Irish Keywords: Introduction

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Introduction

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January 1, 2026 will mark the fiftieth anniversary of Raymond Williams's *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. On its initial publication, it seemed a modest enough event, a book intended, so its title suggests, as a companion to Williams's breakthrough book of 1958, *Culture and Society*. Over the course of this past half century, however, *Keywords* has arguably been consulted by more readers than any of Williams's other influential works. It has had scores of reissues and new editions from many different publishers. It has been translated into several languages. It has been revised and expanded. It has known almost as many different cover designs as a novel by Jane Austen or Charles Dickens. There have been sequels, too. A large "Keywords Project" was launched some years ago by Stephen Heath and others, and one important result of this initiative was the publication of *Keywords for Today* (2018), with a list of new words that includes *queer* and *fundamentalism*.[1] The same year saw a special issue of the journal *Victorian Literature and Culture* on the topic of "Keywords," updated in 2023 as "Keywords Redux" with new entries including *oceanic*, *planet*, and *trans*. At a time when philology finds itself embattled across much of the academic world, Williams's book continues to inspire field-level acts of renewal and reimagination.

Keywords in Caribbean Studies, a project recently launched at the Small Axe Project, revises Williams's *Keywords* by calling attention to the colonial and geographic contours of overlapping linguistic histories. The editors, Vanessa Pérez-Rosario and Ryan Cecil Jobson, describe their effort as "an exercise in critical vocabulary that is less preoccupied with the production of a singular, authoritative definition for a term than it is with a genealogy of that term's history and usage."[2] Successive issues of the journal focus on instantiations of a word in several of the languages most used in the Caribbean world—in the first instance, "*Zwart/ Negro/a/x*/ Négre/ Black*" in March 2003. This extension of the keywords model into the postcolonial world resonates with what we hope to achieve with "Irish Keywords." Rather than simply updating Williams's

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mid-1970s "vocabulary" for "today," our project similarly involves both an expansion and a dislocation of Williams's work, opening up distinct geographies and genealogies of word usage.

Looking back in this light on the place of Williams's *Keywords* in the recent history of literary scholarship, one notices that Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* did not appear until 1993, and even his breakthrough book, *Orientalism* (1978) followed Williams's *Keywords* by two years. This might help to explain the otherwise surprising fact that Williams's list of entries in 1976 failed to include *empire*, *imperialism*, *colony*, *colonialism*, and of course *orientalism* itself. It is also the case that Williams was working in the long shadow of a debate on the British left about what E. P. Thompson famously called the "The Peculiarities of the English," a phrase coined for his account of Perry Anderson and Tom Nairn's comparative critiques of Britain.[3] But Williams can also be incurious about or just dismissive of words that arrived into English from overseas. Discussing his various orders of words, he gives *baobab*, *basilica*, and *batik* as examples of words for which standard dictionary definitions will suffice because they do not "involve ideas or values."[4] Our word *shanty* might belong in such an order, and yet is shown by Lisa Goff to track through transatlantic history and culture with a remarkable range of implication.

The case of Ireland, sometimes called "semicolonial," is one to which we have turned for several related reasons.[5] Ireland is Britain's closest neighbor and England's earliest colony. The English conquest of Ireland that began with the invasion of Henry II in 1171 marked the beginning of a centuries-long military occupation, and a political relationship both intensely intimate and intensely divisive. Ireland had valuable resources to be plundered and, for many of these centuries, a large population to be subdued and exploited. The Great Famine (1845-1852), two centuries of emigration, and the partition of Ireland in 1921 left the United Kingdom and Ireland with populations of vastly disparate sizes in the late twentieth century. By the time Williams published *Keywords* in 1976, the population of the United Kingdom had grown to just over fifty six million whereas that of the Republic of Ireland was just over three million—a difference of well over an order of magnitude. But at the time of the Act of Union in 1800, Great Britain had a population only about double that of Ireland (about ten million compared to five million). It was thus, for example, that Georgian Dublin could be called the second city of the empire while the maritime city of Cork became a naval and provisioning sub-post. Unlike *migration*, *population* did not make it onto our final list of Irish keywords, but from the time of the foundation of political arithmetic by William Petty in the wake of the Cromwellian wars, through Jonathan Swift's "Modest Proposal" and the

enlarged 1803 edition Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*, the sheer number of inhabitants on the small island was a central question in discourses of modernity.

The populous smaller island was remade over the centuries in a succession of efforts at colonial redesign. The Normans came first, with the support of the pope, bringing their armies, their technologies, and their developed forms of political organization. Later, in the wake of Henry VIII's break with the Roman Catholic Church, came the Tudors, in defiance of the pope, and again with armies, but now with plantations, settlers, and a civilizing mission. Continued expropriation of Irish property prompted rebellions that fueled sectarian hatred and a greater push toward a fuller conquest and integration. After the Cromwellian settlement, the seventeenth-century process of making Irish English saw the beginnings of wholesale anglicization that drew on the oral and literary resources of an evolving English language. English dominated in the so-called Pale around Dublin and came gradually to gain currency across the country, especially as the language of literacy and of officialdom.

The ensuing language shift from Irish to English was not a straightforward story of suppression and loss but rather a regionally varied affair, slow-moving if ultimately devastating in its consequences. Damage done to the Irish language meant the loss of what Angela Bourke describes as "rich resources of imagination, memory, creativity, and communication."[6] But nineteenth-century Ireland was home to a "sizeable, socially diverse, and geographically varied" speech community that did not simply vanish.[7] As Margaret Kelleher has written, "extensive bilingualism, as well as degrees of Irish monolingualism, continued in some areas of the country into the late nineteenth century."[8] Irish survived, as did many instances of "linguistic interconnectedness and gradual transition," while the English language bore the marks of its many encounters with Irish lives and landscapes.[9] The "macaronic medium" of Hiberno-English itself belongs to this longer history of upheaval, destruction, change, and loss.[10]

For the Keywords approach to take root in Irish studies soil, however, one must also confront the extent to which glossing and defining are practices deeply embedded in the history of conquering and colonizing Ireland. Its culture had to be explicated even as it was subjugated. In Edmund Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland* (1633), a series of seemingly assured exercises in etymology are routinely weaponized as a way to draw out and decry Irish resistance to colonial rule. One of our keywords, *pale*, gets this treatment from Spenser: "Palatine" is explained as meaning "a pale and defence of the inner lands" and (improbably) connected to "the Latin *palare*, that is to forage or outrun, because those marcherers and borderers use commonly to do so."[11] Spenser's

View, composed in 1596 and first published in 1633, was intended at least in part to defend the reputation of his employer, Lord Grey, who had gained victory in Munster by starving the local people and destroying food that might have sustained the rebels. In his account, the *pale* is not only an area of land but a place shaped by the rebellious attacks of the native Irish. As "political commentary is circuited through the internal workings of language," Spenser raids language for the resources needed for conquest, thus pioneering what Anne Fogarty calls a form of "philological privateering."[12] Sparky Booker's essay on *pale* takes up Spenser's very example and explores the ways in which the meaning of *pale* persists in Irish culture.

Can a collection such as "Irish Keywords" ultimately escape an imperial imprint? Perhaps not, but one answer to the problem of decolonizing definitions lies in our resort to the realm of the literary itself. There is a valuable resource to be explored not only in the literary texture of those early efforts to explain Irish words and phrases but also in subsequent contestations of such interpretative work, even within the Anglo-Irish literary tradition after Spenser. Challenging Spenser by name, Maria Edgeworth attacked his brand of colonial philology in the glossary and notes she included with her first adult work of narrative fiction, *Castle Rackrent* (1800). She extended her critique in *Essay on Irish Bulls* (1802), a satirical portrait of how British readers typically misconstrue Ireland's distinctive form of verbal wit that some Americans will recognize as a kind of Yogi Berra-ism *avant la lettre*: "Nobody goes to that restaurant anymore —it's too crowded."[13] Edgeworth's examples tend either to be benignly comparative, proving that humorous Irish errors have a long global history, or more darkly shadowed by recent history and the experience of living through violent times.

Edgeworth's career also represents a second way in which literature matters to a project addressed to Irish keywords, for Edgeworth's early engagements with colonial philology in *Castle Rackrent* and *Essay on Irish Bulls* would soon give way to publications that we might now call more *literary*—more like literature itself as we have come to understand the term. And herein lies another important connection with Williams. It is one of the signal contributions of his own philological work, first in *Keywords* and then, more expansively, in *Marxism and Literature* (1977), to give us a detailed and revelatory account of how that term, literature, changed in its complexion over the hundred years that straddle the turn of the nineteenth century—the very moment when Edgeworth's work was crucially taking shape. In these decades, Williams explains, "literature" was shifting in meaning from (roughly) classical "letters" to what would eventually to be called "creative writing"—novels, plays, and poems.[14] In

Ireland, that same moment saw a tipping point in the process by which Irish lives and experiences were mediated in the English language, the latter increasingly associated with literacy itself.

Williams does not acknowledge Edgeworth's body of work, and her brand of "literature" differed from what Williams was tracing in the British context—the context he had outlined so effectively in an early chapter of *Culture and Society* on "The Romantic Artist," and again in the opening chapter of *The Long Revolution* on "The Creative Mind."[15] Instead of opening a rift between literature and science, both undergoing rapid changes in meaning in these decades (as Williams shows), Edgeworth kept faith both with the creative imagination and with what can now be recognized as "key elements of the scientific method," such as "observation, comparison, principled selection of objects," and "hypotheses about causal relations."[16] She did so, moreover, against the backdrop of the upheavals of revolution, union, and the language shift. In managing this feat, she helped to pioneer a distinctive role for literature in subsequent Irish social analysis. Thus, one of Edgeworth's most influential efforts in her "literary" mode, *The Absentee* (1812), would provide an explicit template for Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* (1814), the novel that Georg Lukács famously placed at the beginning of the modern sociological tradition in fiction.[17] Not coincidentally, Edgeworth's novel has proven to be an important point of reference for at least two of our entries—*union* (by Clíona Ó Gallchoir) and *absentee* (by Joe Cleary) itself—each of which involves extended commentary on Edgeworth's sociological imagination.

If, as we suggest, Edgeworth helped to establish for Ireland a sociology that took place within Irish literature itself, her legacy has only expanded and strengthened with time, even if her name has been periodically forgotten along the way. A comparison with British cultural studies is instructive: John McGahern and Edna O'Brien were born between the end of the First World War and the early 1930s, just as Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams were, and similarly crafted a language of social analysis that was widely taken up and applied. In her work on twentieth-century emigration, Clair Wills has noted how, in the absence of a strong sociological tradition, literature has often been called in to provide explanatory frameworks for Irish culture. One result has been the field's early inattention to social theory and participatory social methods, as flagged by Linda Connolly.[18] Yet Wills has demonstrated the cultural power of a fictional language of social types, especially as this language moved, along with the population, between Ireland and Britain during periods of emigration. Where mid-twentieth-century Irish fiction offered "a language which was internally articulated, superficially directed towards elucidating local conceptions of status, class and re-

spectability in a period of immense change in the rural economy," those same words, "transferred to a British social milieu," might well simply spell out the contours of an "ethnic stereotype" that dropped nice class distinctions and instead fixed Irish immigrants as others within a British working-class world.[19]

It is clear enough, in any case, that contemporary Irish culture routinely turns to literature for analysis and understanding of the society at large—often with insight and brio, sometimes with mixed results. Consider the current popularity of Claire Keegan's *Small Things Like These*, Ireland's bestselling book of 2024 across all categories, with three years in the Top Ten sales of Irish books, and already more than 130,000 copies sold in the Republic alone.[20] On the one hand, the Keegan phenomenon exemplifies the enduring role of literature in the business of social explanation in Ireland. The novel was first published in 2021, the same year as the controversial findings of the government report by the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation. A film adaptation in 2024 contributed to its popularity, but its wide readership also testifies to its standing as a timely intervention in difficult contemporary debates about Ireland's treatment of its women and children. On the other hand, Keegan's use of familiar literary frames, in particular the genre of the Christmas tale with its tendency towards communal reconciliation, might be seen to distort the experiences of the countless women and children who were not saved by the actions of a heroic individual. Even the luminous qualities of Keegan's prose might, as a review in *The Guardian* put it, represent a "lightness" that "has become too light."[21] As shown by Clair Wills's essay on *home*, Irish culture continues to reckon not only with painful legacies of past injustice but also with the plight of the contemporary unhoused.

Forms of signification grounded in historically specific forms of circumvention and circumlocution are memorably realized in Seamus Heaney's 1975 poem, "Whatever You Say, Say Nothing" and more prosaically realized in the Irish term for the Second World War, "the Emergency." The word *absentee* not only describes the absence of Anglo-Irish land owners but the "all-too-palpable" presence of middlemen, effectively a class of stand-in rulers of the soil.[22] In his essay, Robert J. Savage shows how the word *troubles* belongs to that culture of patterned silences, a phrase that both evokes and eludes a thirty-year-long period of violence. And across this special issue, literature perhaps proves most useful when it reimagines history in the act of representing it. Writing about *union*, Ó Gallchoir not only draws on evidence found in the nineteenth-century fictions that were contemporaneous with the passing of the Act of Union but also turns to a speculative play, *The Alternative* (2019), for its provoca-

tive depiction of an alternative Ireland that remains part of the United Kingdom. And in the case of *migration*, Josephine McDonagh also turns to a kind of futuristic fiction, ending as she does on Paul Lynch's novel *Prophet Song* and its powerful return to the history of Irish emigration in dystopian mode.

More broadly, a case for the uncanny power of Irish literature at the level of the word might be made via the case of the nineteenth-century Irish poet James Clarence Mangan, credited as the first and sometimes the only use for no fewer than fourteen words in the *Oxford English Dictionary*.[23] Mangan is also a progenitor of the brilliant prose achievements of James Joyce, who raided the resources of nineteenth-century Irish writing for a new literary language. And it's not all exuberance and word play: Raymond Williams cites early-nineteenth-century Irish writer Lady Morgan in his discussion of the word bureaucracy, which Morgan used to mean a specifically colonial formation of knowledge and statecraft. The earliest uses of some keywords in our current academic formation came from Irish writers—the *OED* credits Jonathan Swift for the first use of the word modernism, while the first cited definition of Romanticism comes from a travel book by Lady Morgan.[24] Joyce himself was preoccupied, as Luke Gibbons has shown, with the thought that "coming events cast their shadows before," and in Joyce's case words are a crucial medium of such adumbration.[25]

In order to explore more fully this capacity of Irish keywords to produce precocious forms of conceptualization, we have included a limited selection of Irish-language words with strong explanatory power, though it will be clear enough that, unlike *Keywords in Caribbean Studies*, this collection remains chiefly focused on the English language. We have included some entries for words that began in Irish—*bog*, *gombeen*, and (possibly) *shanty*—along with others that that remained in that language—*aisling*, *duanaire*, and *seanchas*. Yet all, we hope, continue to resonate in the context of an Anglophone soundscape. In the case of *aisling*, the word evokes not only an experience in print but a living tradition of performance in the Irish language, of which the essay's co-author, Iarla Ó Lionáird, is a celebrated practitioner. In their contribution, Aileen Dillane and Ó Lionáird show how *aisling* not only describes a body of performed songs but also calls up indigenous forms of epistemology that might serve as a visionary social resource.

In some cases, our Irish language words were settled in dialogue with our contributors. Guy Beiner chooses to counterpoint Williams's word *tradition* with *seanchas*, a word that encompasses Irish history as preserved memory and story, with resonances reaching from the early medieval period into the seventeenth century through its remediation as recorded

stories and songs. We might well have thought of others, such as *dúchas*, a word with a range of meanings including nature, native, heritage, and hereditary right. A large part of Ireland's significant repository of folklore, collected in the early twentieth century and physically housed in University College Dublin, is digitally remediated on a website named *dúchas.ie*. Margaret Kelleher's word *duanaire*, which might in one reading belong to a shrinking world with a set of vanishing cultural codes, also lives on as a repository of a living culture, most especially in Seán Ó Tuama and Thomas Kinsella's adoption of the term for their influential 1981 anthology *An Duanaire, 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed*. *Gombeen*, discussed by Barry McCrea, perhaps occupies a middle ground, first found in English-language prints in the 1830s but drawing its energy from an Irish language oral context that is largely lost.

Questions of scale, significance, and reach attend our approach to English as well as Irish-language words. We include English-language words that emerged in Ireland, grew up with empire, and travelled across the world—these include *pale* and *plantation*. The keyword *settler*, as explored by Rashid Khalidi, describes a transferable set of colonial practices that grew in deadly force as they moved from Ireland to North America and Palestine. Heather Laird's essay on *partition* similarly tracks a word that is also a matter of imperial policy with lasting and deadly political effects.

We steered clear of proper nouns, though *pale* and *union* are both words whose first letter is capitalized on certain occasions. We might have added *boycott*, which grew out of highly specific Irish circumstances of the Irish Land War in the 1880s. As the *OED* describes its transitive use as verb: "Of tenants in Ireland: to isolate and ostracize (a landlord or land agent, or anyone not participating in such action) socially and commercially, by withholding labour, the supply of food, custom, etc., in order to protest at the eviction of tenants, secure a reduction in rents, etc. Now historical."[26] The *OED* gives an accurate enough description of the meaning of the word, though it is difficult to draw a line between the first "historical" use given and the second meaning listed: "to withdraw from commercial or social interaction with (a group, nation, person, etc.) as a protest or punishment; to refuse to handle or buy (goods), or refuse to participate in (an event, meeting, etc.), as a protest." And yet there is a missing cultural story, namely the historical figure of Captain Charles Cunningham Boycott, a retired army officer and English land agent who imposed rent increases and evictions in the spring of 1880 following the bad harvests of 1879. In response, the Land League called a general rent strike and launched a wholesale program of social ostracism that led to the flight of Boycott and his family. Boycott himself wrote to the *Times*

to complain of his treatment, and the story was widely covered in Irish, British, and American newspapers. Some journalists drew comparisons with the Anglo-Zulu War, with press reports comparing Irish tenants to bloodthirsty Zulus in their shared zeal to assault the empire.

Even when the earlier 1989 *OED* definition names Captain Boycott as "the original victim of the treatment described," the story of a word that describes the astonishing power of communal action is hardly complete.[27] Quite a few contributors to "Irish Keywords" use the *OED* much as Williams did. Some others call it into question, while still others find no resources there that are of use. Williams includes an evocative account of how he wrote up his *Keywords* while consulting unbound copies of the *OED* with their "rough uncut paper," volumes that were gifted to him by a student in his adult education class after the Second World War.[28] A number of our entries show how the information infrastructure of the colonial state—in particular the state papers—involved a linguistic re-ordering of history. The cases of *plantation* and *civilize* are especially enlightening in this regard. Rory Rapple shows how the Victorian *Calendars of the State Papers Relating to Ireland*—long a key resource for Irish historians seeking access to the early modern past—overlay the keyword *plantation* on a body of manuscripts that scarcely if ever employ the term.

Other significant sources for "Irish Keywords" include Terence Patrick Dolan's *A Dictionary of Hiberno-English*: a book rather than an online resource, and so an experience less likely to foster the "the *illusion* of immateriality" associated with reading and writing on a screen.[29] Williams's wish for "some form of presentation" that might allow for the description of complex forms of connection between words is potentially answered in the research resources available to our contributors, including access to historic newspapers and online state documentation.[30] A number of authors have found important evidence in eDIL, a digital dictionary of medieval Irish that is based on the Royal Irish Academy's *Dictionary of the Irish Language* and covers the period c.700 - c.1700. Three of its pioneering editors, Sharon Arbuthnot, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh, and Greg Toner, went on to popularize their detailed philological research in an engaging and attractively presented book, *A History of Ireland in 100 Words*.

For the present collection, our loose criteria for choosing an Irish keyword involved three considerations. The first is that it had to be a word—not a phrase, but a single word—with a distinctively, though not of course exclusively, Irish provenance. The second is that it had to be a word with important implications for understanding Irish "culture and society," as these have evolved over time. And the third is that, as in Williams's *Keywords*, it has to have had a meaningful trajectory as a word, rather than a concept or a fact. The word *gothic* gives us one

strong counter example—a pervasive concept in Irish culture but very difficult to track at the level of the word. The word *potato* provides another—we had thought, for example, about including it as a possible entry, but ultimately rejected it because, while the fact of the tuber itself is important in Irish history, the fact of the word *potato* is not.[31]

In practice, however, it turned out to be impossible for our contributors to separate words from facts quite so neatly. Words and facts are already imbricated in Williams's entries, of course, and in the essays collected here even more so, perhaps in part because of the charged political stakes for some of the keywords in question, as with *partition*, *union*, or *settler*. In the case of *hunger*, readers will find in Breandán Mac Suibhne's essay a principled objection to any prioritizing of the English word over the Irish fact, a position that plays out within the very organization of his essay. Such gestures resonate across Irish literature, where English-language words are found to make a poor fit with Irish lives and landscapes—think of Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980). In an 1827 tale, the novelist Gerald Griffin glosses the word "pit" alongside other terms including "haggart" (a word of Old Norse derivation that remains in use in rural Ireland to mean a small field close to a farmhouse), and offers the following observation: "There is a curious inversion in signification in the words *pit, ditch,* and *dyke,* in the sister isle. A potato *pit* is an *elevated* mound of earth, containing potatoes. A *ditch* is a dyke and a dyke means a ditch."[32] Edgeworth too in her *Irish Bulls* corrects the perception of strangers who might laugh at a newspaper advertisement for land, in which the acreage to be let is described as "entirely surrounded and divided by *impenetrable furze ditches, made of quarried stone laid edgeways.*" Ditches of course can be made of furze and stone combined and "the untravelled English reader" has much to learn not only about the art of hedging but also about "the technical terms of the country."[33]

Curious inversions and elisions are found in a number of the essays, not least in relation to a landscape that requires careful reading. Clara Tuite, for example, shows how environmentally rich bogs were often characterised as wastelands. Manchán Magan's books, *Thirty-Two Words for Field*, *Listen to the Land Speak*, and *The Irish Words for Nature* have begun to communicate the rich particularity of Irish landscape vocabulary as a resource in the face of climate crisis and global biodiversity loss. A related if more academically oriented undertaking in field-level conceptual vocabulary can be found in the digital project, the *Living Lexicon for the Environmental Humanities* and in the recent collection *Power Shift: Keywords for a New Politics of Energy,* edited by Imre Szeman and Jennifer Wenzel. Returning to the case of Ireland, Matthew Kelly, in a book prospecting environmental approaches to nineteenth-century

Ireland, notes a slim historiography on the topic and turns to Raymond Williams's keyword *nature* in order to begin to shape a critical language for an environmentally-oriented Irish studies.[34]

Accordingly, we have given some prominence to territorial terms, including *bog*, *pale*, *plantation*, and *settler*. To this extent, "Irish Keywords" comes closer to Williams's writing on Wales than to his English-language-focused research into social transformations registered at the level of the word. Whereas Williams dates but does not ground his terms in *Keywords*, his Welsh fictions and essays make resonant use of landscape as expressing a "structure of feeling" that is rooted in "the distinctive physical character of Wales as a whole."[35] Those same "distinguishing shapes" and lines of sight matter to a number of Irish keywords, notably *tour* as explored by Finola O'Kane, with its emphasis on perspective, position, and the kinds of cultural authority embedded in lines of sight that are also lines of language.

As we reflect on the words that are constellated in these pages we find that certain groupings could be identified, beyond the most obvious: English and Irish. Another grouping includes perfectly everyday English words—*hunger, home, tour, troubles*—that have acquired special relevance for Ireland. We have also included words that set off a depth charge, most notably *tinker*, often used as a term of racist abuse in contemporary Ireland and "now frequently regarded as derogatory or offensive" as the *OED* puts it.[36] In her essay on this word, Mary Burke offers some remarks on the parallel history of the word *traveller*. *Bog*, too, is often used in offensive ways, as in the insult "bogtrotter" or Francie Brady's description of finding himself in "a school for bogmen with bony arses" in Patrick McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*.[37] We might further observe that the relation of two of our keywords—*gombeen* and *brogue*—involves a diametrical opposition in respect to insider/ outsider status in Ireland. To call someone a *gombeen* man marks a speaker as belonging to the larger community of Irish speakers while also opening an avenue to a wider world of terms associated with class position: *buckeen*, *spalpeen*, and *paudeen* come to mind, all ending on a diminutive drawn from the Irish *ín* or little. The first term means a low-ranking member of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy, while the second refers to a poor migrant laborer. "Paudeen," a diminutive of Patrick, is memorably used by W. B. Yeats to convey a grasping Catholic middle class on the rise and more particularly to target newspaper owner and strike-breaker William Martin Murphy. Meanwhile, even now, to refer to a *brogue* marks a speaker as an outsider: one Irish person might refer to the Tipperary or Dublin accent of another but never to their *brogue*.

What about the practical guidelines that we offered our contributors as they approached the assigned keyword? How should these essays

relate to the entries in Williams volume of fifty years ago? Common to these words—whether they place the speaker or speak of place—is a set of distinctions between words and concepts. In addition to focusing on a word rather than a thing or a concept, we urged our contributors to follow Williams's example in looking not only at radically diverse meanings of a word—Paige Reynolds reflects on *brogue* as naming both a kind of accent and a kind of shoe—but also at the various forms of the keyword in question. In his entry for *science*, for example, Williams includes some valuable tracking of the back-formation *scientist*, a word that made a remarkably late entry into English (in the 1830s). Thus Joe Cleary's essay considers the term *absentee* in multiple contexts, and Josephine McDonagh's essay traces the many forms of the word *migration* (immigration, emigration, migrant, immigrant, emigrant). In Rory Rapple's account, much proves to depend on discriminating *plantation*, as naming a specific kind of military site, from other forms of the word (such as plant, planter, and planting). We also encouraged contributors to follow Williams in providing some outline of a word's evolution over time. We did not urge, however, that the resulting piece of work should follow Williams's format for charting that evolution—familiar to every reader of his "vocabulary." On the contrary, and above all, we stressed that these were to be essays rather than entries—understanding that, as essays, they could be open-ended, problem-oriented, and capable of offering reflections on, for example, the relevance of Williams's approach for the Irish keyword in question. Jane Ohlmeyer's essay on *civilize* takes special note, for example, of the fact that it is the one word that actually appears both in this volume and in Williams's, but with very different associations, not least in his choice of *civilization* as headline term.

We recruited contributors from across the disciplines of literary studies and history—including a pair of musicologists—and the mix of disciplinary expertise in this special issue is something we count as a strength. In keeping with our sense of the importance of the "literary" in this project, we encouraged many of our contributors to draw on their capacities as literary critics. A number of these essays (including those by McDonagh, Cleary, Reynolds, and Wills) include some discussion of particular literary works. For the historians, we noted a tendency to hew to events as much as to words, and we gave them licence to do so. The musicologists have played a riff on *aisling* that in the best ways, as will be clear, sets their essay apart from many of the others.

The essays gathered here think with and against Raymond Williams's generative *Keywords* approach to culture, heeding his call to pay attention to the work words are doing on the ground and offering close analyses of the actual language of social transformation. In several of our essays,

an analysis of a word's origin and journey through time finds something to say about the present, suggesting that philology as practised by Williams may even have a predictive quality. Two of our keywords, *plantation* and *shanty*, have found new meaning in a contemporary Ireland in which far-right anti-immigration discourse has gained ground. In the case of *plantation*, as Rory Rapple shows, an older nationalist resistance to settlement from Britain is now mobilized against refugees and asylum seekers, seen in a distorted historical mirror as a "new plantation" of the country. Tracking the meanings and movements of *shanty*, Lisa Goff brings her essay up to 2024 and the removal of temporary tented accommodation in Dublin. In the Dáil chamber, then-Taoiseach Simon Harris, T. D., announced that Irish people "do not live in a country where makeshift shantytowns are allowed to just develop."[38]

Efforts to contain and manage an unruly Ireland via its linguistic texture did not end with Spenser and Edgeworth. Where far-right groups graft new forms of hatred onto colonial history, a different kind of attempt to tackle cultural difference via language as it is used in Ireland is found in the ongoing art project, *Some Words for Living Locally*, led by Erica Van Horn, an American artist who has lived in France, Britain, and rural Ireland.[39] In 2002, her art press, Coracle Press, published *Some Words for Living Locally* in a limited edition of three hundred letterpress copies. The claim is different from Williams's: she selects "some words," rather than listing keywords, while her frame for these few choices is a local not a national one. And the project deliberately displays signs of its outsiderness, with a cover designed to resemble an Aliens Order card from the Second World War, overlaid with the book's title.

Some Words For Living Locally sets a few everyday Irish words apart on the page as art objects in themselves, inviting readers to encounter them as strange but also to recognize their authority in their own time and place. Some words are oblique in very ordinary ways: the word "messages," commonly used in Hiberno-English to mean groceries, has a facing page text that explains its meaning as "what you are sent to the shops to get, as well as what returns with you from the shops: the groceries or the shopping & the list itself."[40] Facing the word "clay" (a word that we considered for this collection) across white page space is a brief definition that works by encompassing a range of meanings while still evading explanation: "all dirt or soil, but not sand, or even clay." Joyce's story "Clay," with its strange suggestions and negations, its invocation of a living world of supernatural belief with biblical associations, feels close at hand.

Though we take Williams's book as a point of departure, he would have been the first to admit that the keywords methodology has its own

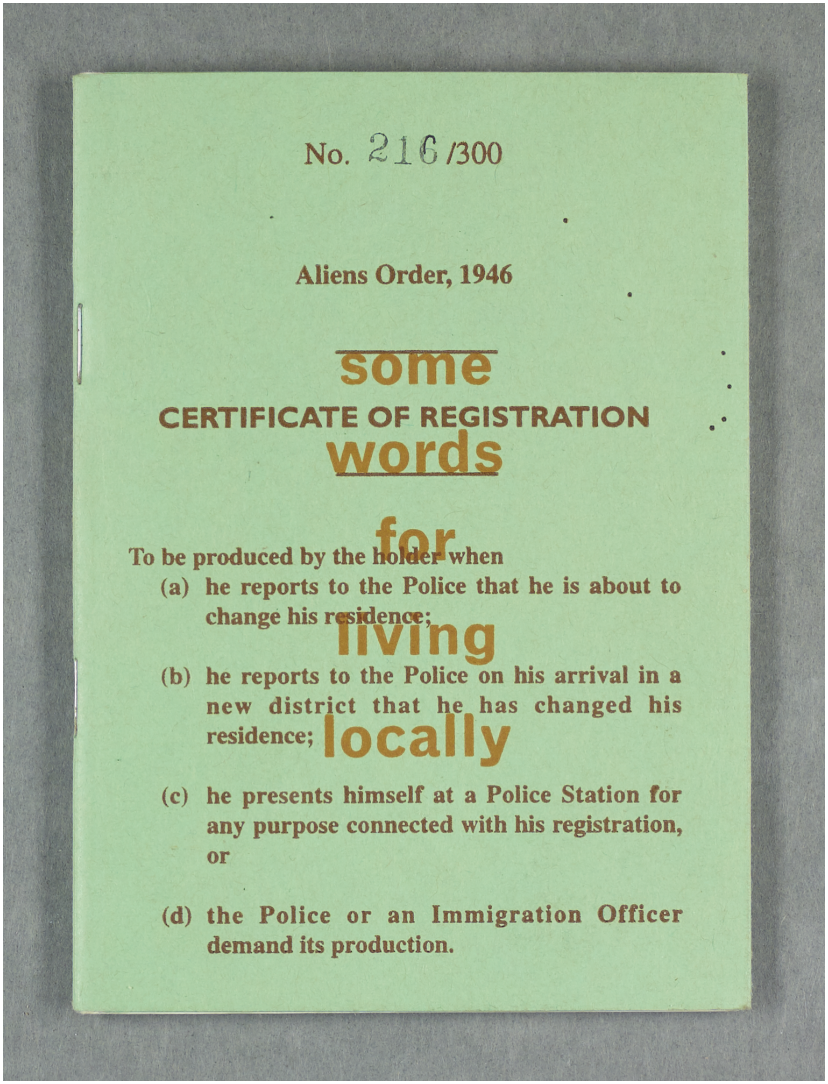

Fig. 1. Cover of *Some Words for Living Locally* by Erica Van Horn (Coracle Press, 2002). The Coracle Press Collection at UCC Library, University College Cork.

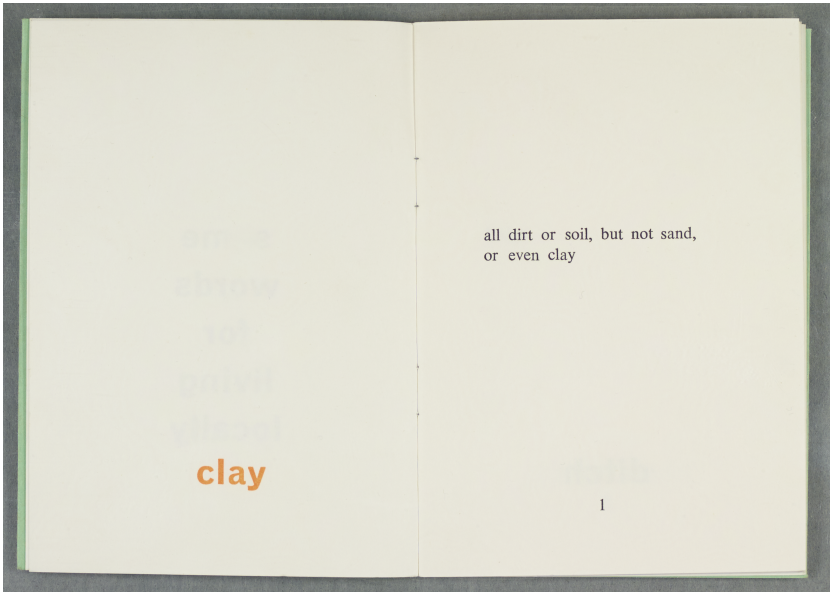

Fig. 2. "Clay," *Some Words for Living Locally* by Erica Van Horn (Coracle Press, 2002). The Coracle Press Collection at UCC Library, University College Cork.

history, beyond Britain and Ireland both. With Honoré de Balzac, this methodology is already emergent, early on in the sociological tradition of modern literary fiction that Edgeworth, by way of Scott, helped to establish. Lukács recognized Balzac as having taken up the sociological baton from Scott, and Balzac himself admitted as much in the preface to his first novel *Les Chouans* (1829). But Lukács did not know of Edgeworth's importance for Scott, and Ireland remained a missing piece in one significant strand of literary sociology. Balzac, though, along with closer attention to the role of keywords ramified by a tumultuous history, can help to reintroduce that strand in its literary texture. We close with a brief passage from an early Balzac novella that it is at once sociological and autobiographical, *Louis Lambert* (1832), a portrait of the novelist as a young man, disciple of Madame de Staël, reader of dictionaries and a lover of the adventure of words in time:

> Often . . . have I made the most delightful voyage, floating on a word down the abyss of the past, like an insect embarked on a blade of grass tossing on the ripples of a stream. . . .What a fine book might be written of the life and adventures of a word! It has, of course, received various stamps from the occasions on which it has served its purpose; it has conveyed different ideas in different places. . . The combination of letters, their shapes, and the look they

give to the word, are the exact reflection, in accordance with the character of each nation, of the unknown beings whose traces survive in us.[41]

Here's wishing the readers of these essays *bons voyages*!

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NOTES

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