

Call for Papers
Conference “Discourses of Unity in Ireland and Europe”
Tuebingen, 20-22 June, 2023

The conference will be hosted by Visiting Professor in Irish Studies and the English Department at the University of Tübingen.

Conference Organizers:

Maurice Fitzpatrick, PhD (Visiting Professor in Irish Studies, Tuebingen University, winter term 22/23):

maurice.fitzpatrick@uni-tuebingen.de

Prof. Dr. Christoph Reinfandt (Chair of English Literature, Tuebingen University):

christoph.reinfandt@uni-tuebingen.de

Dr. Raphael Zähringer (Lecturer in Literary and Cultural Studies, English Department, Tuebingen University):

raphael.zaehringer@uni-tuebingen.de

Conference venue: Alte Aula, Münzgasse 30, 72070 Tuebingen

Confirmed Keynote Speakers:

Prof. Dr. Joe Cleary (Irish, Postcolonial and World Literatures, Yale University):

Title tbc.

Prof. Dr. Etain Tannam (International Peace Studies, Trinity College Dublin):

Provisional Keynote title: British-Irish Relations: Past, Present, Future.

Dr. Fergal Keane (Irish foreign correspondent and author):

Provisional Keynote title: The Victor's Delusions: The Past That Will Not Go Away.

Irish Peace Nobelist John Hume once argued: ‘The Border is not a line on the map. It is a mental border built on fear, prejudice and misunderstanding and which can only be eradicated by developing understanding and friendship. This is the real task which faces those who genuinely want to solve the Irish problem’ (John Hume, 1970). Hume’s conceptualisation of the historical problem in Ireland as that of a divided people rather than a divided territory proved fundamental to the development of a new discourse in Ireland. Ireland and the UK’s joining the European Economic Community in 1973 helped to give institutional consolidation to that new discourse of pluralism and unity of people. Yet the ‘romantic dream’ of a constitutionally united Ireland for Irish nationalists and the identity of unionists as guaranteed by the perpetuation of the union between Northern Ireland and Great Britain continued to cause cultural and political division during the Troubles period (1968-1998). The Good Friday Agreement of 1998 enshrined the principles of consent to constitutional change and parity of esteem between the cultures of Northern Ireland and a power-sharing government within the framework of Arend Lijphart’s theory of consociation (Lijphart, 1968, 1977, 1984, 1999). Yet since the Brexit referendum, and the disruptions that have flowed from it, the fault lines of the divided people have once again been exposed. Northern Ireland is not in the Irish state, but it is on the island of Ireland; Northern Ireland forms part of the British State, but it does not form part of the island of Great Britain. These factors made Northern Ireland difficult to extricate from the European Union after Brexit. Northern Ireland is founded on a series of paradoxes, and EU membership helped to modulate the political conflicts that they have engendered. Brexit forced the departure of Northern Ireland from the EU against the wishes of the majority of the electorate. That has intensified the debate of competing discourses of unity among the constituencies that hold mutually exclusive constitutional aspirations.

Depending upon its discursive framing, Irish unity can be perceived by turns as an aspect of a shared and inclusive future, or a threat to the stability of the agreed political and cultural frameworks in Northern Ireland. This inherent doubleness in the discourse of unity makes it a crucial concept for the continued process of mutual recognition and tolerance that has been essential for peace in Ireland. Brexit forced a decision upon the two communities in Northern Ireland whose meta-identities considerably relied upon the UK on the one hand and Ireland's continued membership of the European Union and the open border in Ireland that that enabled on the other. Since Brexit, circumstances have prompted writers, citizens and public figures to interrogate, re-interpret and re-define the concept of unity with renewed urgency. This has occurred at governmental level with the Irish government's establishment of the Shared Island Unit as well as in writings that re-examine the proposition of unity from a unionist perspective (Collins, 2022). Similarly, writers have been inspired to situate the prospect of a deeper unity on the island of Ireland in the *longue durée* of movements that sought to unite people as a precondition to uniting the island such as the Presbyterian-led United Irishmen movement (1791-1805) (Mitchell, 2022).

'Discourses of Unity in Ireland and Europe' explores the linguistic, cultural and political challenges of articulating a discourse of unity in Ireland. The conference will explore how the concept of unity has manifested in literary, historical and political texts. Recent publications have explored the concept of unity from unionist, nationalist, European, liberal and feminist perspectives (Patterson, 2022; Collins, 2022; Mitchell, 2022; McKay, 2021). The field has also been enriched by a critically acclaimed definitive *Treatise on Northern Ireland* in three volumes by Brendan O'Leary (2019). Leading from these major interventions in the discourses of unity in Ireland, this conference is an opportunity to examine the concept in its current mutable manifestation.

The conference will also explore the reconceptualisation of Ireland in Europe since Ireland and the UK joined the EEC in 1973. Delegates will discuss the role of Europe in neutralising contested national territories through its defence of the validity of regional identity. It will trace the ways in which Northern Ireland has found, and can continue to find, in European regions such as Alsace, a place formed both by Franco-German conflict and reconciliation, an example of a pathway to a shared future where political identities, languages and backgrounds enjoy parity of esteem. The German experience of national unity will lend a comparative dimension to the conference's debate. In tandem with the focus on Irish unity, there will be a panel discussion on Hume's concept of a 'Europe of the Regions' (Hume, 1998) in the context of the evolution of regions such as Schleswig Holstein, the Saarland, Alsace and Northern Ireland.

We welcome papers (20 minutes) on, among other related subjects:

- How have ideas of unity been represented in literary texts in Ireland since the 1960s?
- Which potentials and potentialities of representation and performativity (such as, for example, multiperspectivity or multivoicedness) have been made use of for reflections upon or staging discourses of unity?
- In which ways are discourses of unity reflected in popular culture?
- Which features of discourses of unity emerge from a linguistic perspective?
- How have approaches to unity in social sciences been complicated by the uncertainty of Northern Ireland's status since Brexit?
- How can contested regions in Europe provide a meta-comparative frame for the discourse of Irish unity?

Please send abstracts (300 words) with a short biographical note plus full address and institutional affiliation to the conference organisers.

Deadline for proposals: 31 March, 2023.