

Modernist Afterlives in Irish Literature and Culture

Edited by Paige Reynolds

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Irish modernism is a demanding subject for the contemporary Irish scholar, if for no other reason than the enormous amount of literary, artistic, and critical output of high modernism in Irish literature and culture. If we add to this the large number of themes, forms, and practices of high modernism, and artists' interests in a wide range of cultural practices, the scope of the field keeps on widening. In this context, *Modernist Afterlives in Irish Literature and Culture*, edited by Paige Reynolds, will be an important contribution to the field. This volume will be of great use both to scholars new to modernism in Irish literature and culture and to most of us who are not hugely familiar with the new perspectives of this influential movement.

The volume addresses the full scope of Irish modernism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It examines how and why the experimental devices of high modernism keep on appearing in contemporary fiction, poetry, drama, and various cultural practices. The collection's twelve chapters are organized thematically in two sections, and each focuses on a topic relating to Irish modernist writing, a period, a text, or a cultural practice. The first section, "Irish Modernism in Literature and Language", presents a set of essays devoted to specific works of fiction and authors; the second, "Irish Modernism in Institutions, Art and Performance", focuses on various major themes and forms of its cultural practices, in art, design, visual culture, choreography, and theatre. Finally, the book also includes an insightful Afterword by David James in which the scholar proclaims the expansive nature of the volume in terms of scope, interests, and periodization. The index is accurate and complete, and increases the utility of the volume.

The picture of Irish modernism that emerges from this volume is of a multifaceted and multidisciplinary movement. In the first section of the book, several of the essays are devoted to mapping its main aspects, such as formal experimentation or subjectivity, yet also various disciplines, including visual culture or choreography. Thus, the first essay, Anne Fogarty's "A World of Hotels and Gaols", deals with Irish women novelists during the 1930s, whereas Lucy Collins' "I Knew What It Meant/Not to Be at All" tackles experimental Irish women poets in the 1940s and Leah Flack's essay "Whatever is Given/Can Always Be Reimagined" discusses Seamus Heaney's "indefinite modernism".

Within this line of thought, Fogarty identifies aspects of the work of Elizabeth Bowen, Kathleen Coyle, and Pamela Hinkson as belonging to a delayed phase of Irish feminist modernism, whose concerns and self-conscious and radical characteristics contest an aesthetic of a modernism that came after. Fogarty draws attention to how these female novelists depict women as modern subjects who struggle for different roles as a result of the relationship between private and public spheres. Collins studies the radical style of Rhoda Coghill, Mary Devenport O'Neill, and Sheila Wingfield. Their artistic representation of death and dissolution. Such a radical approach allowed them to interrogate the practice of poetry at the time, their own formation and endurance as creative artists, and how difficult it was to adopt a fragmented subjectivity when the female writing self was itself under question. The conclusion is that the modernist afterlife is not a place where these three writers can rest peacefully. These kinds of essays, which provide a diachronic view of Irish modernism as it changed, will be helpful to readers hoping to understand what Irish women writers contributed to the movement. Finally, Flack's shrewd reading of Russian poet Osip

Mandelstam's modernism not only emphasizes his impact on Seamus Heaney, but also draws attention to the latter's invaluable chance to form new conceptions of his past and extend the influence of his thought, work, ideas and forms to later generations in an unlimited manner.

The other three essays in the first section of the volume convey an idea of Irish modernism as a movement-shifter; it was not the monolithic period it is sometimes thought to be – rather, its themes, forms, and cultivators' arguments can be recognized across the intellectual work of the twentieth and twenty-first century. In this regard, the contribution of Ellen McWilliams, "James Joyce and the Lives of Edna O'Brien", usefully argues that the latter's retelling of Joyce's life is complex and paradoxical because she shows herself to be very much aware of the politics of the canon of Joyce's biography, and yet still adopts an irreverent and casual manner dependent on her own writing interests and commitments. McWilliams concludes that O'Brien has always maintained a careful balance of power with her most important modernist siblings. In the next essay, "Modernist Topoi and Late Modernist Praxis in Recent Irish Poetry", Alex Davis addresses the relevance of poetry presses in advancing the aims of procedural poets like David Lloyd, whose appropriation of earlier modernist practices differs from the thematically significant deployment of modernist topoi one witnesses in, for instance, Mahon and Heaney. Finally, Sarah McKibben's "'Amach Leis!' (Out with It!)" traces modernist inheritances in Micheál Ó Conghaile's "Athair", and the result is a challenge to traditional views of Irish-language writing of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, which has always been associated with revival and as being incompatible with modernism. On the contrary, McKibben argues that prose writers of the Gaelic Revival like Máirtín Ó Cadhain, Myles na gCopaleen, or Ó Conghaile not only shared crucial preoccupations with modernism, but also advanced many experimental forms. For this reader, one of the most fascinating aspects of the volume is how many different varieties of Irish modernism appear across its pages.

Modernist Afterlives is also particularly valuable for its contributions on Irish modernist culture. The second section, "Irish Modernism in Institutions, Art and Performance", starts with an essay by Andrew A. Kuhn ("Make a Letter Like a Monument") that offers an engaging, readable overview of modernist institutions in print culture and the publishing world that created and sustained literature in Ireland. By focusing on how certain publishers, like Cuala, Dun Emer, or Dolmen Press, fully embraced valuable Irish modernist strategies and experiments, Kuhn shows that they contributed to remaking the literary world of the day, enlarging the international reputation of their writers, and conceptualizing Irishness within a cosmopolitan framework. Kuhn's essay is illustrated with six reproductions of early and mid-to-late twentieth-century books by W. B. Yeats, including *In the Seven Woods*, *The Cat and the Moon and Certain Poems*, the *Yeats Centenary Papers MCMLXV*, and the 1950s *Ten Poems* by Padraic Colum, which contribute to a further understanding of the subject. This piece is complemented by Róisín Kennedy's essay on Irish modernist art ("Storm in a Teacup"), which usefully explores contemporary Irish artists' ambivalent attitudes to this subject. Here, Kennedy compares the enthusiastic embrace of Irish modernist art by contemporary collectors and institutions in Ireland to the stance of contemporary artists, as they preferred to evoke the more subversive practices found in international avant-garde art rather than those of Irish modernist art. Illustrations include a 3-minute loop image from Dorothy Cross' *Teacup* (1997), Michael Farrell's lithograph *Madonna Irlanda* (1977), Louis le Brocquy's oil on canvas *A Family* (1951), or Sean Scully's oil in linen *Figure in Grey* (2004). The traces of modernism found in contemporary Irish artists' work, Kennedy argues, offer a surprising remedy to the frequent association of Irish modernism to the Celticism of the past and a way of reclaiming a more accurate understanding of the radical inquiry of the present that lies at the core of modernist forms.

Linda King's "Particles of Meaning" investigates the modernist afterlife in Irish design during the twentieth century, including branding, architecture, and book design, among other areas. She points to four figures from the 30s to the late 50s, Michael Scott, Stella Steyn, Jan de Fouw, and Alvin Lustig, and asserts the relevance of migration to the production of exciting new forms that spoke to indigenous and foreign audiences, as well as to the development of modern and contemporary Irish design. Maria Pramaggiore's "Animal Afterlives: Equine Legacies in Irish Visual Culture" traces representations of the horse in twentieth- and twenty-first-century visual media, focusing primarily on the qualities of this animal's afterlives to transcend our sense of modernist temporality. The last two essays, by Aoife McGrath ("Choreographies of Irish Modernity") and Emilie Pine ("The Modernist Impulse in Irish Theatre"), contribute particularly interesting accounts of how contemporary performances in Ireland are reminiscent of modernism in their search to represent and understand trauma. McGrath explores the relevance of Yeats's dance play *At the Hawk's Well* (1916) to Fearghus Ó Conchúir's solo dance performance *Cure* (2013) and offers a fuller account of how the comparison of these two works by Irish artists separated by a hundred-year gap contributes to not only the illumination of discussions of modernity and dance, but also helps to determine links between the body practices researched and performed by Ó Conchúir and the choreographers of *Cure*, the space thus created provides an alternative affective experience that allows the audience to understand their everyday life in a corrupted, but not incurable, Irish society. Pine, for her part, shows that the well-known Monto tetralogy of plays produced by Anu Productions (a site-specific Dublin theatre company run by director Louise Lowe and visual artist Owen Boss) – *World's End Lane* (2010), *Laundry* (2011), *The Boys of Foley Street* (2012), and *Vardo Corner* (2014) – set in particularly economically deprived inner-city areas, consistently disrupts the detachment frequently associated with modernist work, yet, in staging trauma, echoes the modernists working in post-war contexts, like Brecht, Jarry, or Beckett, and their commitment to form as meaning, as a form of expressing and comprehending trauma.

Modernist Afterlives in Irish Literature and Culture seeks to assist both established and new scholars of Irish modernism as they come to terms with the full extent of Irish modernist achievements. Editor Paige Reynolds is to be praised for assembling a fairly varied group of scholars to produce essays, and for designing this volume to ensure deep and wide coverage. This is a clear and concise collection that highlights significant thought and areas of debate. It provides many examples of theoretical investigation in the hope that readers will find Irish modernist literature and culture engaging. *Modernist Afterlives* will be a welcome addition to university libraries, and will benefit postgraduate students and professors who teach or research Irish modernist literature and culture.

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