

Exploring Digital Literature and Humanities in Ireland

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Introduction

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The 12th issue of *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* is aimed at exploring the development of Digital Literature (DL) and Digital Humanities (DH) in and about Ireland, and it therefore contributes to shedding light on the multiple ways in which Ireland has related to DL and DH in the past and continues to do so in the present. How has the turn to “digital” been addressed in Ireland within literary, artistic, scholarly and publishing fields? In what ways has DH been practiced and developed in Ireland and in Irish Universities? What is the role that DH play in the study and teaching of Irish literature both in Ireland and abroad? How have issues of authorship and reading been modified in and by the digital environment?

Prompted by these questions, as guest editors of this issue we wanted to offer an overview of various computational and digital approaches to Irish literary, linguistic and cultural studies, as well as the various theoretical, epistemological, methodological and historical aspects of DH in Ireland. The current issue provides an occasion to showcase DH projects and/or methods that include digital tools in the interrogation of Irish Literature and Culture, and/or those which combine linguistics, literature and culture.

The section opens with “Introducing the Digital Humanities in Ireland Landscape Report Dataset”, by Michelle Doran, which presents an insider’s perspective on the newly formed UK-Ireland Digital Humanities Association and the relevant Network. Through an Open Science Frame-work (OSF) repository this cross-country initiative is going to map the Digital Humanities across Ireland as a two-phase Landscape Report. A recollection of the aims and objectives of the project is integrated into a discussion of possible future directions that will contribute to the inquiry into this growing field of research.

Pádraig Ó Macháin recollects the development of and the role played by the Irish Script on Screen (ISOS) in his article, “The Digitisation of Irish Manuscripts: Beyond and Beneath the Visible Image”. ISOS remains Ireland’s first manuscript digitisation project, borne of the collaborative work of scholars and experts whose major effort has allowed to read Irish using the potentialities of the digital humanities. It remains a powerful and invaluable platform, as the author comments, “to explore what lies beneath” images inside archives.

Sarah Corrigan in her “Incrementally Does It: New Perspectives and New Opportunities in Early Medieval Digital Humanities” focuses on the digital humanities and early medieval textual analysis, taking a lead from a project she coordinated a few years ago. In particular, the essay builds on two workshops as part of the project, and in addition to reporting on those, it seeks to capture the complexities and newfound challenges of doing research on early medieval writing within the digital environment(s).

Jeneen Naji and Michał Rzeszewski’s “Digital Poetry as a Dublin City Data Interface” considers the idea of “place” alongside the connections of digital humanities and human geography, exemplified in the digital poem *The River Poem*. The purpose of their investigation is to produce an alternative set of meanings of the experience of place among contemporary subjectivities, whose experiences shift across the analog and the digital as part of their everyday life. In the process, their rich experience and its visualisation are meant to think differently with traditional virtual geographic environments (VGEs) as research method and as object/tool.

In his “Reading Republican Murals in Northern Ireland: Archiving and Meaning-Making” Tony Crowley critically asks to what extent the digital can be useful for understanding complex and fraught histories, pasts, and memories. His reflection on an online archive of the murals of Northern Ireland 1979-2021 he compiled presents us with the challenge of looking at and investigating the images inside the archive and being able to grasp the complexities of their meaning. The regime of the visual and its “representation” is further interrogated through the gathering of a wide number of pictures displaying the graffiti.

Finally, the last piece of the collection is an interview to Barry Houlihan, archivist and lecturer at the National University of Ireland, Galway, whose work on the social-cultural history of Irish theatre and new means/media includes two recent volumes, *Navigating Ireland’s Theatre Archive: Theory, Practice, Performance* (ed. 2019, Peter Lang) and *Theatre and Archival Memory Irish Drama and Marginalised Histories 1951-1977* (2021, Palgrave). In the interview piece, Houlihan provides an original and challenging account of the interrelationships of theatre studies and digital humanities via a rethinking of the archive.

We want to acknowledge and to show our gratitude to the work that all contributors to this special issue dedicated as they sent us their literary, theoretical/methodological essays, and/or case-studies, at a time when the past-present-future of the pandemic was/is far from behind us, and in the midst of the pressure to carry out increasing workloads and commitments inside academia. This issue is dedicated to their passion and their vision for research that always insists on pushing the boundaries of the real and the possible.