



Introduction

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Historically, cultural, religious, and intellectual exchanges have played a defining role in shaping Ireland's connections with other countries across Europe and beyond. From the early circuits of missionary travel and pilgrimage to contemporary patterns of economic migration, the Irish experience of mobility has been central to the nation's evolving identity. Watershed moments – such as the Great Famine in the 1840s, twentieth-century waves of migration to the UK and the United States, and Ireland's more recent positioning within a globalised European economy – have all contributed to collective imaginaries of Irishness, both at home and abroad. These forms of movement have shaped not only demographic landscapes but also affective and cultural ones, transforming how Ireland is seen from elsewhere and how it sees itself.

This special issue of *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies* proposes to focus on the “sense” of Irish travel – foregrounding affect, imagination, and embodiment as key analytical lenses. Moving beyond a strictly representational framework, we ask how travel produces and is produced by emotional registers and cultural attachments. What atmospheres accompany Ireland's current engagements with mobility? How do memory, nostalgia, hope, and critique animate the travel narratives and encounters that continue to define Ireland's place in a shifting global order?

The tourist gaze has long played a powerful role in framing Ireland as a site of natural beauty, cultural authenticity, and rural charm. The imagery of rolling green hills, music festivals, and quaint villages remains potent – both cherished by some and questioned by others. Yet in recent years, Ireland has increasingly positioned itself as a site for “sustainable tourism”, aiming to balance heritage with ecological awareness. This trend, while promising, opens up difficult questions about who is included in – or excluded from – these visions of Ireland. How, for instance, does sustainable tourism reflect the historical marginalisation of Gaelic-speaking Ireland and with ongoing forms of exclusion based on class, gender, race, and sexuality? What alternative narratives and imaginaries resist or reframe dominant visions of Irishness in circulation today?

We wanted to explore these tensions by considering travel as both a literal and metaphorical practice – entangled with processes of translation, cultural diplomacy, and identity-making. Our call aimed to interrogate how narratives of movement, displacement, and encounter inform historical and contemporary understandings of Irishness. We hoped to gather contributions that address in nuanced and productive ways the politics of representation and consumption, the commodification of culture under neoliberalism, and the affective legacies of colonialism and migration. How do these overlapping contexts reshape the meanings of mobility, home, and belonging? What role can literature, oral history, visual culture, or activism play in imagining more just and inclusive futures of travel?

Finally, the call also encouraged reflection on long-standing routes of exchange – especially between Ireland and Italy, where this journal is based. We invited considerations of historical and contemporary interactions across these national spaces, including through translation, intellectual networks, migration, and cultural activism. These transnational perspectives serve not only to enrich understandings of Ireland, but also to foreground the importance of comparative and dialogical approaches in the study of travel.

The theme of “Portable Ireland” is central to our endeavour, foregrounding how Irish identities, narratives, and aesthetics travel – across borders, genres, and generations – shaping and being shaped by wider global and diasporic contexts. The contributions reflect the complex and shifting terrain of contemporary Ireland, attending to the cultural, social, and political reverberations of mobility, memory, and transformation in both historical and modern frames.

The contributions gathered in this special issue trace the entanglement of Irishness with migration, memory, and cultural reinvention. Matthew Fogarty reimagines Roddy Doyle’s *Oh, Play that Thing* through the lens of jazz aesthetics and biofiction, revealing how form and theme subvert traditional emigration narratives and expose persistent racism in Ireland, past and present. Similarly, Martina Zanetti interrogates Irish women’s migration – voluntary, forced, or symbolic – probing how home, identity, and belonging are constantly renegotiated in narratives by contemporary women writers. This mobility is not only geographical, but also cognitive and aesthetic. Monica Randaccio’s application of frame theory to Marina Carr’s *The Cordelia Dream* unveils the interplay between inherited narratives and the reconfiguration of perception and artistic rivalry, including in translation. Stephanie Rains recovers the cultural hybridity of 1930s pilgrimage cruises, showing how religious journeys doubled as secular pleasures and anticipated the mass tourism that followed – a convergence of faith, modernity, and commodification. Perceptual and affective boundaries are also central to Martina Giannetti’s study of Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin’s poetry, where language mediates between the real and the mythical, and the liminal becomes a space of encounter with otherness. Giuseppe Pusceddu highlights travel writing as a vital, though overlooked, component of Seán Ó Faoláin’s oeuvre, revealing his narrative sophistication and ironic lens on European destinations. The “Miscellanea” section extends these themes of translocation and transformation. Stanley Gontarski revisits Dublin’s theatrical radicalism in the 1950s, mapping how the staging of Tennessee Williams and the reception of American modernism shaped Flann O’Brien’s creative and critical engagements. Nourhan Ashraf Saleh stages a comparative reading of Irish and Palestinian identities under colonial and postcolonial pressures, showing how fragmentation and hybridity can become forms of resistance and self-reinvention. Arianna Antonielli’s essay introduces Debbie Jenkinson’s *Midlands* as a quietly subversive graphic narrative, using sequential art to explore loss, memory, and emotional texture beyond heroic tropes. Alberto Mini turns to autofiction, examining how Irish women writers depict and contest patriarchal oppression through literary self-fashioning. Finally, Jeffrey Minicucci’s exploration of *The Yellow Briar* uncovers a fascinating feedback loop

between fiction and professional identity, as the novel's mythmaking becomes part of Canadian legal lore. Together, these essays highlight Ireland as a site of continual departure and arrival, of frames disrupted and identities reshaped. Whether through literature, visual narrative, performance, or historical reconstruction, this issue captures a *Portable Ireland* – a mutable, migratory formation whose boundaries are always in motion, even as it remains grounded in the distinctive textures of Irish cultural life.

This special issue is enriched by the writings of three distinctively Irish voices from the contemporary world stage: William Wall's falling in love with a people, a poetry, and a language began in the late 1970s, while he was honeymooning in Rimini, a coastal town in the Centre-East of Emilia Romagna. Dante's account of Paolo and Francesca's doomed love in the *Inferno* served as a point of entry into the articulation of his own growing passion for Italian culture and its many facets. What makes Wall's reflections particularly cogent at this juncture is how translation – and the possibility for a text, for words and feelings, to travel and find specific impression or expression in the singular experience of something shared collectively – becomes a way to resist the strangeness of the foreign, which so often feels too distant in time, space, or place. Here as increasingly elsewhere, translation is one of many methods employed by critics and cultural theorists to bridge the gap created by the inescapable fact of life with others on a planet in ruins. This sense of profound anticipation permeates the poems that follow, which take us to Ireland, Europe, the US and Palestine, year 2025. Catherine Ann Cullen's poem "Paper Boats", inspired by the Gaza Freedom Flotilla project and read at a Conference on Palestine in 2018, was conceived as an act of solidarity, hope, and witness since resistance, defiance and freedom are desperately needed in the area, now an apocalyptic landscape of devastation and ruins. Sarah Clancy offers us five poems showing her need of being able to travel to other places and her impulsive response "to the chaotic pace of world events", a world increasingly disconnected from reality, passive in the face of genocide, migration from warzones and insensitive towards the attacks on diversity, equity, and inclusion. Like Cullen, Clancy sends out a message of hope, solidarity, a powerful message that the editors of this issue share and strongly support unconditionally.

Stop genocide!