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“A SENSE OF PLACE”

IRISH STUDIES &
CULTURAL THEORY
SUMMER SCHOOL
14–18 JULY, VIENNA

SPEAKERS:
CHAMBERS – EBURY – FUCHS – GIDDENS – MONAHAN –
O’NEILL – ÖZTÜRK – PILNY – WELSCH – WITEN – ZÄHRINGER
... AND MORE!

ART BY CHARLOTTA HAUUSDÓTTIR

The Irish Studies & Cultural Theory Summer School

“A Sense of Place”

Vienna 14-18 July 2025

Co-Hosted by the Vienna and EUF Centres for Irish Studies
University of Vienna, Hof 8.3, Spitalgasse 2-4, 1090

Registration is now open for an ECTS-accredited week of lectures, seminars, and screenings with internationally renowned Irish studies and cultural theory scholars at the Vienna Centre for Irish Studies!

From the ancient past until the world of today, cultural geography as ‘a sense of place’ plays a decisive role for the (mis-)representation of Irish collective identity. Dating back to the Roman historian Tacitus, Ireland’s Latinized name *Hibernia* emerged in the first century AD, and the first surviving map – or geographical representation – of Ireland was created by the Greek astronomer and cartographer Claudius Ptolemy around 140 AD. Ptolemy’s work served as an important source from which later maps were created in the 15th and 16th centuries. Another decisive work shaping a collective imagination of Ireland dates back to Gerald of Wales *alias* Giraldus Cambrensis, who accompanied the youngest son of the English King Henry II on a military campaign against Ireland in 1186 and wrote the *Topographia Hibernica* (1188) and the *Expugnatio Hibernica* (1189) on behalf of the Anglo Norman Conquest.

As can be seen from these case studies in the field of cultural history, the discourse of Ireland as a (collective and power-related) ‘sense of place’ was mainly constructed by others – i.e. by (mainly English) foreigners and not by the Irish people themselves – an aspect which continues with works by Englishmen such as John Derricke’s *An Image of Irland* (1581) and Edmund Spenser’s *A View on the Present State of Ireland* (1596) in times of the Tudor Conquest.

Written on behalf of the English colonizers from the neighboring island, these foreign works misrepresent Ireland as an alien place of savagery devoid of culture – a strategy which might be called ‘non-cultural’ or ‘anti-cultural’ topography. Being proverbially known as ‘England’s first oversea territory’ and England’s first colonial possession, Ireland and its Gaelic inhabitants were misrepresented as a foreign space inhabited by ‘savages’ comparable to the indigenous populations of the European oversea territories in the Americas and the West Indies. Although Ireland was *de facto* the cradle of modern European civilization (i.e. ‘the island of saints and sages’ whose Druids were agents of Celtic wisdom and whose missionaries spread Christianity among the rest of Europe as intercultural go-betweens), early modern Ireland and its population were reduced to an uncivilized ‘no-place’ and escaped cultural representation as a kind of *anti-u-topia* (cf. Thomas More’s coinage of the ancient Greek word *u-topos* – as a pun on ‘no place’ and ‘good place’ – as the title of his *Utopia* in 1516).

As the Gaelic Irish population was likened to the indigenous inhabitants of other colonial oversea possessions across the Atlantic, it seems to be no coincidence that the first slaves to be shipped to the European plantations on the West Indies were not abducted from the African west coast but recruited in Ireland. The circumstance that this early stage of the history of the slave triangle with its notorious Middle Passage has become all but forgotten, may be attributed to the shockingly pragmatic fact that European colonizers considered African forced laborers to be, physically speaking, better prepared to survive the ‘hot’ climate of the Caribbean insular plantations and that they were thus considered better ‘value for money’ than Irish slaves who soon contracted infections and perished in this part of the new world. This slavery-induced early modern equation of Gaelic

and African people continued far into the nineteenth century, with the emergence of racist theories which claimed that the Irish were ‘people of color’ with an ‘African’ origin and were thus ‘essentially’ different from other ‘white’ Europeans.

This form of racist colonial othering escaping cultural representation continued until a sense of Irish collective identity emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries (especially the late 19th century as the period of the Gaelic Revival) and more recent times when Ireland was increasingly seen as an idyllic, non-urbanized laid-back recreational part of the ‘white’ Anglo-Saxon old world of the 20th century – an inverted form of the earlier cultural misrepresentations sketched above, which was constructed by US-movies such as *The Quiet Man* (1952) and which may be still observed from the concept of ‘Stage Irishness’ and modern tourist expectations of US-travelers in quest of their ‘Irish’ roots.

These and related aspects (such as cultural memory, the cultural partition of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, semantic spaces and borderlines analyzed by Juri Lotman, Mikhail Bakhtin’s Chronotope, epic landscape and the (post)modern cityscape; (what belongs in) the literary canon, rhetorical *topoi* or commonplaces, sustainability studies, postcolonialism and belonging, history, politics, etc.) will be addressed by the invited speakers of the **Irish Studies & Cultural Theory Summer School**.

Confirmed Speakers: Ciara **Chambers** (University College Cork); Katherine **Ebury** (University of Sheffield); Dieter **Fuchs** (University of Vienna); Tara **Giddens** (University of Limerick); Barry **Monahan** (University College Cork); Stephen **O’Neill** (Trinity College Dublin); Dilek **Öztürk** (Trinity College Dublin); Ondrej **Pilny** (Charles University Prague); JT **Welsch** (University of York); Michelle **Witen** (Europa-Universität Flensburg); Raphael **Zähringer** (University of Tübingen); with more speakers and topics to be announced...!

Accreditation: The Summer School will be accredited according to the ECTS system: 3 ECTS points (attendance) or 5 ECTS points with term paper (to be handed in by 15 September).

Venue: Dept. of English & American Studies, University of Vienna, Hof 8.3, Spitalgasse 2-4, 1090 Vienna

Organisers: Dieter Fuchs & Michelle Witen

Fee: € 100 for access to all talks, seminars, screenings, social events (€ 30 for students who are fully registered at the University of Vienna)

Registration: Email your name and affiliation to dieter.fuchs@univie.ac.at by **1 July 2025**.