



Dr Emily Ridge – English

Past Research

The philosopher Gaston Bachelard has observed that ‘one of the powers of attraction of smallness lies in the fact that large things can issue from small ones’. More often than not, my projects have likewise started with a curiosity about the larger implications of a small detail. My first major research project was prompted by a single word – luggage – and, from that word, I set about tracing the evolution of a modern culture of portability as well as the emergence of a portable aesthetic in modernist writing. The resulting book, based on my PhD thesis, was published in 2017 as part of the Critical Studies in Modernist Culture series at Edinburgh University Press: *Portable Modernisms: The Art of Travelling Light*. The book examines the heady effects of a new ‘travel light’ ethos on authorial practice and vision during the modernist period, but it equally tracks the changing resonances of this idea against a backdrop of political displacement and war from the 1930s onwards, when portability became less a choice than a necessity. My own life has been shaped by displacement too and it is this experience that doubtless first drew me to the works of modernism’s exiles and émigrés. My first sixteen years were spent in a bilingual English-Irish environment in Connemara. After that, I lived, for various periods, in The Netherlands, Dublin, Paris, London, Durham and Hong Kong before making this pleasingly circular return to Galway to begin work at NUIG in September 2020.

Current Research

If I had the figure of the modernist exile at the forefront of my mind when I initiated my work on modernism and portability, by the time I finished that project, I was thinking about the figure of the refugee. Developing a more specific focus on late modernist and mid-century British fiction, I became interested, following my PhD, in the question of how far an English literary tradition of novelistic hospitality came under pressure in the context of widespread refugee and immigration movements before, during and after the Second World War. In pursuing this topic, I co-edited a volume of essays with a former colleague at the Education University of Hong Kong, Dr Jeffrey Clapp, on the subject of the intersecting concerns of security and hospitality in modern and contemporary literature and culture. This was published by Routledge in 2015. In the same year, I won an Early Career Scheme grant from the Hong Kong Research Grants Council. This grant enabled me to carry out extensive archival research in the United States: at the Harry Ransom Centre in Austin, Texas, the McFarlane Library in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and the Daniel A. Reed Library in Fredonia, New York. Drawing directly on these archival findings, I have published

two articles on the work of Stefan Zweig and have two further essays forthcoming in 2021, on archival methodologies and on the interwar administration of hospitality at the English P.E.N.

Future Research

My work on hospitality and refugee reception around the time of the Second World War has organically led to a new interest in questions of narrative empathy and care in the mid-twentieth-century period. These interests will form the basis of my next book-length project and it will focus on works by mid-twentieth-century British women writers that might be characterised as unfeeling, from the late fiction of Virginia Woolf in the 1930s through to the early satires of Christine Brooke-Rose in the 1960s. These works signal a departure from earlier modernist endeavours to represent interior thought processes using devices such as stream of consciousness, towards more unempathetic narrative techniques and perspectives. I seek to interpret this shift more specifically in relation to the institutionalisation, bureaucratisation and commodification of care in the post-war period, drawing on theories of governmentality and surveillance developed by Michel Foucault, Nikolas Rose and others, as well as feminist and sociological interventions on the concept of care. Within this interdisciplinary framework, I aim to investigate the multiple ways in which these women writers respond, through different degrees of distrust, to the evolution of a discourse of care and empathy in British public, political and commercial life.