

Introduction

Poetics of the Local

The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

—William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

No space disappears in the course of growth and development: the
worldwide does not abolish the local.

—Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*

I.

In his 1978 essay, “The Sense of Place,” Seamus Heaney laments what he sees as the diminishing presence of Ireland in the work of contemporary Irish poetry as new generations of poets slowly unmoor their identity from the country’s landscape. Replacing the “sense of place” is a deterritorialized perception of Irish identity and place. “We are no longer innocent, we are no longer parishioners of the local. We go to Paris at Easter instead of rolling eggs on the hill at the gable,” the poet bemoans, “‘It’s a far cry from the Moy.’”¹ While Heaney expresses his concern with some degree of irony, there is nonetheless a zero-sum game at work in his nostalgia in which globality and a globalized identity

always come at the expense of locality and a local identity. Conceived as opposite ends of a binary, the local and global are mutually exclusive and even hostile categories of cultural identity. It seems that the Irish poet cannot have Paris and the Moy too.

Heaney's sentiments reverberate well beyond the bounds of Irish literature and cultural criticism. Doreen Massey identifies how similar anxieties over the so-called "loss" of the local have emerged in an era of globalization. Such concerns circulate around the dissolution of "any sense of a local place and its particularity" and look longingly to a time "when places were (supposedly) inhabited by coherent and homogeneous communities."² The reactionary undertone of such anxieties is not lost on Massey, who argues that the "seeking after a sense of place" can slide dangerously into "certain forms of nationalism, sentimentalized recovering of sanitized 'heritages,' and outright antagonism to newcomers and 'outsiders.'" While Massey writes nearly three decades ago, the nostalgia for the local rings all too familiar in the contemporary moment as waves of resurgent ethnonationalism—with white supremacists resuscitating the Nazi slogan "Blood and soil"—sweep across Europe and the US.

A book on the poetics of the local may then seem outdated and ill-timed. But rather than looking to the local as a relic of a bygone era, I trace the ways that Irish poets have approached the local as a critical interlocutor with the forms of globalization they have found alienating and destructive. The poets in this book have strayed from the more laudatory accounts of globalization, which view it as a blissful period of geopolitical and cultural interconnections facilitated by innovations in travel and telecommunications. Instead, they call attention to the uneven experiences of economic development and cultural interchange under global capitalism, which has indeed connected places near and far but only within deeply asymmetrical relations of power.³ Following the lead of these writers, this book approaches the local and the global as not antagonistic but rather intersecting modes of engaging with the world. The local is often seen as a source of authenticity, a fragile site under duress as the monolithic machinations of globalization threaten to subsume everything within their grasp. Worse yet, the yearning for place reads like a coded kind of nativism, a backlash against migration and other forms of global movement. In the context of contemporary Irish poetry, the enduring centrality of place can be seen (sometimes deservedly so) as an embarrassing symptom of its formal and political conservatism. But in *Poetics of the Local*, I argue that the continued presence of place

in Irish poetry should not be dismissed as just the vestiges of a nostalgic nationalism but instead understood as a meditation on the material and emplaced effects of globalization—a way of discerning and therefore interrogating what are seemingly invisible and faraway processes.

Such an approach helps us view the history of Ireland in the twentieth century as more than the exclusive narrative of the creation of the Republic and the Troubles, and therefore also helps us situate Irish poetry in a more variegated political and economic frame.⁴ Though the processes of decolonization were integral to the nation's history, they reverberate elsewhere than in Ireland's relationship with the United Kingdom. I reroute attention to events such as the country's accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1972; the installation of corporate tariff breaks in the 1980s and the subsequent influx of multinational corporation investments; the 1990s boom period of the Celtic Tiger and its spectacular crash in the first decade of the new millennium; the 2004 referendum, which changed the basis of Irish citizenship from *jus soli* (automatic citizenship to those born in Ireland) to *jus sanguinis* (citizenship determined by the nationality of one's parents). Such events are watershed moments that have equally marked Ireland's postcolonial condition. As the ongoing fallout from Brexit and the Irish financial crisis makes evident, Ireland's role in global politics cannot be contained within a schematic metropole-and-colony dyad. Critically engaging with discourses of globalization, the poets in this book point to broader literary and economic systems—an emergent, transforming global situation that confounds any simplistic nationalist identity. At the heart of *Poetics of the Local*, then, is a centralizing question: at a time when the languages of open-market economics, urban development, and world literature were promoted as “transcending” the local, how did Irish poets understand the place of Ireland in the world?

This book pursues this line of inquiry by examining a series of spaces implicated in the growing pains of a rapidly globalizing Irish economy: Alice Lyons's “ghost estates,” the empty housing projects built during the Celtic Tiger and then abandoned after its crash; St. Stephen's Green, the historic Dublin square whose grand Georgian architecture was subsidized by financial capital, as Paula Meehan explores in her poetry; the disappearing agricultural order in Seamus Heaney and John Montague's pastoral poetry; the urban “regeneration” of Belfast during and after the Troubles, as depicted by Ciaran Carson, Sinéad Morrissey, Alan Gillis, and Leontia Flynn; the cross-cultural communities imagined by Paul Muldoon.

In exploring both the material and imaginative configurations of these spaces, I wed together critical lenses from globalization studies, critical geography, and ecocriticism. At the same time, through close textual analysis, I show how these writers renovated poetic genres, modes, and forms—including the occasional, pastoral, and loco-descriptive poems, and the figures of apostrophe and conceit—to articulate new forms of place and belonging in contemporary Ireland. By many accounts, Ireland is one of the most, if not the most, globalized country in the world.⁵ Yet, as demonstrated by the work of these aforementioned writers, place has continued to loom large in contemporary Irish poetry. This book reads poetry in light of the transnational forces of neoliberalism and uneven development, showing how these global forces and conditions have shaped poetic innovation in Ireland. In doing so, my project moves in two directions: on the one hand, it asks how the local inheres in Irish poetry at a moment when discourses of globalization are dominating politico-economic policy. On the other, it argues that Irish history and cultural production, particularly poetry, have not only participated in but can also give new insights into emerging scholarship on global poetics and other literatures produced under conditions of globalization.

While “local” and “place” are obvious conceptual bedfellows, at first glance “local” and “globalization” may seem fundamentally at odds with one another. “Local” derives from the Latin *locus*, but its earliest usages in the English language did not refer to a geographic place but rather emerged first in the fields of medicine and theology. In medicine, “local” referred to a contained area of the body on which topical medicine was applied (such as a local anesthetic), while in theology it signified the space of the immanent and human as opposed to that of the celestial and spiritual. (In his 1777 work *Disquisitiones*, for instance, Joseph Priestley writes that the “Cartesians have . . . maintain[ed] that spirits have no extension, nor local presence.”) Material and spiritual, encircled and unbounded: the local, since its earliest origins, has captured a wide sense of scale from the most delimited zones of the body to the heavens above.

Similarly, globalization has been defined by a preoccupation with scale. While the term “globalization” carries a much less storied past, having only begun to appear in the 1970s, it has since generated a wide range of meanings. David Harvey defines the experience of globalization as that of “time-space compression,” the concept he coined to describe the breakdown of spatial barriers and distances caused by the acceleration

of capitalist production and exchange. Writing more recently, Harvey views globalization as a fundamental “shift in the geographical scale at which capitalism is organized” with a reorganization of geopolitical power away from the nation-state and toward supranational institutions like the World Bank, World Trade Organization, and International Monetary Fund.⁶ Anthony Giddens has frequently challenged Harvey’s focus on globalization as an exclusively economic phenomenon, but he likewise understands globalization as a change in scale caused by the “intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.”⁷

My book leans on the local as one of its central terms because it is an inherently relational concept—conjuring at once the materially grounded spaces of the natural and built environments and also the territorially unbounded movements of global capitalism. Of course, it is now old hat to recognize that the local is shaped by far-flung global forces. But what has been less clear is how such shifts in scale can be attended to in our modes of literary and cultural analysis. Clichés like “think global, act local” and “glocalize” paper over the complex shifts of conceptual register that are required of such thinking. Ursula Heise critiques a similar line of rhetoric in US environmentalism, pointing out that the “local is not just a seamless extension of the global.”⁸ This book, then, forefronts the question of how to think across and think together the seemingly incommensurate scales of the local and global. How can literary scholars negotiate between the macro-level analyses of globalization studies with the micro-level sensitivities of close reading? How can poetry help us negotiate these different conceptual registers? At a time when the nation-state and the world are no longer the obvious frameworks of analysis, what is the scale of literary study?

To answer such questions, we can look to modernist studies, where scholars have turned to the concept of scale itself as a way of widening the field’s geographic reach and expanding its archives and languages.⁹ Central to such conversations is modernism’s scalability, or the broadening of the field’s modes of analysis and the very definition of modernism itself to include periods and cultures outside the traditional purview of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century European and American literature and art. The anthropologist Anna Tsing defines scalability as the “ability to make one’s research framework apply to greater scales, without changing the research questions,” and her definition reveals how

scale is often implicitly synonymous with scaling up.¹⁰ (For instance, a business plan is scalable and only has value to a company if it can be “scaled up” and implemented in larger markets.) This sense of scalability is recapitulated in recent treatises on scale that privilege the macro, global, and maximal. In a special issue on “Scale and Form; or, What Was Global Modernism?,” editors Thomas S. Davis and Nathan Hensley pioneer a model of modernist studies that “coordinate[s] macro-level analyses of the world-as-system—the maximalist model—with particularized attention to individual cultural objects or moments within them.”¹¹ But their emphasis ultimately tilts toward the former; as they later write, modernism is always “best understood as a maximal rather than restricted phenomenon.” In her call for a “planetary modernism” that would open up the “capacious archive of global modernities,” Susan Stanford Friedman argues for abandoning definitions of modernism as a distinct historical period and designating it instead as a “loosely configured set of conditions that share a core meaning of accelerated change.”¹² While she argues that it is crucial to attend to the “small scale of localized, even textualized particularities,” her study seems to belie such an attention to the local and particular. Friedman’s model of planetary modernity rests on scaling up the definition of modernity to include “stories” that envelop everything from the Mongol Empire to the Song and Tang dynasties to contemporary Shanghai in a single chapter. Rather than being subsumed under the umbrella of “Western modernity,” the whole world is now incorporated under the new moniker of “planetary modernity.”

Gendered spatial tropes underpin the privileging of the “planetary,” which pits the “maximal” against the “localized.” In conventional oppositions of the local and global, the local is associated with the feminized spaces of the private, insular, and domestic. Feminist scholars have long critiqued the discourses of nationalism that have embodied the nation as passive, feminized victims of male imperial power. Elizabeth Butler Cullingford argues that male Irish poets often personified the nation as idealized visions of Irish womanhood, reducing both land and women to the status of material objects to be reclaimed from colonial aggressors: “Politically, the land is seen as an object to be possessed, or repossessed: to gender it as female, therefore, is to confirm and reproduce the social arrangements which construct women as material possessions, not speaking subjects.”¹³ In a similar vein, Geraldine Pratt and Victoria Rosner point out that even the seemingly innocuous call to “think global, act

local” reinforces the gendering of space “by associating the global with theory, objectivity, and causation, while depicting the local as embodied, unthinking, and determined by outside forces.”¹⁴ To scale up, then, is to circulate within the abstract and sophisticated machinations of the global; to scale down, by contrast, is to fall into crude and “unthinking” materialism.

We can see a similar assumption at work in Jahan Ramazani’s critique of what he calls “loco-materialist approaches” in poetry criticism, which offer a corrective to the “placeless” formalism of New Criticism and deconstruction by “explor[ing] poems in relationship to the historical sites from which they emerge.”¹⁵ While Ramazani acknowledges some of the critical insights of loco-materialist scholars, he finds them guilty of what he calls “locational fallacy,” of conflating the setting of a poem with its real-life referent. He reminds loco-materialists that, “Poems may not be ‘about’ places in the same way that a pin can be pushed into a real or digital spot or that GPS can calculate a position.”¹⁶ According to Ramazani, an overemphasis on a poem’s locality both misses the formal workings of poetry and misunderstands how the local itself is far from a stable and homogenous referent, particularly in a globalized era: “Such loco-materialist arguments . . . advance a model of the poetry of place . . . that is ultimately insufficient to the complexities of poetic mimesis and formal mediation, perhaps especially under global modernity.”¹⁷ However, one might query the claim that an attention to place is necessarily at odds with an appreciation of poetic form. But more concerning is how Ramazani divulges an underlying assumption that folds together the local with the indexical in his critiques of loco-materialists. For instance, he describes their “implicit representational ideal” as the “empirical documentation of a limited historical space.” But few scholars would argue—or, indeed, have argued—for reading poetry in order to supply “empirical documentation” of a place; even fewer would judge a poem’s value on the fidelity of its description or its ability to produce an “authentic reproduction of the singularities of singular places.” If the locational fallacy rests on the overvaluing of a poem’s place, Ramazani’s account of loco-materialism rests on the conflation of the local with verisimilitude and indexicality.

The poetry of Sinéad Morrissey elucidates the complex relationships between locality, materiality, and poetic form, and demonstrates how an attention to place need not assume an ideal of indexicality. At first glance, Morrissey’s poem “In Belfast” seems to lure the reader into

the trap of locational fallacy, as the title and recitation of place-names (including references to the Lough, Royal Avenue, Albert Bridge, and the Transport Workers' Union) firmly anchor the poem in the writer's home city. Morrissey emphasizes the architectural and even meteorological solidity of Belfast, which comprises grandiose Victorian buildings ("ballast of cooper and gravitas") weighed down by an "iron sky" leaden with rain and fog. But all that is situated melts into air in the second half of the poem as the city dissolves into a haze of rain and mist: "The city weaves itself so intimately / it is hard to see, despite the tenacity of the river / and the iron sky; and in its downpour and its vapour I am / as much at home *here* as I will ever be."¹⁸ The city's intimacy does not so much assure a sense of place as make it difficult to discern altogether. In the poem's opening line, the deictic "here" grounds the poem in a specific, rooted site: "Here the seagulls stay in off the Lough all day." But by the poem's conclusion, Belfast's architectural and environmental materiality is supplanted by the speaker's uncertain feelings of being "at home here." As words that gesture toward people and places, deictics are usually assumed to point to worlds outside the pages of the poem. But Andrew Weaver notes that deictics "'shimmer' between a possible, provisional specific interpretation and a possible, provisional general interpretation . . . '[H]ere' can be both a particular—though unspecified—place . . . as well as a self-reflexive gesture to the poem itself."¹⁹ In Morrissey's poem, we are similarly unsure of where exactly "here" is; the poem's deictic ambiguity resists any attempts to fix it definitively in either the space of the city or the poem itself. Rather than acting as a pushpin on a map, the poem shimmers between material and poetic place. Despite the poem's emphatic location "In Belfast," Morrissey's work is far from a simple documentation of Belfast's topographical textures. Morrissey instead emphasizes how the local (after all, what is more local than "here"?) is an unsettled site, the product of a set of highly mediated cultural and historical practices.

But Morrissey's unsettling of the local bespeaks more than just the restlessness she feels in her home city; her poetry also registers Belfast's uneasy transition from the locus of sectarian violence during the Troubles to a now "post-conflict," global city. Morrissey is part of a generation of "Peace Poets," or Northern Irish writers who established their careers after the IRA cease-fire in 1994 and Belfast Agreement in 1998.²⁰ (In this book's third chapter, I further analyze the work of this cadre of poets.) Morrissey shares with her cohort a deep skepticism over what they see as the false promises of the Peace Process, which has couched peace and

reconciliation in primarily economic terms. The architects of the Peace Process attracted support by promising participants a “peace dividend,” or economic growth in the form of foreign investments and Northern Ireland’s integration into global markets.²¹ Morrissey experiments with deixis again in “Tourism” to ridicule the commodification of the city’s sectarian geography, now repackaged and peddled as heritage tours to lure curious European visitors: “We take them first to those streets / they want to see most, at first, / as though it’s all over and safe behind bus glass.” But in the final stanzas of the poem, Morrissey’s scorn dissipates into a surprisingly open, albeit also wary, welcome for future visitors:

Unabashedly, *this* is our splintered city,
 and *this*, the corrugated line between doorstep and headstone.
 Next, fearing summary,
 We buy them a pint with a Bushmills chase
 And *then* on to the festering gap in the shipyard
 The Titanic made when it sank . . .
 So come, keep coming *here*.
 We’ll recklessly set chairs in the streets and pray for the sun.
 Diffuse the gene pool, confuse the local kings,
 infect us with your radical ideas; be carried *here*
 on a sea breeze from the European superstate
 we long to join; bring us new symbols,
 a new national flag, a xylophone. Stay.²²

At first, the deictic “this” acts as a possessive that cements the speaker’s custody of “our splintered city.” Operating as both tour guide and native informant, the speaker seems to physically point to the remnants of the city’s sectarian and deindustrialized past: “this, the corrugated line” of old Republican-Unionist barriers, “Next . . . the festering gap” where Belfast’s once thriving shipbuilding industry stood. (This makes all the more sense if we remember that “deixis” originates from the Greek *deiknūnai*, meaning to point or show.) But by the poem’s close, the deictic markers have loosened their firm grip on the city. As Belfast is rebranded in a post-conflict era of global capital, its history of “local kings” and very “gene pool” about to be “infected” by the influx of tourists (and more significantly EU investments), the deictic “here” points to a city whose identity is on the cusp of being entirely remade by “new symbols / a new national flag.” Yet the poem does not close with an ethnonationalist nostalgia for a now-lost Belfast, as the speaker directly addresses and

invites the visitors to “keep coming here” and even to “Stay.” (Moreover, Morrissey has spoken optimistically of the racial and cultural diversity that immigrants would bring to Northern Ireland.)²³ Instead, while the poem ends on a note of hospitality and openness, Morrissey also cautions against equating globalization (the “European superstate / we long to join”) with more genuine forms of cosmopolitanism.²⁴

Ramazani is right to stress that, “before equating the global with present-day ‘capital and data,’ let’s remember that the poets were there before the economists . . . The globe is more than global capital.”²⁵ But Morrissey offers the rejoinder that it is equally important not to privilege utopian imaginings of the world over a critical analysis of the material effects of globalization—nor are poetry and politico-economic critiques of global capitalism necessarily opposed modes of engaging with the world. In her poetry, Morrissey shows how the particularities of the local cannot be separated from the processes of globalization and uneven development that make them visible and experienceable in the first place. While the writers in this study come to varying and sometimes conflicting conclusions, they are united by a shared commitment to make legible what are insignificantly local places—too “local” to be addressed by the terms of globalization studies. The turn to the local—despite being laden with problematic senses of nostalgia (and sometimes precisely because it does shoulder associations with nativism and ethnonationalism)—allows these writers to see how global capital manifests within specific places, whether in the architecture of post-cease-fire Belfast or the ghost estates that dot the countryside of the post-recession Republic. By fixating on these local sites, these poets negotiate between the macro and micro levels of analysis, between the abstract language of globalization and the more concrete figurations of poetic language. In so doing, the writers discussed in *Poetics of the Local* not only demonstrate how the supposedly deterritorialized and dematerialized processes of global capital make themselves known in place and space; they also show how their poetics of place can become an effective means of reflecting on and interrogating globalization.

II.

While I seek to make porous and flexible the geographic boundaries of my book, I also want to make the case that contemporary Irish poetry is

a key site from which to contemplate the complex relationships between globalization, locality, and place. The archive of contemporary Irish poetry that I explore—written from the late 1960s to the present—coincides with some of the country’s most seismic geopolitical upheavals and falls under what has been designated the post-1973 era of late capitalism by Marxist scholars like Fredric Jameson and Giovanni Arrighi. As these scholars have argued, the cultural dominant in this era takes the name “postmodernism,” and its political dominant is neoliberal globalization. This same period has also been witness to Ireland’s most decisive economic shake-ups in the twentieth century: its accession to the EEC in 1973, the brief economic boom of the Celtic Tiger from the mid-1990s to 2008, and the subsequent financial crisis. Moreover, the violence of the Troubles reached its zenith in the 1970s and was pushed into the spotlight of international news media after the events of Bloody Sunday in 1972. But despite the fact that this tumultuous period of economic and political unrest coincides almost precisely with the Marxist periodization of late capitalism and globalization, relatively little scholarship has situated Irish poetry within these global flows.²⁶

In *Poetics of the Local*, I bring global theory to bear on this archive of contemporary Irish poetry by turning to analyses of globalization that take into account the materiality of space and place. Earlier scholars of globalization often utilized the language of flow and scape to describe what they saw as the fluidity and movement of globalization. But in recent years, especially as ecocriticism has permeated global studies, theorists have instead emphasized more spatially informed and “grounded” theories of globalization. Saskia Sassen understands growing forms of inequity (such as rising poverty levels, land evictions, austerity measures forced upon peripheral economies) as a series of “expulsions,” or instances when vulnerable peoples and places are displaced and “expelled from the core social and economic orders” by new technologies of financialization and resource extraction.²⁷ Similarly, Annie McClanahan revises older Marxist notions of finance capitalism as totally dematerialized, arguing instead that the material processes of “violent political force, scarce natural resources, and brutalized working (or not-working) bodies . . . underwrite [financialization’s] apparent abstraction.”²⁸ In his theory of world-ecology, Jason Moore dissolves the binary that separates social and environmental history, arguing instead that capitalism has always been a socio-ecological process comprised of “ecological regimes.” Borrowing from Henri Lefebvre and other Marxist geographers, he explains that “all social relations are

spatial relations; social relations develop through, and actively co-produce, space . . . Space is, then, not simply ‘out there’ but joins in specific complexes of social relations and ‘built environments.’”²⁹

These geographically informed lenses allow us to recalibrate the ways we have approached the histories of colonialism and dispossession in Ireland. For instance, the period of early modern Irish plantation included not just the displacement of native populations but also the mass deforestation of oak forests that made way for farmland and provided lumber for the English shipbuilding industry. The destruction of Ireland’s ecological biodiversity reached apocalyptic proportions with the Great Famine in the 1840s, an environmental disaster spurred by a monocultural food system that was developed to feed a growing peasant labor force. Sharae Deckard argues that Irish history must be situated beyond its colonial relationship with the UK and as part of a wider global history of capitalist accumulation, in which the country’s natural resources were extracted to provide new sources of cheap energy: “The reorganization of Ireland’s biologically diverse bogs and forests into rationalized sites of capitalist monoculture was crucial to the erosion of Irish self-sufficiency and the integration of the island into the capitalist world-ecology.”³⁰ Although there is no shortage of Irish scholarship that concentrates on land and landscape (Deckard concedes that the “significance of land and agriculture is almost overdetermined in Irish historiography”), there still remains important work to be done to read these histories of dispossession within broader politico-economic and ecological frameworks.

How then might we analyze the persistent importance of place in contemporary Irish poetry within these global frameworks? Scholars of Irish literature have long meditated on the relationships between place and identity, but often within the parameters of the nation-state, particularly as the Troubles deepened fault lines over the question of national self-determination. Elmer Kennedy-Andrews argues that modern and contemporary Irish poetry has been vital to articulating competing claims to land and country, from Yeats’s projects of cultural nationalism that attempted to carve out a space for the besieged Anglo-Irish class to Heaney’s mythological constructions of a Catholic indigenous connection to the land: “Poetry becomes an act of imaginative repossession, the recreation of community as synonym or synecdoche for the nation.”³¹ While Kennedy-Andrews is latitudinarian about such acts of “imaginative repossession,” David Lloyd stridently criticizes these impulses in Heaney’s poetry and accuses the poet of metaphorizing the land as

a figure of unbroken historical continuity—and therefore fabricating a false sense of national community: “[Heaney] uncritically replays the Romantic schema of a return to origins through fuller self-possession, and accordingly rehearses the compensations conducted by Irish Romantic nationalism. But his poetic offers constantly a premature compensation enacted through linguistic and metaphorical usages which promise a healing of division simply by returning the subject to place.”³² What for Kennedy-Andrews is an act of “imaginative repossession” for Lloyd is a poetic sleight of hand in the service of empty cultural nationalism.

Since the rise and fall of the Celtic Tiger, however, it has become customary to speak of Ireland as caught in a moment when national identity is on the decline. In a scorching editorial for the *Irish Times*, Declan Kiberd accuses contemporary Irish artists of worshipping the ideology of “Europeanization” and “declar[ing] their embarrassment in the face of simple-minded notions of nation, faith and fatherland [and helping] to erode these forces.”³³ But for Justin Quinn, the “disappearance of Ireland” ushers in an era of postnationalism that liberates Irish poetry from such nationalist constraints; rather than “mov[ing] in concert with a larger nationalist objective . . . [contemporary Irish poets] bear witness to the multitudes the island contains, and have extended its borders to include a fair piece of the known world.”³⁴ Jefferson Holdridge and Brian Ó Conchubhair are more agnostic in their tellingly titled collection *Post-Ireland?* but nonetheless present a familiar argument: “Once, the larger threat was England, the United Kingdom, then America, now it is the European Union or globalization.”³⁵

While the scholars surveyed above represent a wide and sometimes conflicting range of politics, a familiar refrain echoes throughout their analyses of modern and contemporary Irish culture, where “nation, faith, and fatherland” have ceded ground to the realities of the globalized “new Ireland.” Because Irish studies consolidated as a field at a time of intense intellectual infighting and during periods of partition and sectarian violence, the impulse has often been to divide scholarship along the fault lines of political and ideological affiliations—nationalist or revisionist, postcolonial studies or other critical theory. Although this disciplinary history should not be neglected, the attention on these fissures obscures how these scholars also tread shared ground.³⁶ Whatever their politics and whatever conclusions they draw, many periodizations of twentieth-century Irish literature rely on a pervasive tendency to read Irish modernism as split into two antipodal ideologies. According to such accounts, Revival-

ism is regarded as a holdover of nineteenth-century romanticism that is obsessed with Gaelic culture, Irish mythology, and the West of Ireland. Yeats is the quintessential representative of the Revival's fascination with peasant culture, especially in his early career as a proto-anthropological collector of Irish fairy tales and folklore. Modernism, on the other hand, is defined by its rejection of such cultural and national insularity. Instead, "true" modernists like Joyce and Beckett turned their backs on what they saw as the stifling provincialism of Irish nationalism and dedicated their careers (spent primarily on the European continent) to more innovative and cosmopolitan aesthetic practices. A similar binary underwrites the diagnostic accounts of postnationalism—whether Quinn's celebration of the "disappearance of Ireland" or Kiberd's more doleful outlook.

Rather than taking a side, I draw attention to how the concept of place has subtended these differing accounts of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Ireland. It is easy to discern that these periodizations rest on a spatialized teleology in which cultural nationalism subsides and is traded in for a more outward-looking cosmopolitanism. Indeed, by these accounts, the story of modern Ireland is a retreat from place and a move toward placelessness. But such a teleological view obfuscates the much more complex relationship between Revivalism and modernism that has characterized twentieth-century Irish culture.³⁷ It would be much more useful to reframe such dichotomies as instead dialectically linked cultural modes and to trace the ways that Irish writers have looked to the local in ways that can generate useful critiques of globalization as well as alternative forms of filiation outside the nation-state. This allows us to read the lingering centrality of place as something more than the residuals of nationalism or backward provincialism. Rather, Irish poets turn to place as a means of literally and figuratively grounding their critiques of the seemingly abstract and removed machinations of global capitalism, which are often seen as occurring offstage in some other corners of the Global North and South. As *Poetics of the Local* demonstrates, Irish poets confront the advent of globalization in Ireland not only through a repudiation of cultural nationalism but through a cultivation of the local.

III.

Irish poetry might not seem the most obvious archive to use in an analysis of globalization's effects on literary and cultural production. In addition

to its seeming obsession with the “nation question,” contemporary Irish poetry has often been occluded from larger critical conversations in poetry and poetics for its perceived formal—and correspondingly political—conservatism.³⁸ Additionally, poetry more largely has been more reluctantly folded into broader sociohistorical analyses, and still relatively little postcolonial and global studies scholarship centers on poetry when compared to the novel. This stems in part from a holdover notion that poetry is inherently private—an “utterance overheard,” as John Stuart Mills famously described it—and therefore unsuitable for narrating the processes of nation-building, decolonization, and globalization. As Shira Wolosky explains, the concept of poetry as a “self-enclosed aesthetic realm . . . to be approached through more or less exclusively specified categories of formal analysis” emerged in the late nineteenth century and since then has governed the ways we read poetry today.³⁹ The result is that poetry criticism has often impeded rather than enabled newer modes of analysis for contemporary poetry. As Walt Hunter cogently argues, “knowledge of poetic devices serves as a border check for those interested in poetic criticism, slowing contemporary poetry’s reception, inhibiting pedagogy, and operating like a canon of revealed truths.”⁴⁰ Many scholars have sought to break open such hermetic modes of interpretation, as demonstrated by critical interventions such as Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins’s new lyric studies, Dorothy Wang’s call to read together poetic innovation and race, and recent work on global poetics by Harris Feinsod, Hunter, Sonya Posmentier, Ramazani, and Anthony Reed, among others.⁴¹

Poetics of the Local learns from and works in concert with these scholars; in so doing, I hope to bring closer together poetics studies and Irish poetry criticism, as these scholarly conversations have sometimes been siloed from one another. One of the central aims in this book is to show how contemporary Irish poetry has much to contribute to emerging conversations in global poetics. For better and for worse, Irish poetry has served as a political battleground in the heated intellectual skirmishes waged between revisionist and nationalist scholars, which have both polarized and helped shape the field of Irish studies over the past half century. Irish poetry, then, has not been cocooned within a “self-enclosed aesthetic realm” but rather read against the backdrop of colonialism, decolonization, and partition. (To give one brief but telling example: when Heaney moved from Belfast to County Wicklow during the Troubles, his move was accompanied by multiple newspaper editorials,

including one in the *Protestant Telegraph* that delighted in the departure of the “well-known papist propagandist.”⁴² Margaret Greaves has pointed out the glaring omission of Irish poetry in new lyric studies, which she persuasively argues is a “missed opportunity” in that “nowhere in the postwar poetry world have poetics, politics, and history intersected with such concentration and with such investment in Anglo-American ideas about the lyric as in Northern Ireland.”⁴³ Given its long engagement with histories of displacement and given Ireland’s sudden global profile with the Celtic Tiger and now as the poster child of fiscal austerity and post-recession recovery, contemporary Irish poetry serves as a prime archive for understanding how poets can work within and intervene in discourses of globalization.

Alice Lyons illustrates how contemporary Irish poetry—and the landscapes it often sets its sights upon—is a rich site of engagement with globalization. In her poem “Developers,” Lyons turns her gaze to her home in Cootehall in County Roscommon, one of the rural areas in Ireland that was targeted for real estate development during the Celtic Tiger and is now overrun with ghost estates.⁴⁴ In the poem, the speaker comes upon a vacant lot filled with discarded construction materials:

O the places where pavement runs out and ragwort
springs up, where *Lindenwood* ends but doesn’t abut
anywhere neatly, a petered-out plot of Tayto
tumbleweeds, binbags, rebar, roof slates, offcuts
guttering, drain grilles, doodads, infill, gravel!
A not-as-yet nice establishment, possessing potential
where we have no authorised voice but are oddly fitted-
out for the pain it takes to build bit by bit.
When the last contractions brought us to the brink
of our new predicament, we became developers.⁴⁵

In a collection that contains mostly concrete and experimental poems, “Developers” stands out in the ways Lyons transforms traditional poetic tropes and figures. (The poem was reprinted in the collection *The Breadbasket of Europe* but originally conceived as an experimental poem-film, in which Lyons’s reading is juxtaposed with moving images of Roscommon’s barren landscape.) An evocative signifier of the Great Famine, Ireland’s most significant economic disaster, the potato field is reimagined as a “petered-out plot” strewn with Tayto chip bags. In an act of apostrophe,

Lyons uses the vocative exclamation “O” to call forth the deserted lot and lists in trochaic meter its “binbags, rebar, roof slates, offcuts” and other leftover debris. The abandoned property borders the already constructed ghost estates that forlornly await homeowners, their “doorbells, rows of them, glow[ing] in the night village / a string of lit invitations no elbow has leaned into.”⁴⁶ The ghost estate is the most emblematic signifier of the boom period’s excesses, which had been fueled not so much by credit default swaps (as had been the case in the US) but by property construction.⁴⁷ Terrence McDonough explains that while the 2008 financial crisis was a worldwide phenomenon, the “Irish *version* of financialization channeled a substantial amount of international credit into the property market” and led to unsustainable levels of construction.⁴⁸ At the height of the Celtic Tiger, the construction industry accounted for nearly 30 percent of total value produced in the Irish economy and over 10 percent of the Republic’s entire GDP (though some economists claim it was closer to 20 percent). With much of employment centered on construction, the bursting of the property bubble led to both high vacancy and massive unemployment rates. (Unemployment rates climbed as high as 14.7 percent, and according to the 2011 census there are over 230,000 vacant dwellings in the Republic—a staggering figure if one considers that Ireland has a population of 4.5 million people.)

Recently novelists like Dermot Bolger, Anne Enright, and Donal Ryan have leaned on the mode of social realism to document the socioeconomic deprivations of the post-boom era. It may seem counter-intuitive, and perhaps even unseemly, for Lyons to lyricize the barren landscape of Cootehall, especially as rural villages were arguably hit hardest by the construction craze. But in addressing and therefore giving voice to the absent, apostrophe has long been a crucial literary figure in political discourse. Barbara Johnson famously argues that apostrophe was a central figure in the legal language around abortion because it could make present what was absent, dead, and inanimate, and therefore extend the categories of personhood. For Johnson, apostrophe acts as a “form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness.”⁴⁹ More recently, Margaret Ronda recalibrates Johnson’s analysis in the context of ecopoetics, analyzing how postwar US poets mobilize apostrophe as a means of forging relations between the human and nonhuman, between a human speaker and seemingly distant environmental crises—melting glaciers, acidifying oceans, a depleting ozone

layer. Apostrophe is a figure of both “intimacy” and “unreachability,” an attempt to call forth environmental destruction that unfolds on the other side of the world.⁵⁰

But why does Lyons apostrophize a ghost estate, which is not distant but decidedly local? (Lyons’s text and film both focus on Cootehall, Lyons’s home for fifteen years, and the poem’s “we” is directly implicated as the village’s “developers.”) The ghost estate is also neither absent nor dead (despite what its name would suggest), as thousands still dot the Irish countryside more than a decade after the economic downturn. Rather, the “petered-out plot” is ghostly in a different sense: it is speculative, “not-as-yet nice” and “possessing potential”—what she earlier calls a “fake estate” that is the result of “cunning speculation.” Of course, Lyons is mocking the language of development that underwrote the Celtic Tiger’s runaway real estate development and the economic and ecological destruction it wrought.⁵¹ Critics of financialization have often zeroed in on its immateriality and abstraction, fully deterritorialized from the concrete sites of production. As Fredric Jameson famously argues with unsettling prescience, “this free-floating capital . . . will begin to live its life in a new context: no longer in the factories and spaces of extraction and production, but on the floor of the stock market.”⁵² Joseph Vogl similarly describes the “spectral willfulness” of the global finance economy, whose immateriality and shadowy movements make it “unrepresentable”: “Freed from the material manifestations of wealth, [finance capital] has installed itself in a ‘time beyond geography and touchable money.’ It dictates its own dynamics and standards of mobility, abandoning all local, social and political constraints . . . It embodies an economic sublime that manifests itself without taking material form.”⁵³ For both Jameson and Vogl, the “economic sublime” of financial capitalism is at once all-encompassing and insubstantial, capable of catastrophe on a global scale and yet strangely invisible, built on liquidity and speculation.

But the legacies of financial crisis have taken on different forms and shapes in the context of Ireland, where the ghost estate has been its material and landed embodiment. (We might even pause to reflect on how the word “economics” stems from the Greek *oikos*, or “house.”) In her turn to apostrophize, Lyons points out the strange ontology of the ghost estate, which seems to hover between materiality and immateriality. The ghostly imprint of the “fake estates” is one not of post-industrial ruin and rubble but of empty lots of undeveloped construction materials. The litany of construction materials makes present what is absent:

labor and employment. For Lyons, apostrophe makes manifest what is local and yet not present, what is materially emplaced but also a fake estate. Ruth Jennison argues that poetry, with its emphasis on figurative language, is the genre most adept at confronting the seeming invisibility of financialization: “Since a crucial force of poetry resides in the figural and the unseen—metaphors, similes, line breaks, vast and micro fields of white space, allusions—it is . . . uniquely suited to represent a world financial system that is increasingly conducted in an invisible manner, through derivatives, currency trading, outsourcing, collateralized debt obligations, and so on.”⁵⁴ Poetry, then, can attend to a key tension in representations of the financial crisis: recognizing the material conditions of unemployment and environmental violence while also appreciating how the movements of finance capital exceed the bounds of the local, particular, and material. Although the importance of landscape in the Irish literary imagination has certainly led to mythologizing and even nativist conceptions of land and identity, it also allows for materially grounded critiques of the apparently abstract and immaterial machinations of financialization.

New literary figurations are needed to represent the legacies of the financial crisis, and yet Lyons nonetheless returns to the classical figure of apostrophe and long tradition of landscape poetry. Such an impulse is not contradictory but rather reveals how contemporary Irish poets have revisited traditional poetic forms, tropes, and genres to make sense of Ireland’s geopolitical landscape. As mentioned earlier, contemporary Irish poetry has often been cloistered from larger conversations in poetic criticism because of its formal conservatism. For David Lloyd, this insulation is willfully self-imposed; he argues that the tyranny of formalism and the “well-made poem” in contemporary Irish poetry has been a means of evading, rather than confronting, the advent of neoliberalism in Ireland.⁵⁵ Though I agree with much of Lloyd’s sharp prognosis of the state of Irish poetry and share his frustrations (which I will further examine in the next chapter), I take distance from his claim that a meaningful engagement with global capitalism necessitates an absolute turn away from traditional poetic forms and genres.⁵⁶ The poets studied in this book often refurbish poetic forms both to draw on their deep literary history and also to show their limitations in a newly globalized Irish economy. Ronda argues for rethinking what she calls the “innovation paradigm” that has dominated discussions of modern and contemporary poetry and has often equated avant-garde poetics with revolutionary potential.⁵⁷ Such

an unchecked celebration of innovation invests poetry in a problematic narrative of progress, which poets often seek to disrupt. “If these [poets] make it new,” Ronda argues instead, “it is often by way of testing the capacities and limits of older genres, tropes, and recurring figures.”⁵⁸ In Lyons’s work, we can similarly see how the financial crisis and continued austerity measures (arguably the defining features of Irish society today) have transformed poetic figures like apostrophe. Contemporary Irish poetry, often insulated from broader conversations in poetry studies, is a privileged terrain in which the relations between place and globalization are staged and worked through.

IV.

Each chapter in *Poetics of the Local* centers on a different space mobilized by contemporary Irish writers to delve into and complicate notions of the local and global. In the opening chapter, I take as my local site both a geographic location and a poetic genre: Dublin and the occasional poem. Defined in terms of function rather than form, occasional poetry memorializes a specific event such as a death, wedding, or military victory. While critics often emphasize the temporality of occasional poetry, I read it as an also emplaced genre that locates itself in a specific place—specifically, in the case of this chapter, modern and contemporary Dublin. Occasional poetry is often disregarded as a minor genre because it openly relies on patronage, causing critics to cast doubt on its aesthetic and political autonomy. But as I argue, the occasional poem’s overt lack of autonomy makes it an ideal genre to scrutinize poetry’s relationship to public arts programs, arts councils, corporate philanthropy, and other cultural institutions. In the context of contemporary Ireland, the occasional poem’s historic ties to patronage reveal how creative economy schemes (most notably the UNESCO City of Literature program and the Per Cent for Art Scheme) have come to shape the production and circulation of Irish poetry today. I begin by examining the early career of Thomas Kinsella, who established his own independent small press in 1972 in order to publish occasional poems that could circumvent the usual channels of the Anglophone publishing world. Then I move onto Paula Meehan, whose occasional poetry dramatizes the capitalist crisis of contemporary Irish literature, which has been transformed by Ireland’s rapid financialization during the Celtic Tiger. In spanning from the 1960s