



**Comhairle Chontae Liatroma
Leitrim County Council**



Time and Place: A Taste of John McGahern's Leitrim

Programme

Thursday 10th May, Ballinamore Library, Co. Leitrim

10:00–10:15

Conference Opening

10:15–11:00

- Séamus O’Kane (NCFIS) “County Leitrim: The Sky Above Us”: Subjective Landscapes in McGahern’s Prose
- Emily Smith (NCFIS) “It’s not a mansion this house, but it’s our own”: Memory, Childhood and Domestic Space in John McGahern’s *Memoir*

11:00–11:45

- Aoife Carrigy (NCFIS) A place apart, in its own time: the Irish pub as portrayed in McGahern’s short stories
- Paul Butler (NCFIS) Visualising McGahern

11:45–12:00

Tea/coffee break

12:00–13:00

- Keynote Speaker I, Dr Máire Doyle: The Living Landscapes of McGahern’s Leitrim

13:00–14:00

Lunch in Smyth’s Siopa Ol Pub and Restaurant, Ballinamore

14:00–14:45

- Yen-Chi Wu (UCC): From Broken Rhythm to Slow Time: Temporalities in John McGahern’s Novels
- Martin Keaveney (NUIG): “Waiting” for the “Arrival” of the “Text”: Poetics in John McGahern’s *The Dark*

14:45–15:30

- John Singleton (NUIG): Sex and the City: The Urban Space of a Rural Elegist – John McGahern’s *The Pornographer*

- Ryan Dennis (NUIG): For the Name of Cattle and Land: Farming in McGahern

15:30–16:00

Tea/coffee break

16:00–17:00

- Keynote Speaker II, Dr Derek Hand (DCU): “It happened this way and no other way”: John McGahern's Art and the Development of Irish Fiction

17:00–17:30

Drumshanbo Gunpowder Irish Gin reception courtesy of The Shed Distillery & The Food Hub

17:30–19:00

Dramatised reading of McGahern's 'The Slip-Up' followed by Q&A

19:00–20:30

Dinner at Smyth's Siopa Ol Pub and Restaurant, Ballinamore

Friday 11th May, Ballinamore, Co. Leitrim.

Mini-bus tour of McGahern's Leitrim, with selected readings.

- Locations to include Aughawillan, Glenview Folk Museum and Cootehall.
- Mini-bus tour commences at 10am outside Ballinamore library and concludes by 3:30pm.
- Participants can be dropped off in Carrick-on-Shannon or Ballinamore after tour.
- Places are limited and should be pre-booked with organisers on Thursday 10th.



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List of Speakers

Paul Butler is a photographer based in Co. Leitrim, exploring and documenting the ordinary people and places around his home in Farnaght and further afield. He has recently embarked on a Research Masters detailing the visual aspects of John McGahern's work at the National Centre for Franco-Irish Studies under the direction of Dr Eamon Maher. He has published articles linked loosely to his research in *The Irish Times* and (with Eamon Maher) *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*.

Aoife Carrigy is undertaking a Research Masters on 'Cultural Representations of the Irish Pub' at the National Centre for Franco-Irish Studies (NCFIS) in the Institute of Technology, Tallaght. She is a graduate of UCD with a BA in English Literature and Philosophy and an MA in Anglo-Irish Literature. Her current research is examining the relationship between Irish culture and identity and the Irish pub as a key signifier of Irishness. Aoife works as a freelance editor and journalist specialising in gastronomy, travel and the arts. She was Chair of the Irish Food Writers' Guild, has edited and co-authored several cookbooks and lectured on journalism (Independent College, Dublin) and literature and communications skills (Dublin Business School).

Ryan Dennis is a former Fulbright recipient in creative writing. He lectured in writing at a German university for several years, and now at NUIG, where he is pursuing a doctorate in English. He writes a syndicated column that appears in multiple countries and several languages. He hates violence, ketchup, and British spelling, but mostly ketchup.

Martin Keaveney is a practice and research PhD. candidate at NUIG. The practice section involves writing a novel manuscript while his research centres on the John McGahern archive and the application of the tools of narratology and stylistics to McGahern's oeuvre. He has a B.A. and M.A. in English. He was awarded the Sparancacht Ui Eithir for his research in 2016. He has published writing at: *Crannog*, *The Galway Review* (IRL); *The Crazy Oik*, *Tears in the Fence*, *Gold Dust* (UK); *Agave*, *The Writing Disorder*, and *Burning Word* (US) amongst many others. His work has been included in anthologies by Puddle Publications and Inwood Indiana Press. His play *Coathanger* was selected for development at the Scripts Ireland festival in 2016.

Séamus O'Kane is currently completing a Research Masters on John McGahern at the National Centre for Franco-Irish Studies in Dublin. His thesis is a comparative study of John McGahern's

writing in relation to other authors positioned within the realist genre whose prose reflects and responds to the social issues of their respective periods. His reviews have appeared in *Irish Studies Review* and *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*.

John Singleton is a PhD Candidate at NUI Galway. His doctoral thesis investigates the novels of John McGahern, examining his aesthetic evolution and the discourse between the stylistic, thematic and narrative content of his work and the geopolitical spatial divisions in modernising Ireland, from the mid-1960s to the beginning of the 21st century.

Emily Smith is undertaking a Research Masters in French and English Literature under the supervision of Dr Eamon Maher in the National Centre for Franco-Irish Studies. Her current work is on John McGahern and George Moore and their links to French literature, philosophy and cultural theory, particularly in the realms of gender, sexuality and psychoanalysis.

Yen-Chi Wu is a PhD candidate in the School of English at University College Cork. His research project on John McGahern and modernity is funded by the Irish Research Council Postgraduate Scholarship. His research interests include Irish Literature, Postcolonial Studies, and modernism.

Keynote Speakers:

Dr Máire Doyle studied at University College Dublin where she was awarded her doctorate on the topic of ‘Love and Ethics in the Fiction of John McGahern’ in 2013. She has delivered workshops and seminars at University College Dublin, the National University of Ireland Maynooth, and at the James Joyce Summer School (Dublin). She currently lectures in creative non-fiction writing at the Institute for the International Education of Students Abroad, Dublin. Máire is co-editor of a recently published essay collection, *John McGahern: Authority and vision*. This collection brings together essays on McGahern’s work from contributors across a range of disciplines, including creative writers. She is pleased to announce that the collection will be available in paperback later this year, making it much more affordable to interested readers. Máire has also adapted two of John McGahern’s short stories, ‘A Slip Up’ and ‘All Sorts of Impossible Things’ for the stage. These were performed in Dublin in 2016 and at The Dock, Carrick-on-Shannon in March 2017.

Dr Derek Hand is a Senior Lecturer and Head of the School of English at Dublin City University. The Liffey Press published his book *John Banville: Exploring Fictions* in 2002. He edited a special edition of the *Irish University Review* on John Banville in 2006. He was awarded an IRCHSS Government of Ireland Research Fellowship for 2008-2009. His *A History of the Irish Novel: 1665 to the present* was published by Cambridge University Press in 2011 and is now available in paperback. He is also currently co-editing a collection of essays on John McGahern entitled, *Essays on John McGahern: Assessing a Literary Legacy* to be published by Cork University Press.



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Abstracts

Séamus O'Kane (NCFIS)

“County Leitrim: The Sky Above Us”: Subjective Landscapes in McGahern's Prose

McGahern's depictions of rural Ireland have received great acclaim. His ability to conjure up realistic and recognisable images of the north-west of Ireland and particularly Leitrim is perhaps unparalleled. The landscapes in McGahern's work are not fixed but often possess a fluidity which reflects the narrative and the characters themselves. McGahern's descriptions of landscapes are therefore dependent on the focalizer, not limited by an empirical reality but rather taking on new meaning in a subjectivity influenced by Romanticism. It is worth looking at particular scenes in McGahern's 'The Country Funeral' and his *Memoir* to see these shifts.

Emily Smith (NCFIS)

“It's not a mansion this house, but it's our own”: Memory, Childhood and Domestic Space in John McGahern's *Memoir*

In his classic text, *The Poetics of Space*, philosopher Gaston Bachelard states that, “The house is our first universe”. More than a shelter, our intimate relationship with our childhood home comes not only to shape our everyday behaviours, but the manner by which we form and reconstruct the memories created within it. A “Resting place for daydreaming”: the house's two-fold role as both a setting for and conduit of memory gives it an interesting role in autobiographical writings. Over the course of my paper I hope to address the manner by which John McGahern both depicts and makes us of these personal spaces in his work *Memoir* (2005), to reconstruct and at times come to terms with distinct moments of his childhood and adolescence in Leitrim.

Aoife Carrigy (NCFIS)

A place apart, in its own time: the Irish pub as portrayed in McGahern's short stories

Themes of time and place are common to much of McGahern's writings, but they take on particular qualities in his portrayals of the Irish pub within short stories such as 'The Country Funeral', which depicts contrasting images of quintessential city and country pubs. These depictions are echoed in stories such as 'Bank Holiday', 'My Love, My Umbrella' and 'Parachutes', each of which feature Dublin's bohemian pubs and some of the literary characters that famously inhabited them, and 'Old-Fashioned' and 'High Ground', which are firmly rooted in that Leitrim/Roscommon hinterland of the source of the Shannon. This paper will explore how McGahern establishes those pubs as places apart from the wider worlds they inhabit – physically and in terms of their rituals and rules of engagement –

but also as integral parts of their wider societal context. It will also examine McGahern's treatment of pubs as places apart with their own peculiar relationship to time.

Yen-Chi Wu (UCC)

From Broken Rhythm to Slow Time: Temporalities in John McGahern's Novels

This paper, informed by postcolonial and ecocritical criticisms of modern temporality, examines the "strange sense of timelessness" in John McGahern's novels. McGahern's novels are punctuated with dysfunctional timepieces, which seem to invoke a modernist sentiment that distrusts mechanic time. Differing from modernist works, however, McGahern's novels are primarily concerned with rural Ireland, as opposed to the urban settings with which his modernist predecessors were mostly preoccupied. The "broken rhythm" in his rural writing, then, may signify the multi-layered temporalities in postcolonial states, where colonial modernity is paradoxically resisted and replicated. The meandering narrative and a sense of environmental consciousness in his later novels, moreover, register an ecological "slow time" at odds with the modern temporality of speed. Drawing on postcolonial and ecocritical criticisms of modern temporality, this paper explores the ways in which McGahern's use of time, suggested by his temporal figures and narrative strategies, serves as a subtle critique of the globalising modernity of our time. In thus doing, this essay wishes to tease out the enduring social critique in McGahern's work and to engage with the growing scholarly interest in ecocritical aspects of his writing.

Martin Keaveney (NUIG)

"Waiting" for the "Arrival" of the "Text": Poetics in John McGahern's *The Dark*

The 'Waiting' and 'Arrival' experiences of young Mahoney in John McGahern's novel *The Dark* are measured here in terms of 'textual effect', by isolating both narrative sequences and stylistic interference in the prose. These aspects are found in the boy's 'waiting' for his father in Chapter 3; later, as he waits for Father Gerald in the parochial house; and in the chronic sense of 'waiting' in the second part of the novel as the boy cannot reach a plateau of stability. The equally unsatisfactory dynamic of 'arrival' is tabulated in the boy's transcension of his father, completed as he humiliates him in Chapter 8, the embarrassment rather than joy of superior exam results and the agonising 'arrival' of adulthood as he is forced to seek counsel from the father he has attempted to escape from for most of the book. These elements of 'waiting' and 'arriving' are particularly emergent via the arrangement of atmosphere, dialogue and character-based stylistics. This study ultimately directs the focus on McGahern away from the privileged and rigorously scrutinised 'Context' reading and toward a more fundamental and much less exhausted approach directly to the McGahern 'Text'.

John Singleton (NUIG)

Sex and the City: The Urban Space of a Rural Elegist - John McGahern's *The Pornographer*

Recent movements such as #metoo #WakingTheFeminists and #RepealThe8th have re-invigorated debate surrounding attitudes towards gender and sexuality in 20th century Ireland. In Literary Studies, however, too often these investigations are framed by recourse to essentialist division between rural naivety and urban promiscuity. This paper addresses the issue of evolving attitudes to sexuality in young men and women from a rural background living adult lives in the capital city. I will investigate McGahern's *The Pornographer* (1979) to explore representations of the 'GUBU' world of late 1970s Dublin, a world of internal migration and a secularising, bourgeois public service caught between its

conservative, Catholic upbringing and the globalising, Neo-liberal economic agenda. I argue that, through *The Pornographer*, McGahern explores the psychological liminal space where his characters reside – neither fully rural nor fully urban, no longer traditional and not yet modern – and investigates how the forces and limitations of one space necessarily shaped how life was lived in the other. I analyse how *The Pornographer* expressed a modernising Ireland shaped by ‘sex in the city’ and offers an insight into the thriving urban life in 1970’s Ireland, an aspect of McGahern’s fiction too often overlooked by critics in favour of the rural elegy of later works.

Ryan Dennis (NUIG)

For the Name of Cattle and Land: Farming in McGahern

John McGahern’s *That They May Face the Rising Sun* has largely been considered a eulogy project lamenting the passing of traditional Rural Ireland as it follows a community involved in small-scale agriculture. What is often overlooked in this farming novel, however, is the farming itself. Leaving behind the social realism that portrayed the harsh realities of agriculture in his former work, McGahern chooses instead to write a pastoral celebration that portrays farming to be a quaint and relaxed existence—much unlike the farmer-writer himself would have known it to be. With the MacSharry Reforms in 1992, Irish agriculture, under the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy, shifted away from supply control regulation to a market-based scheme similar to that practiced in the US. As a result, the Irish farmer has been forced to expand in order to stay in business, entering the productivist “treadmill.” This paper suggests that *Sun* was written under the context of—and response to—specific agricultural policy changes that were being felt at the time of its publication. It will contend that, given McGahern’s experience in farming, the novel must be read as an act of political intent meant to provide a warning against productivist policies by highlighting the forms of social and rural capital that were in the process of dissolving due to EU legislation. In connecting *Sun* to the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy, a form of resistance will be brought to light that has been overlooked thus far in its registration as Irish literature.