Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **12**, 1 (2020) 1–9

DOI: 10.2478/ausp-2020-0001

Introduction

The significance of Central/Eastern Europe for Irish writing from the late nineteenth century may first be identified in three canonical publications: Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897), Arthur Griffith's *The Resurrection of Hungary* (1904), and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Stoker subliminally transposes the historical, political, and religious anxieties that Ireland presented for England unto one of the most remote and oldest regions of Europe, at least from the vantage-point of Stoker's base in London: Transylvania. Just over seven years after the publication of *Dracula*, Griffith turns to Hungary as a model for modern Irish nationalists to take up in their goal of Irish sovereign independence. *The Resurrection of Hungary* would become the founding document of his party, *Sinn Féin* (Ourselves Alone) in 1905, a small organization that was transformed into the major political driving force for Ireland's break from British rule, following its massive success in the General Election of December 1918, immediately after the First World War. During the same year in which an Irish parliament sat in Dublin independent of London rule for the first time, 1922, Joyce's *Ulysses* was published. The novel includes one of the most widely known characters in European modernist literature of the early twentieth century: Dublin-born Leopold Bloom, whose father was a Jewish Hungarian.

The term "Central/Eastern Europe" announces a certain topographical ambiguity that inflects Irish writing when looking Eastward to the opposite side of the European continent. Illustrative of this uncertainty, Sinéad Sturgeon and Lili Zách opt for an alternative descriptor, "East-Central Europe," in their essays below. Sturgeon does so when addressing James Clarence Mangan's engagement with Austrian poetry and politics of the 1820s, and Zách when addressing diplomatic relations between the Irish Free State and Hungary in the 1920s and 1930s. "Central/Eastern Europe" might simply be taken as a convenient geographical description of territories traditionally identified with *Mitteleuropa* and those located immediately to the East of this region while still regarded as European. Yet the phrase also carries with it a set of value judgements concerning centre and periphery within Europe. The example of Hungary is telling in this respect. Part of what interested Griffith about the country was a perception that it had somehow become simultaneously Central and Eastern European within the continent and, as a consequence, both powerful and peripheral. It was Central European as a partner in what came to be regarded as a significant political force in the later nineteenth century: the so-called Austro-Hungarian Empire. At the same time, Griffith admired Hungary precisely

BDD-A31511 © 2020 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:42 UTC)

for regaining a strong measure of independence from Vienna, thereby validating its own Eastern European language, culture, identities, and narrative of origins in the East. Sturgeon's discussion of James Clarence Mangan in the opening essay of this Special Issue suggests that Griffith's double vision has a gothic precedent in the poetry of pre-Famine Ireland. She illustrates how Mangan turns to a cultural and historical centre-point of Europe through his translations of poems by the Vienna-based and Silesian-born poet Joseph Christian Freiherr von Zedlitz, a locus that leans sharply towards the European East.

The case of Poland is invested with a similar ambiguity between Centre and East, a country that historically has been subject to the power of Germany, especially Prussia, on its western side and that of Russia in its eastern regions. Set against Hungary and Poland, there are such territories as the Transylvania that interested Stoker or the Russia that interested Irish writers like George Moore and Frank O'Connor. Undoubtedly, Stoker presents Transylvania as assuredly Eastern European, almost Oriental, in fact. Yet to speak of Transylvania as a peripheral region in *Dracula* underplays the fact that it was part of the Kingdom of Hungary during the time in which Stoker's novel was published, and thus a constituent partner in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The case of Russia as a source of literary influence for Irish writers is likewise riven. In its remoteness from Western Europe, Russia could well be regarded as peripheral in the Irish mind: yet to view such a vast territory as marginal is absurd since territorially Russia dwarfs the historical continent of Europe in size.

This Special Issue of *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica* explores Irish representations and engagements with Central/Eastern Europe in order to show how the ambiguity around this geographical designation is reflective of the diverse and sometimes contradictory ways through which Irish writers and intellectuals have responded to the region. There is something paradoxical, for example, in Griffith looking beyond Ireland to modern Hungary when arguing for Irish political self-reliance. Griffith and Joyce turn to the same territory out of different perceptions of Ireland as much as Central/Eastern Europe. Whereas Griffith admires the national standing that Hungary had achieved through a redefinition of its relation with Hapsburg-dominated Vienna, Joyce represents the same territory as an exotic internationalist presence in the Dublin of 1904 through the character of Leopold Bloom. These alternative yet interrelated tendencies towards nationality and cosmopolitanism find a unique precedent in the writing of James Clarence Mangan, a Dublin poet who moves between gothic and Romantic nationalist tendencies in his fiction and poetry translations of the 1830s and 1840s. Addressing the place of Vienna in Mangan's creative work, Sinéad Sturgeon unveils a feature that pre-empts Griffith's interest in Vienna-Budapest political relations of the nineteenth century and Joyce's positioning of Bloom's ancestry in a Hungarian town bordering Austria, Szombathely. Cryptically alluding to contemporary Vienna in his 1838 short-story,

BDD-A31511 © 2020 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:42 UTC)

"The Man in the Cloak," and translating works by Vienna-based poet, Zedlitz, Mangan conveys his awareness of state oppression in post-Napoleonic Austria. Sturgeon demonstrates how the Dublin poet's cognisance of circumstances in the meeting point of Western and Eastern Europe not only demonstrates Mangan's sophistication as an Irish poet in the gothic mode who absorbs German Romantic sensibilities and perspectives. She also directs attention to the manner in which, through the setting of Vienna and through his translations from Zedlitz, Mangan surreptitiously alludes to political circumstances in Ireland under the Union with Great Britain that became law in 1801.

Following this exploration of the place occupied by Eastward-looking Vienna in Mangan's early nineteenth century work, Eglantina Remport shows just how deeply the example of Hungary entered Irish nationalist intellectual discourse in the early twentieth century, bringing out the complexities of such discourse in the process. These become evident in identifications made between the case of Ireland and that of Hungary, raising such issues as nationality, language, coloniality, and empire. Remport looks at Patrick Pearse's response to *The Resurrection of Hungary* with regard to Pearse's educational philosophy and the role that he identified for the Irish language in the new Irish-centred system of education to which he aspired. Remport illustrates how Pearse's endorsement of *The Resurrection of Hungary* was mediated through his sympathy for the arguments of Douglas Hyde's "The Necessity of De-Anglicising Ireland" and the place that Pearse granted to the Irish language and Irish mythology in the curriculum for the schools that he founded in Dublin. Contextualizing Griffith's discussion of Hungary in this manner, she compares aspects of the movement for language revival in early nineteenth-century Hungary with the Irish language revival that Hyde inaugurated, Pearse assisted, and Griffith commended at the start of the twentieth century. In an echo of Mangan's Germanophilia, Remport traces a direct connection between the two movements in the figure of Kuno Meyer, the German philologist who exerted a profound influence on Douglas Hyde and who also wrote to Hyde admiringly on the subject of the Hungarian language when visiting Hungary. She also identifies a context largely ignored in Irish historical accounts of Griffith's *The Resurrection of Hungary*: the Millennial Celebrations in Hungary during the 1890s–1900s, marking the arrival of the Magyar tribes into the Carpathian basin almost one thousand years earlier.

The question of language arises again in another essay within this Special Issue: Sorcha de Brún's discussion of the first Irish-language translation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* by Seán Ó Cuirrín, published in the 1930s. While there has been considerable critical argument in favour of the view that Stoker's representation of Transylvania owes much to traditions around ghosts and the supernatural in his native Ireland, de Brún tests this critical perspective by looking at the ways in which Ó Cuirrín conjures the character of the Count and the landscape of Transylvania through the Irish language medium. De Brún demonstrates some fascinating aspects

BDD-A31511 © 2020 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:42 UTC)

of Ó Cuirrín's bestselling translation, especially the way in which it moves beyond the original Stoker work of 1897 to present Dracula as a figure inviting sympathy as much as foreboding and the landscape of Transylvania as redolent of rural Ireland. In the English-language original, Stoker sets up a diametric opposition between the modern London from which Jonathan Harker travels and the ancient Transylvania where the Count dwells. If this narrative strategy conceals Stoker's liminal identification of the Eastern European landscape with the remoteness of the rural West of Ireland and the recurring stories of haunting in the Irish folklore tradition, then this association becomes manifest in the Ó Cuirrín translation of *Dracula*. Neither Stoker's original nor Ó Cuirrín's translation evoke Transylvania in a realistic fashion since the distancing element of exoticism is fundamental to the tale. Having said this, de Brún's ground-breaking reading of the Irish-language translation of *Dracula* suggests that Ó Cuirrín's work has the merit of weakening the mechanism of Othering that controls Stoker's original narrative, a mechanism that produces the ultimately reductive stereotype of Transylvania as epitomizing the pre-modern Uncanny.

De Brún's reading of Ó Cuirrín's translation of *Dracula* indicates how much the representation of Central/Eastern Europe in Irish writing involves movements between identification and distancing. This characteristic reflects tensions within Irish culture and politics between varieties of nationalist and varieties of unionist positions from the early twentieth century. These become manifest in a remarkable pamphlet that was published by an important and overlooked figure within movements for Irish cultural and economic revival from the late nineteenth century: Thomas William Rolleston. The extent of neglect of Rolleston may be indicated by the fact that no cultural, scholarly, or civic event has been held in Ireland to mark the centenary of his death in 1920. The First World War entered its third year in 1917, following the rebellion for Irish independence that was led by Patrick Pearse in April of the previous year. Writing as a member of the British Ministry of Information during the War years, Rolleston responded critically to identifications that had been made at this time between the circumstances of Ireland under British rule and those of Poland under both Prussian and Russian domination. My discussion of Rolleston's pamphlet examines his refutation of these identifications. I consider Rolleston's views on Poland in relation to his understanding of Irish Home Rule and of British Government policies towards Ireland during the late nineteenth/early twentieth century. Arguing for fundamental differences between the circumstances of British-governed Ireland and the Prussian-controlled territories of Poland, Rolleston moves stridently against the pattern of identification between Ireland and Central/Eastern Europe that we find in Griffith's *The Resurrection of Hungary* or in Ó Cuirrín's translation of *Dracula*. I draw attention to the fact that his insistence on the differences rather than the similarities between Ireland and Poland during the period following the 1916 Rising could not be easily discounted by Irish nationalists.

BDD-A31511 © 2020 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:42 UTC)

Rolleston supported the Irish-language work of such scholars as Standish Hayes O'Grady, co-founded the Irish Literary Society in London, and involved himself in the work of the Irish Co-operative Movement for the resuscitation of economic life in rural Ireland. My analysis of *Ireland and Poland: A Comparison* sheds further light on the language question that Remport and de Brún address, since one of the key issues to arise in Rolleston's pamphlet is that of British Government attitudes to Irish language revival as compared to German policies on the Polish language in the Prussian-controlled regions of Poland.

Discussing the development of diplomatic relations between the Irish Free State and the new small nation of Hungary that came into being following the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, Lili Zách extends an understanding of the political aspects to the movement between Irish identifications with and Irish distancing from Central/Eastern Europe. Zách's reading of the evolution of diplomatic connections between the Irish Free State and the post-Trianon State of Hungary is particularly significant with regard to the figure of Hubert Briscoe. She illustrates how instrumental Briscoe was in developing links between the two countries in the 1920s and 1930s. Zách shows Briscoe as a Catholic intellectual and diplomat whose moves to strengthen ties between Ireland and Hungary were reflective of the Catholic religious ethos that shaped the Irish Free State in its formative decades. Her reading illustrates how identifications between Ireland and Hungary through diplomatic initiatives were made on a strongly Catholic basis during the 1920s and 1930s. It also indicates one of the legacies of Griffith's association of Ireland with Hungary in the foreign policy of the Irish Free State Governments during the 1920s and 1930s.

The practices of identifying Ireland with Central/Eastern Europe or of stressing the distance between the two regions also involve questions of exile and belonging. One of the most striking instances where these matters arise is found in the character of Leopold Bloom from Joyce's *Ulysses*. Leaving Ireland at first for Paris, then for Zürich, and eventually for a long-term settlement in Trieste, Joyce appears famously as the modernist writer who chooses exile over the conservatism of the middle-class Catholic Irish society in which he grew up. Through the figure of Bloom, Joyce turns to Hungary as Griffith would do during the year in which *Ulysses* is set, 1904, and as Briscoe would do in his capacity as an Irish Free State diplomat later during the 1930s. In her reading of Bloom and the Hungarian dimension of *Ulysses*, Márta Goldmann illustrates how the basis of Joyce's association of Ireland with Hungary was radically different from the types of identification that we encounter in the thought of Griffith or the diplomatic initiatives of Briscoe. Goldmann introduces the Jewish background of Bloom as the defining feature of his Hungarian family history, distinguishing him from both the Catholic Irish nationalist and the Protestant British unionist traditions within the Ireland in which he lives. Placing Bloom at the centre of her reading of the interconnection between Ireland and Hungary in *Ulysses*, Goldmann alters the critical perception of one vital element within dominant forms

BDD-A31511 © 2020 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:42 UTC)

of Irish identity in Joyce's lifetime: the significance of history. Whereas history presents itself in Irish nationalist discourse under the aspects of native traditions or the traumas of colonial dispossession and subjugation, Bloom introduces a broader dimension to the "nightmare of history" in *Ulysses* with reference to the experience of Jewish people of Hungary. Drawing upon Walter Benjamin's dialectical reading of history in Paul Klee's painting, *Angelus Novus*, Goldmann considers some of the ways in which Bloom's character, circumstances, and experiences in *Ulysses* form a premonition in *Ulysses* of the ultimate terror visited upon the Jewish people of Central/Eastern Europe: the Holocaust. Pivotal to Goldmann's evaluation is Bloom's identity as the son of a displaced migrant from a Hungarian Jewish background, one who makes his home in Ireland. Goldmann develops her reading of key moments of anti-Semitism in the Dublin of 1904 as represented in *Ulysses* by turning our attention to the real-life history of the Jewish community of Szombathely in western Hungary, from which Bloom's father, Rudolph, had emigrated. Her discussion troubles the opposition between practices of identifying Ireland with Central/Eastern Europe and those of distancing the two regions. In the figure of Dublin-dwelling Bloom, Central/Eastern Europe cannot be easily distanced from Ireland. Yet neither can Ireland be automatically identified with Hungary in the case of Bloom. The unique history of Szombathely's Jewish community from the nineteenth century, and the real-life obliteration that would be visited upon it subsequently in 1944, separates him from the many other native Dublin characters with whom he interacts through the course of Joyce's modernist masterpiece.

A question posed by the figure of Leopold Bloom is where Irish writing turns in its relation to Central/Eastern Europe subsequent to the appearance of *Ulysses* in 1922. One answer may be found in some of the short stories of Frank O'Connor. Márta Pellérdi discusses the influence of Russian author Anton Chekhov on O'Connor, arguing that Chekhov's naturalism represents a form of modernist experimentation in fiction. This view is an interesting counter to the critical perspective of literary modernism as a reaction to naturalism, particularly when naturalism is considered to be a species of realism in literature. Pellérdi's idea of Chekhov as experimentalist and realist in one carries important ramifications for his influence on writers like Frank O'Connor. Pellérdi successfully argues for Chekhov's influence on O'Connor stretching beyond the superficial, alluding to Chekhov's "Uprooted" and "The Lady with the Dog" in relation to O'Connor's story, "Uprooted," published in one of his short-story collections during the 1940s. While Pellérdi makes no claim for any association of Ireland with Russia in O'Connor's fiction, she illustrates how Chekhov's work enables O'Connor to express an idea concerning the human condition, namely, the nature of loneliness. In her assessment of Ned Keating's lack of belonging in O'Connor's "Uprooted," Pellérdi identifies an intriguingly paradoxical aspect. She regards this rootlessness as deriving from Ned's choices and thus a consequence of what Chekhov sees – within the Christian tradition but somewhat

BDD-A31511 © 2020 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:42 UTC)

subversive of it – as the greater seriousness of the "venial" over the "mortal" sin. The paradox that Pellérdi illustrates stems from the significance of Chekhov to O'Connor's achievement in many of his short stories. The failure of such characters as Ned Keating in "Uprooted" to ground themselves in their Irish localities and traditions is one that O'Connor articulates successfully by absorbing the influence of Chekhov's writing, utterly removed from Ireland in its Russian settings. Without any connection to O'Connor's native country, Chekhov nonetheless is shown to be immensely important to O'Connor when tackling the subject of displacement within Ireland. This is especially poignant when considering that O'Connor wrote during an era in which notions of homeland and belonging were stressed in the policies and practices of Irish Governments, following the achievement of Irish independence in 1922.

The final essay of this Special Issue brings us to the representation of Central/Eastern Europe in contemporary Irish writing. Orsolya Szűcs discusses the 2015 novel, *The Little Red Chairs*, a work of fiction by Edna O'Brien, Ireland's pre-eminent feminist novelist since the 1960s. Based mainly on the convicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić from the Balkans conflict of the 1990s and moving from the rural West of Ireland to the International Criminal Court at The Hague, O'Brien's story expresses her enduring concern with the emotional character of Irish society. She does so with a keen eye for the globalization of Irish experience over the past twenty years through the advent of the Celtic Tiger economy and its subsequent collapse in 2008. Szűcs's reading of *The Little Red Chairs* illustrates how the novel addresses recurrent themes in O'Brien's fiction. These include sexuality and religion in Irish life, the Irish landscape as a living character in its own right, and the blurring of distinctions between the animal and the human in remote rural settings. Through her consideration of the main protagonist, sex therapist Dr Vlad Dragan, Szűcs identifies the ways in which O'Brien's novel draws upon long-enduring stereotypes of Eastern Europe as mysterious, alien, and barbaric.

Szűcs's insightful discussion of *The Little Red Chairs* is of value in its own right, but also as a coalescence of several themes that are addressed in the earlier essays. The attention that she draws to Dragan's association of the rural Irish landscape with that of Montenegro is continuous with the association made between rural Ireland and Transylvania in Ó Cuirrín's translation of *Dracula,* as analysed by Sorcha de Brún. The presence of the Serbian Dr Vlad troubles the conventions of a rural Irish village in *The Little Red Chairs*, one still shaped by Catholic traditions in a largely secular contemporary Irish society. His character also brings to mind the gothic element in Mangan's turn to Vienna's poet Zedlitz as discussed by Sturgeon, but also Goldmann's reading of Bloom in *Ulysses*. Like Dr Vlad, Bloom is a figure of Eastern European origins who disrupts the conventional assumptions of Irish nationalist and British unionist discourses in Irish society. Dragan's presence in twenty-first century Ireland also recalls Bloom's presence in 1904 Dublin when

BDD-A31511 © 2020 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:42 UTC)

confusing the distinction between Irish identification with and Irish distancing from Eastern Europe. As Szűcs's reading of *The Little Red Chairs* illustrates, Dragan ingratiates himself intimately into the rural Irish village where O'Brien sets the first part of the novel. Yet he retains the quality of an outsider with concealed origins in Eastern Europe, one partly reflective of the circumstances of Eastern European migrant workers living in rural Ireland during the post-Celtic Tiger era.

The tension between belonging and wandering in the figure of O'Brien's Dr Vlad, to which Szűcs draws our attention, recalls the dilemma of the characters in Frank O'Connor's short-story "Uprooted," as assessed by Pellérdi. As O'Brien chooses a Serbian character through which to explore this conflict in a globalized contemporary Ireland, so O'Connor also turns Eastward in the 1940s when drawing upon the Russian author, Anton Chekhov, to express human loneliness and restlessness in the rural Ireland of his time. Furthermore, Dragan carries with him in *The Little Red Chairs* a dark and hidden history of mass killing in Eastern Europe during the Balkans War, a contemporary reminder of the much wider trauma of the Holocaust that Goldmann links to Bloom in *Ulysses*. O'Brien's Dragan recalls Joyce's Bloom in that, like Dragan, Bloom is associated with an eruption of mass murder in Eastern Europe. As the premonition rather than the witness of this terror, *Ulysses* is a work in which the violence of the Holocaust obviously cannot be addressed directly. Likewise, the barbarities of the Balkans War remain hidden in the character of Dragan in the Irish village of Cloonoila in *The Little Red Chairs*.

A novel that concerns itself directly with political upheavals in late twentieth-century Europe, *The Little Red Chairs* is a reminder of the relationship between literature and politics that constantly influences the manner through which Irish writing treats Central/Eastern Europe. Indeed, Szűcs's essay returns to questions that are raised by Sturgeon's examination of Austrian political contexts for Mangan's translations of the poetry of Zedlitz in the 1830s and how his turn to Austria in poetry was an indirect means of registering concerns regarding political circumstances in Ireland during the years preceding the catastrophe of the Great Famine in the 1840s. O'Brien's 2015 novel lies open to the accusation of ignoring or forgetting the history of Irish political identifications and associations with Eastern Europe from the early twentieth century period. Remport's reading of *The Resurrection of Hungary* demonstrates not just the significance of Hungary for Pearse, executed leader of the 1916 rebellion for Irish independence. She also observes that the book inhabits both the worlds of Irish and Hungarian nationalism in the 1900s. Presenting the Radovan Karadžić figure of Dr Vlad as the Eastern European Other, *The Little Red Chairs* also appears unaware of the diplomatic relations and initiatives between the new independent Irish Free State of the 1920s–1930s and that of Eastern European countries like Hungary, connections that Lili Zách traces in some detail. O'Brien's novel in some ways typifies the presumption made in contemporary Irish writing of exploring relations between Ireland and Central/Eastern Europe, as if for the first

BDD-A31511 © 2020 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:42 UTC)

time. As far back as 1917, T. W. Rolleston challenged arguments for identifying the circumstances of Ireland and Poland with one another. Yet Rolleston was certainly alert to the potency of such arguments, recognizing that in profound ways they arose from the calamitous conditions of the First World War in Europe. Sturgeon draws our attention to James Clarence Mangan's concern for the plight of Poland as far back as the 1846 in his poem "Siberia." This piece appears in print almost one hundred and seventy years in advance of O'Brien's treatment of a politically loaded Irish-Serbian encounter.

The impetus for this Special Issue on Irish writing and Central/Eastern Europe has its origins in the formation of a Budapest Centre for Irish Studies (BCIS) in 2013, an association of scholars based in Budapest universities with Irish literature and history interests. The BCIS is an institutional member of the European Federation of Centres and Associations of Irish Studies (EFACIS), headquartered at KU Leuven, Belgium. Five contributors to this Special Issue are members of the BCIS: myself as Director of the Centre, Dr Eglantina Remport, Dr Lili Zách, Dr Márta Pellérdi, and Ms Orsolya Szűcs. Their essays reflect the rich and varied interest in Irish and Central/Eastern European connections among scholars of the BCIS. The preparation of this Special Issue has been a very rewarding experience thanks to the professionalism of the editorial team at *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica*. I am grateful in particular to Judit Pieldner in communicating so efficiently when preparing the volume for publication despite the challenges presented by the onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020. The Special Issue is dedicated to the memory of Thomas William Rolleston, a fellow native of South County Offaly, who died one hundred years ago in December 1920 and is perhaps best remembered among past generations in Ireland for his English-language version of Aongus Ó Giolláin's fourteenth-century Irish poem, "The Dead at Clonmacnoise."

Michael McAteer

BDD-A31511 © 2020 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 23:03:42 UTC)