

## **IRIS Graduate Summer Fieldwork Award Report**

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Because of the IRIS Graduate Summer Fieldwork Award, I was able to spend time in Ireland this summer and complete important research for my dissertation, for which I am so grateful! My dissertation project looks at the proliferation of content that engaged real people, events, and cultural trauma in contemporary Irish theatre. These productions were integral to larger conversations across the island about how marginalized voices had been historically erased or silenced. I explore the contemporary moment's trend to feature theatre sculpted directly from the words and experiences of queer people, women, institutionalized children, and indigenous language speakers: narratives erased by the cultural oppression and institutional violence rooted in Catholic Church doctrine and practice. The presence of the real in Irish theatre during the first decades of the 2000s paralleled social efforts to openly acknowledge these people and their concerns as valid, important, and emerging from the realm of the private into the performance of the everyday.

The IRIS Graduate Summer Fieldwork Award allowed me to access countless resources in Ireland that were important to the formation of my thoughts on my dissertation. I was able to see documentation in archives from the productions that I write about, including video footage of productions that happened now two decades ago. To be able to pair my textual analysis with analysis of staging, acting choices, and the embodiment process was invaluable and deepens my commentary on this time period and theatrical trend. Every production is not simply a piece of art, but is surrounded by ephemera of the time, the thoughts and generative process of the creative team, and the social response to the work, all of which is often captured in an archive in the form of artists' preliminary work, rehearsal notes, marketing, and critical commentaries. This

award allowed me to visit the National Library of Ireland and find content within my field, as well as gaining access to unpublished texts and drafts of scripts. I also was able to visit the Abbey archives and the An Taibhdhearc archives housed at NUIG's James Hardiman library.

The most important avenue that was opened to me by IRIS funding was that I could see live theatre in Ireland, and explore how the conversations that I research are continuing and still evolving. Theatre companies like ANU Productions that gained fame and status from the types of work that I am looking at, staging narratives of institutional abuse, are continuing to work with stories of quiet or invisible hardship. I attended a production they staged within the National Maternity Hospital which pulled at the fibers of maternal medicine, both the utter vulnerability of being a patient or family member, but also the exhaustion and strife of being a caregiver or medical professional in a field with limited resources and huge stakes. If Ireland in the 00s had a moment of collective reckoning with their history of the insidiously linked Church and school systems, conversations are swirling about sites where the Church 's power still lingers, like the public hospital system. Multiple performances I saw during my fieldwork will be included in the conclusion of my dissertation, where I explore the impact of this trend and its legacy into the current moment.

Being in Ireland allowed me to have both casual conversations and formal interviews with theatre artists like Una McKevitt who were directly involved with the productions that I write about. I was thrilled to get to talk to the artists about their influences, about the productions that inspired them, and to open doors to new artists and companies I hadn't known before. While the formal content will be directly used in my dissertation, the casual interactions also shaped my research by helping me understand the subtle politics of the theatre scene at the time, and the

ways that different artists played off each other. This was not just valuable in the short term as I work on my dissertation, but helped me create a network of professional contacts for the future.

I am grateful for the resources of the IRIS Graduate Summer Fieldwork Award for facilitating my research and this project is greatly enriched for the opportunities the award provided me.