

Introduction

ÚNA NÍ BHROIMÉIL & GLENN HOOPER

Land in nineteenth-century Ireland is a contested terrain. This collection recognizes the centrality of land to the discourse on nineteenth-century Ireland and explores what Howes and O'Neill call the 'complex, almost bottomless historical layering that characterizes landscape in Ireland'.¹ The essays do not focus on the land question and land legislation or on the grievances of the challenging collectivity. Neither do they dwell on nineteenth-century aesthetic models of landscape painting or on mere descriptions of a wild or romantic landscape. Rather they stress the human interaction with land and focus on perception and memory and on the symbolism of land and landscape as key determinants for the formation of character, of self identity and of 'situated knowledges'.²

Land and landscape are thus linked in a cultural code as critical signifiers of a specific Irish identity. In attending primarily to the rural landscape these essays conjure up the places that Heaney suggests 'stir us to responses other than the merely visual'.³ In the unsettled political and social context of nineteenth-century Ireland the land provides a space for negotiation – of identity, of nationality, of ownership. The changing landscape over time provides a link between past and present, between real and imagined communities. Throughout, the essays testify to Simon Schama's concept of landscape as the 'work of the mind . . . built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock'.⁴

This is an interdisciplinary or even transdisciplinary collection. There are however key points of intersection between the essays and common themes. More than just territory, the transforming power of the land is conveyed in Dabundo's and Murphy's essays. The characters' experiences in and of the land change and remake them and to live in Ireland as Dabundo suggests is to be 'reborn by the force of the land'. Nature is thus exalted and recognized as a power for good and made visible in the morality of the characters portrayed by Edgeworth and Owenson. This connection between land and a person's sense of self and identity is again emphasized in Murphy's discussion of *The O'Donoghue* by Lever. Key relationships are based in the land which reflects the impact of human imprint and which is at the same time a well-spring for the creativity of the human imagination. The practical use of the

1 Marjorie Howes and Kevin O'Neill, 'Introduction: Toward a history of the Irish landscape' in Vera Kreilkamp (ed.), *Éire/Land* (New Bedford, MA, 2003), p. 13. 2 Joan Vincent and Marilyn Cohen, 'Anthropological and sociological studies' in Laurence M. Geary and Margaret Kelleher (eds), *Nineteenth-century Ireland: a guide to recent research* (Dublin, 2005), p. 112. 3 Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: selected prose, 1968–1978* (London, 1980), p. 132. 4 Simon Schama, *Landscape and memory* (London, 1995), pp 6–7.

land as a force for good is explored in Walsh's essay on the nineteenth-century district asylum. In pursuing a regime of moral treatment the land and landscape surrounding the asylum came to play a key role in the recuperation and ultimate cure of mental patients although as she points out 'the healing properties of land, so often cited for the men, was rarely mentioned in the women's records, beyond the necessity for the patients generally to take the air in the exercise yards'.

People are core to Pierser's discussion of George Moore's use of landscape as a medium for presenting ideas. Pierser suggests that the visual and sensory images used to convey landscape invariably encompass political agendas and social problems and that Moore presents landscape scenes to provoke discussion and evoke thought. Indeed landscape used in this way may be considered subversive in that messages and agenda are obscured and secreted behind a veil of popular landscape imagery both verbal and visual and delivered to a reading and seeing public when they least expect it. In drawing attention to Moore's belief that landscape should be 'more about the reality of living than the picturesque' land is presented as a 'humanized space' where life is lived and social and political matters are enacted. As much as the land marks people and is an 'unseverable aspect of self', people too, as Garavel claims in his essay on Somerville and Ross, impress themselves upon the land and leave impressions of their histories, culture and even something of their characters behind as markers of their physical presence.

Traces of past human activities are addressed by Ní Cheallaigh in her discussion of archaeological sites and the conundrum they pose for contemporary viewers. On the one hand, people use these sites as observation points from which to view the past. This past, covered at times superficially and at others overgrown to the point of near extinction can lead to perceptions of things that literally are not there. On the other hand, the past is so obviously present in some sites and monuments that they need to be destroyed in order to obliterate painful historical memories. This material past and present is also evoked by Wein's view of the Irish sublime in which she identifies the 'subliming of history' as a key feature. The land, she maintains, like its people is 'unknowable' and its aesthetic conditions 'haunted, if not deformed' by the moulding of history onto the land. The Irish sublime she contends, is dark and full of despair because of the nexus between past and present.

Certain places and the landscapes associated with them embody this connection between past and present and, according to Cronin in her essay on balladry, they acted as 'veritable codes linking past and present' in the popular consciousness of the people. The appropriation of the landscape if not the land itself is a common premise uniting the essays. While Cronin does cite particular instances of mound building, bonfire lighting and the take-over of hills in particular as evidence of actual land appropriation and indeed of popular mobilization in pre-famine Ireland, it was the capture of the landscape in the songs and ballads of the common people that was significant in claiming it and the events associated with particular landscapes as their own. Similarly, Egenolf stresses the metaphorical appropriation

of picturesque scenes by Owenson's Horatio to convey his sense of 'colonial entitlement' to the land. By making the landscape of Ireland familiar to the reading public she suggests that even the wildest parts of Ireland, particularly the west where 'the potential for insurgent activity lies unnoticed but radically present', rights to the landscape are asserted and rights to the actual land justified.

These rights to landscape are developed further by Benatti in her essay on the *Dublin Penny Journal*. This was the first time average Irish readers were presented with 'good quality depictions of their own homeland' and Petrie's aim, she submits, was to develop a sense of shared identity amongst Irishmen and women, that was located in their appreciation of and ultimately their appropriation of their own landscape. The loyalist press on the other hand emphasized land as the basis of their shared oppression by both nationalist sectarianism and British liberalism. The rights of loyal and propertied individuals to the actual land, Jones maintains, was summed up by the fact that 'in southern unionist discourse "the land" was often framed as a prefixed right of the "ascendancy classes"'. In a close reading of the nineteenth-century loyalist press she concludes that the issue of land provided official unionism with the opportunity to present loyal individuals as victims as well as an 'effective propaganda weapon to counter self-government for Ireland'. Within the context of opposing assertions of ownership and community in nineteenth-century Ireland the symbolic claiming of land and landscape by different factions attest to the power of what Nash terms 'an authentic identity and relationship to place'.⁵

Rights to the profits provided by land and landscape are claimed in a more concrete way in the essays by Furlong and Mulligan who deal with opposite ends of the country and with very different aspects of Ireland's economic life. As Ireland 'slowly awakened to the economic potential of tourism' the gentry began to realize the potential of their estates and this led in 1896 to the cordoning-off of the Giant's causeway and charging for entry to what had been a public space. Furlong points to 'indignation meetings' which were held to protest the 'seizure of the causeway' as testament to the notion that certain locations were imbued with meaning for a people and belonged to them as of right. The filching of this right to walk and view their own space was protested vehemently. In his discussion of mining ventures in Cork and Waterford, Mulligan suggests that the potential for economic success was always overestimated by mining promoters who attributed repeated failures to poor management rather than changing world markets or overly optimistic projections. While the possibility of gaining wealth from the land existed, Mulligan claims that this was located more in the imaginations of mining promoters rather than in reality. In both Furlong's and Mulligan's essays the surrounding poverty of the countryside is emphasized in contrast to economic prosperity.

5 Catherine Nash, 'Remapping and renaming: new cartographies of identity, gender and landscape in Ireland', *Feminist Review*, 44, Nationalisms and national identities (Summer 1993), 39-57.

The rich and textured descriptions of land and landscape in this collection make visible places and events and locations as they were and as they appeared to contemporary observers. In reading text and image simultaneously we too become participants in this observation and can look beyond the symbolism and the economics of land in the nineteenth century to the reality and the actuality of that which surrounded and encompassed its inhabitants. What is conveyed above all through making visible these locations is the importance of place, of a sense of place, of rootedness and of the assertion of nationality, of identity. As Edward S. Casey suggests, 'texts and traces are *found in place*: the place of landscape itself. A given landscape retains and presents the evidences of history that come to enter its generous embrace; more exactly, it both withholds these evidences and renders them visible.'⁶ As the essays in this volume demonstrate, the intersection of history and memory, and of place and identity, are represented on the land, and in the very landscape itself – as tracings and lines, as territorial markers, but fundamentally as a series of texts from which we must speak of, and towards, ourselves.

⁶ Edward S. Casey, *Representing place: landscape painting and maps* (Minneapolis, 2002), p. 275.