.

This volume also includes several chapters that incorporate a digital component into their discussions, whether that be how digital technologies can be utilised in Irish Folklore Studies, sports gambling and maintaining connections between diasporic communities and Ireland. Jarrett's chapter takes a more expansive focus on how the digital age has affected Dublin and raises the important point about connectivity issues in some of the rural spaces of the country, which has gained added urgency and attention during the COVID-19 pandemic. This reviewer contends digital issues will undoubtedly play a larger role in Irish Studies given the evolving state of technology and how we continuously incorporate it into our lives.

The editors have no illusions regarding their inability to adequately explore every subject within the realm of Irish Studies due to its broad nature and the interdisciplinary approach they have adopted. Irish Studies is too expansive for a single volume of this length. Understandably, decisions over content need to be made that are influenced by numerous controllable and uncontrollable factors. That said, one area that could have been further explored is tourism, particularly given Michael Cronin's² well-established background in the field, since the topic connects to changes that have occurred in Ireland in the last two decades. Furthermore, a greater discussion of tourism would connect to one of the handbook's broader ideas on how the government has projected Ireland to the global community. This greater focus on tourism could also be used to segue into an examination of Irish Food and Drink Studies. This is not to suggest that tourism is absent from this volume as Cronin wrote a chapter on it

² Consult, Cronin, M. and O'Connor, B. (eds.) (2003) *Irish Tourism: Image, Culture and Identity*. Toronto: Channel View Publications; O'Connor, B. and Cronin, M. (1993) *Tourism in Ireland: A Critical Analysis*. Cork: Cork University Press.

in regard to the diaspora, but greater focus would have been appreciated in this important and engaging field.

Overall, *Routledge International Handbook of Irish Studies* provides readers with a good selection of the diverse topics that have encompassed Irish Studies, including some of the underexplored topics in this field and identifies areas within the field for further exploration. This volume also touts a collection of contributions from prominent scholars in Irish Studies, most of whom are associated with academic institutions in Ireland and the United States. This demonstrates the high level of influence scholarship from these two countries currently have in Irish Studies.

Dr Brian de Ruiter has been an adjunct professor at Brock University since 2008, teaching in the Centre for Digital Humanities, Department of History, the Centre of Intercultural Studies, the Centre for Canadian Studies and the Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies. He received his PhD in 2014 from Swansea University focusing on North American Indigenous Cinema.