

Institution: University of Derby		
Unit of Assessment: 34		
Title of case study: Voices of Irish Diasporas: Using creative writing and oral history to foster a better understanding of Irish communities and identities		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 1 January 2014–31 December 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Dr Daithí McMahon	Senior Lecturer in Media	4 April 2016–present
Dr Moy McCrory	Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing	1 January 1997–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 January 2014–31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) Using films, broadcast media, analytical and autobiographical essays, and oral history, this case study has achieved three impacts through: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improved public understanding in Ireland and Britain of the historical relationship – and interdependency – between the Irish and British during the twentieth century. 2. Facilitating critical self-reflection by authors and audience about identities and community within the first and second-generation Irish diaspora. 3. Using a collage of individual stories and experiences to improve public understanding of Irish diasporic communities. 		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) This impact case study on UK Irish diasporas is informed by research publications and award-winning original creative outputs. It demonstrates how blending fact and fiction with personal experience provides effective opportunities for analysing, shaping and re-affirming Irish identities, both at home and abroad. The aim of this research is to capture a wider range of Irish diasporic experiences by re-discovering forgotten stories and providing new perspectives, such as those of second-generation women and social media users. Irish immigration was driven by economic hardship at home and the opportunities available elsewhere, such as the pull of the post-World War 2 British economy, which had skills and labour shortages. Chain migration and established local communities in the host countries offered new, lasting relationships and collective resources to help emigrants establish roots and maintain connections to Irish culture and heritage. McCrory and McMahon's research explores the varied activities of Irish immigrants (first and second-generation) over the past hundred and twenty-years and their relationships with others including host communities. Their work brings these experiences to a much wider public audience, informing critical self-perceptions of Irish identity in diasporic and home communities. The research aids the improvement of community relations by fostering respect, understanding and appreciation for the rich and diverse multicultural and multiethnic make-up of UK society. The research demonstrates that Irish diasporic bodies are comprised of a collage of experiences of shared history that informs different perceptions of self. Diasporas do not consider the homeland		

as something insular and fixed, but fluid and open to interpretation, which this research demonstrates.

McMahon's chapter [3.1] explores how Facebook serves as an effective medium for Irish expatriates to connect and engage in Irish history, heritage and culture. McMahon demonstrates how a Facebook page offers a valuable location for members of the Kerry diaspora to congregate, interact and reaffirm their identities. Informed by his acute understanding of radio audiences and the Kerry diaspora, which was formed during the process of investigating and writing-up this research chapter [3.1], McMahon, himself an Irish emigrant, has sought to investigate Irish diasporic contributions and experiences more extensively. He has brought lesser-known histories of Irish diasporic experiences to both a Kerry and wider international audiences through public broadcasts and audio dramas (detailed in section 5). He has also used a case study of Irish immigrants to Derby, England, during the 1950s and 1960s and public responses to his work through oral history projects and public exhibitions.

McCrory's research aims to assist in the first time capture of the diverse experiences of the second-generation Irish community in Britain, a group she contends have been largely rendered invisible, barely perceived, excluded and silenced. The research argues that second-generation Irish actively retain their creativity and use it to maintain connections with home and to re-affirm and shape their sense of identity. Through her groundbreaking co-edited anthology [3.2] combining fiction, poetry and essays by emerging and established/acclaimed writers, McCrory argues and articulates that newer explorations for narrative merging fact and fiction provide valuable expressions of experience. The anthology proposes how imagination and embellishment in storytelling shape Irish diasporic perceptions of the past by challenging conceptions of authenticity and belonging. McCrory's publication [3.3] investigates social attitudes to bereavement and grief relating to female public expression in Irish culture and diasporic communities. The essay examines attitudes towards behaviours of mourning in this demographic past and present, arguing that these have enabled the establishment of a female voice and presence that spans generations.

Together, McCrory and McMahon's research reveals how original creative, artistic and literary contributions explore how obscured or half-forgotten pasts can be re-engaged to forge a new understanding of diasporic experiences historically, on the part of individuals within such communities and those beyond.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1 McMahon, D. (2018) 'Opening up the debate: Irish radio, Facebook, and the creation of transnational cultural public spheres', in Föllmer, G., and Badenoch, A. (eds.) *Transnationalizing radio research: new approaches to an old medium*. Bielefeld: Transcript, pp. 247-256.

Double-blind peer reviewed book chapter.

3.2 McCrory, M. (2019) 'Memory and authenticity: imagining the past to understand the present' in French, R., McCrory, M. and McKay, K. (eds.) *I Wouldn't Start From Here: The Second-Generation Irish in Britain*. The Wild Geese Press, pp. 131-152.

McCrory's sole authored original research paper on memory and authenticity in the second-generation Irish diaspora community in Britain was peer-reviewed by her co-editors (creative writing lecturers at the University of Hull) as part of her co-edited collection (18 chapters, 243 pages). McCrory also contributed a co-authored 'Introduction' (pp. 1-6), a fictional piece reflecting upon the social impact of the Irish Troubles 'Combustible world' (pp. 208-218) and an interview with the writer Maude Casey 'An untold story: Writing as resistance' (pp. 111-124).

3.3 McCrory, M. (2017) 'A Time to Grieve: Women, Mourning and Remembrance in the Irish Diaspora Community' in French, R. and McKay, K. (eds.) *End Notes. Ten Stories about loss, mourning and commemoration*. Edge Publishing, pp 45-58.

Essay in peer-reviewed collection edited by University of Hull creative writing lecturers arising from multidisciplinary AHRC research network: 'Crossing Over – New Narratives of Death' (2012-16), in which the writer examines social attitudes to bereavement and grief relating to female public expression in the Irish diasporic community in England.

Grant funding

G3.1 Department of Foreign Affairs Community Development Fund. GBP1,000 awarded to The Derby Irish Association 2017 to support McMahon's project, *Our Story*.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Pathways to impacts have included exhibitions, broadcasts, online disseminations and public lectures and readings. The beneficiaries are the multi-generational general public who are members of, or who have links to, the Irish diaspora globally and in the UK.

Audio Drama

McMahon's radio drama 'William Melville: Eve of War' demonstrates his perceptive understanding of unappreciated Irish diasporic histories as well as his developing expertise in the needs and expectations of Irish radio audiences (in this sense, the audio drama both benefitted from and informed the research process and findings for 3.1). The audio drama challenged common perceptions of Irish immigrants in Ireland, the UK and internationally. Melville (1850-1918) was an Irish immigrant who had a major impact on British history, for example, by working in the secret service, but his activities were not properly detailed or recognised until this audio drama. The drama was first broadcast by Radio Kerry (01-01-2016), and after McMahon's appointment at Derby, was published by his company Henschman Productions on Soundcloud in 2016 (251 plays by 18-12-2020, see 5.1) and re-broadcast by Radio Kerry in 2017 (07-04-2017, approximately 33,000 listeners per broadcast, see 5.2). McMahon's production also drew international attention to the history of Melville in September 2016, when it was nominated amongst the 231 qualifying entries from 35 countries in the prestigious Prix Europa. It was described by the judging panel as amongst the 'best television, radio, and online productions' which were 'changing Europe' [5.4]. In June 2016, Henschman Productions won a Silver Trophy for the drama at the esteemed New York Festivals International Radio Program Awards [5.5], which honors, *"the exceptional and innovative programs being created on all continents."* The Grand Jury consisted of over 100 award-winning programming executives who sought to *"determine the World's Best Radio Programs"* [sic] with entries from over 30 countries and *"exceptionally strong competition"* [5.5].

Radio Kerry supported, broadcast and rebroadcasted McMahon's work on William Melville who had *"largely been forgotten"*, bringing it to a *"large audience"* [5.2]. The testimonial by the General Manager of Radio Kerry emphasised that the *"research was thorough and reliable"*, and McMahon employed his creative writing and radio production skills, *"to bring it to listeners in an engaging, entertaining and professional way"* [5.2]. Furthermore, McMahon's oeuvre, *"played a huge role in informing and educating Kerry audiences"* about Melville and, *"the Irish diaspora in the UK and further afield"*, representing and reinforcing, *"a different aspect of Irish identity often not told"* [5.2]. The General Manager also confirmed that, *"Daithi's work and the audience reaction to it directly led the station [to] continuing to support this type of content"*; citing the example of the 'Footprints' slot on their regular current affairs radio programme, *Kerry Today*. 'Footprints' features a historian from Kerry Library presenting lesser-known historical stories from the Library's archives and newspaper collections to the station's audience, enhancing awareness of local heritage and identity [5.2].

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI), who commissioned and funded the Melville project, deemed the work *"highly relevant to the Radio Kerry audience"* noting it has, *"enhanced understanding of Irish/Kerry history, heritage and experience"* and helped the audience, *"appreciate the challenges, successes, and experiences of the Irish diaspora in the UK"*

historically". The BAI further "welcomed" what it emphasised was an, "*historically accurate high quality radio drama*" [5.3].

Engaging with Oral Histories of Irish Immigrants

The personal experiences of fourteen first generation Irish emigrants were captured in the 26 minute film *Our Story* [5.7] which was shared publicly online from 21 December 2020 as part of the *To Be Irish Festival* and the content remains available online. Up to 31 December 2020, the film received 65 views, however, up to 12 January 2021 it received a further 1,146 views. An online survey was conducted to measure the public impact of the film with nine respondents completing it up to 31 December 2020 from three countries (5.9). A total of 90 respondents from five countries participated in the survey up to 12 January 2021. Of the nine, who responded by 31 December 2020, 66% felt the film changed their understanding of Irish diaspora communities (31% of the 90 respondents by 12 January 2021). Comments from these 9 respondents included: "*It has drawn my attention to the existence of the Irish community in Derby which I was not aware of. I also have a better understanding of why and how they arrived in the UK*". Another wrote: "*I wasn't aware that there was an Irish diaspora in Derby so this has made me aware*" and, "*The life that flourished abroad is not likely to have enjoyed similar richness had they stayed in Ireland*". The experiences which the respondents believed they had learned most from the film were how senses of community and identity were formed and shaped and the role of host nation hospitality in these processes. A selection of responses included: "*For me, it was how these people embraced their new country whilst maintaining strong 'Irishness' in accent, outlook and traditions.*" Another wrote: "*Many spoke of the importance of having Irish communities around them...to provide sense of belonging and community*" [5.9]. The Department of Foreign Affairs commented that *Our Story* allows for the: "*development of new ways to communicate and connect with the increasingly diverse global Irish, including non-traditional diasporas and young emigrants.*" It also encourages: "*intergenerational engagement... [which will]...ultimately celebrate, maintain and strengthen the links between Ireland and the Global Irish*", fostering a "*more vibrant sense of community and of Irish identity*" and improving, "*awareness and understanding of the Irish emigrant and diaspora experience...[which]...can help promote better awareness of Irish life and culture, to inspire and engage the next generation of the diaspora for years to come*" [5.8].

A 4-minute version of *Our Story* was exhibited at *FORMAT 19: Forever/Now*, the 2019 biennial iteration of the *FORMAT* International Photography Festival which was delivered in partnership with the University of Derby [5.6a, 5.6b]. The festival was featured in *The Guardian/Observer* (17-3-2019), the website reached some 14,000 unique users, had 2.3m Facebook engagements and over 180,000 Twitter impressions [5.6c]. Based on the success and positive reception of the 4-minute piece [5.6a] the 26-minute version of *Our Story* was produced [5.7].

Creative and Analytical Work

The impact of McCrory's chapter 'Memory and authenticity' and her co-edited book [3.2] is evident in the Irish Literary Society's comment that the work's essays are: "*vital aids in thinking about how the tropes of diaspora narratives inform a sense of identity and the stories we tell of ourselves to each other and to others*" [5.10b]. Novelist and poet, Martina Evans in a review for the *Irish Times* noted that the book was "*exceptionally fine*", "*[e]rudite, hilarious and heart-breaking*", "*packed with ... terrific characters and stories*", "*powerful*" and "*harrowing*", whilst McCrory's chapter 'Memory and authenticity' was adjudged "*excellent*" [5.10a]. Evans also noted the importance of the book in promoting intercommunity understanding, further describing the collection as, "*...ground-breaking and thought-provoking... [a] vital contribution' to Anglo-Irish relations*" [5.10a]. Impact has also been generated by live public readings and launch events which took place at the Five Leaves Bookshop in Nottingham, England (20-6-2019); Irish Literary Society/Cumann Éireannach na liteardhachta (30-09-2019); The Leeds Literary Festival (05-03-2020); and a live streamed launch at QUAD Arts Centre, Derby (08-09-2020) which attracted an audience of 80.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

5.1 McMahon, D. and O'Connor F. *William Melville: Eve of War*, radio drama. Published by Henschman Productions on Soundcloud in 2016. The dashboard counts and displays the number

of plays since publication. Available at: <https://soundcloud.com/henchman-productions/william-melville-eve-of-war-full-drama> (Accessed: 18-12-2020).

5.2 Testimonial by Radio Kerry General Manager (date of testimonial: 07-12-2020).

5.3 Testimonial from the BAI (date of testimonial: 04-01-2021).

5.4 Email correspondence/ press release in relation to the Prix Europa Festival (01-09-2016).

5.5 New York Festivals International Radio Program Awards correspondence (22-06-2016).

5.6 Group of items relating to the *Our Story* exhibition at FORMAT19:

5.6a McMahon, D. (2019) *Our Story: A History of the Irish in Derby*, Audio-Visual Exhibit, 4 minutes. *FORMAT19 Festival Forever/Now*, March–April 2019, University of Derby, Derby. Available at: <https://derby.openrepository.com/handle/10545/625536> (Accessed: 21-02-2021).

5.6b *Our Story* in the FORMAT19 exhibition catalogue. See: *Forever/Now* (QUAD Publishing, 2019), p. 70.

5.6c Troika PR Evaluation: *FORMAT19 Forever/Now* (2019).

5.7 McMahon, D. (2020) *Our Story: A History of the Irish in Derby*. Documentary Film. 26 minutes (online). *To Be Irish Festival*, 21–31 December 2020, University of Derby, Derby. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTIOdA3nh5Q> (Accessed: 21-02-2021).

5.8 Testimonial from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland (Date of testimonial: 03-07-2020).

5.9 *Our Story* - Audience Survey Data (18-12-2020–12-01-2021). Produced by the University of Derby (January 2021).

5.10 Group of items evidencing the impact of McCrory's work

5.10a Martina Evans, 'I Wouldn't Start from Here': Hilarious, heart-breaking diaspora tales', *The Irish Times*, 23 July 2019 [online]. Available at: <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/i-wouldn-t-start-from-here-hilarious-heartbreaking-diaspora-1.3952568> (Accessed: 18-12-2020).

5.10b Testimonial by the Irish Literary Society (date of testimonial: 04-12-2020).