

Ireland's Brexit Problem.
After Ireland: Writing the Nation from Beckett to the Present,
by Declan Kiberd;
Atlas of the Irish Revolution, edited by John Crowley,
Donal Ó Drisceoil, and Mike Murphy;
Beckett's Political Imagination, by Emilie Morin;
Commemoration, by Helen Laird;
Ghost-Haunted Land: Contemporary Art and Post-Troubles
Northern Ireland, by Declan Long

Reviewed by Gerry Kearns

QUERY SHEET

This page lists questions we have about your paper. The numbers displayed at the left can be found in the text of the paper for reference. You will find these queries displayed as small red boxes within the text. In addition, please review your paper as a whole for correctness. Please specify column number and line number with query responses.

<AQ1>Please provide a complete corresponding entry in your references for this Doherty film</AQ>

<AQ2>Please spell out what DUP stands for here on first use</AQ>

REVIEW ESSAY

Ireland's Brexit Problem

After Ireland: Writing the Nation from Beckett to the Present. Declan Kiberd. London, UK: Head of Zeus, 2017. 512 pp., notes, index. \$33.15 cloth (ISBN 978-1-7866-9322-8); \$13.36 paper (ISBN 978-1-7866-9323-5).

Atlas of the Irish Revolution. John Crowley, Donal Ó Drisceoil, and Mike Murphy, eds. Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 2017. xx and 964 pp., maps, photos, illustrations, notes, index. \$68.81 cloth (ISBN 978-1-7820-5117-6).

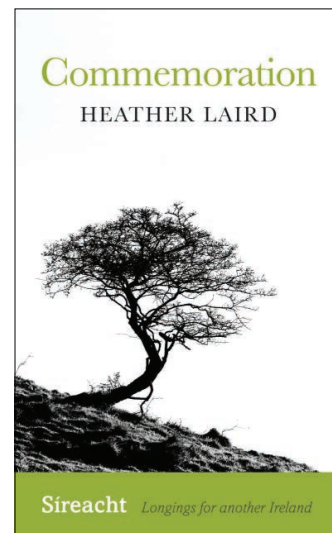
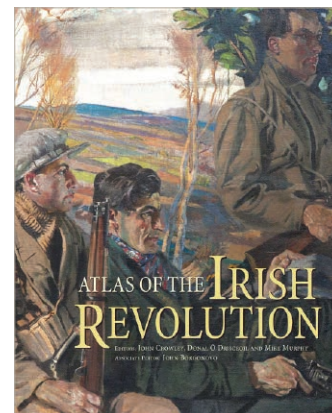
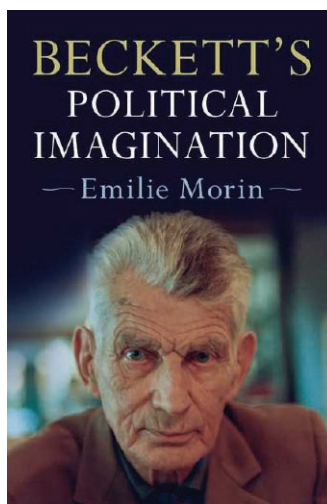
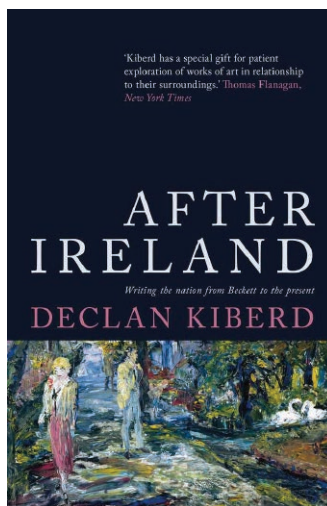
Beckett's Political Imagination. Emilie Morin. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017. \$39.00 cloth (ISBN 978-1-1084-1799-0).

Commemoration. Helen Laird. Cork, Ireland: Cork University Press, 2018. viii and 128 pp., photos, notes, index. \$11.60 paper (ISBN 978-1-7820-5256-2).

Ghost-Haunted Land: Contemporary Art and Post-Troubles Northern Ireland. Declan Long. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2017. xi and 225 pp., photos, bibliography, index. \$99.46 cloth (ISBN 978-1-7849-9144-9).

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In February 1922, Winston Churchill, Secretary of State for the Colonies, apologized to the House of Commons, for intruding "upon their patience on Irish matters" before moving the Second Reading of the Irish Free State (Agreement) Bill (HC Deb 16 February 1922, c. 1261). The consequent Act would implement the Treaty that was recently concluded between Irish rebels and the



1 British Crown. Churchill accepted that there were still
2 matters to be finalized, notably “all this trouble in regard
3 to the boundaries . . . of [the counties of] Fermanagh and
4 Tyrone” (c. 1270). In 1914, the attempt to devise an ex-
5 clusion of Ulster from Irish Home Rule had foundered
6 on this same issue for, even though the dispute had been
7 “narrowed down” to very small areas within these two
8 counties, “the problem appeared to be as insuperable as
9 ever, and neither side would agree to reach any conclu-
10 sion” (c. 1270). Churchill was clearly exasperated that a
11 great imperial power should be stalled in this manner. Af-
12 ter the failure to reach agreement in 1914, the World War
13 of 1914 to 1918 supervened, and much that seemed fixed
14 was thereby loosed:
15

16 The whole map of Europe has been changed. The posi-
17 tion of countries has been violently altered. The modes
18 of thought of men, the whole outlook on affairs, the
19 grouping of parties, all have encountered violent and
20 tremendous changes in the deluge of the world, but as
21 the deluge subsides and the waters fall short we see the
22 dreary steeples of Fermanagh and Tyrone emerging once
23 again. The integrity of their quarrel is one of the few
24 institutions that has been unaltered in the cataclysm
25 which has swept the world. (c. 1270)

26 Continually, the Irish question had forced itself upon
27 British minds. For Churchill, “It says a great deal for the
28 power which Ireland has . . . to lay their hands upon the
29 vital strings of British life and politics, and to hold, domi-
30 nate, and convulse, year after year, generation after gen-
31 eration, the politics of this powerful country” (cc. 1270–
32 71). The contradictions are evident. Churchill thought
33 the Irish question was primarily an Irish dispute and yet it
34 somehow preoccupied British politicians. This Irish ques-
35 tion was about a seemingly trivial matter but the Irish
36 refused to compromise with each other. In language less
37 elegant but no less contemptuous, the current British For-
38 eign Secretary, Boris Johnson, also finds himself called on
39 to talk about the border. As the United Kingdom negoti-
40 ates its withdrawal from the European Union (EU), it is
41 hamstrung by the promises it made as part of the negotia-
42 tion of a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Northern
43 Ireland. On 6 June 2018, Johnson said that the issue of
44 the border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern
45 Ireland was being taken far too seriously: “It’s so small and
46 there are so few firms that actually use that border regu-
47 larly, it’s just beyond belief that we’re allowing the tail to
48 wag the dog in this way. We’re allowing the whole of our
49 agenda to be dictated by this folly” (Spence 2018). Again,
50 the issue is understood as external to Great Britain, as
51 trivial, and as pressed unreasonably by Irish people. Why
52 did Britain have an Irish problem? Well, that would be a
53 colonial question, Mr. Churchill. Why does it still have
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1 an Irish problem? That, in turn, would be a postcolonial
2 question, Mr. Johnson.

3 I have argued elsewhere that taking up the theoretical
4 categories of Giorgio Agamben, colonial rule in Ireland
5 might be understood as creating a colonial space of ex-
6 ception (Kearns 2006). The British saw themselves as
7 broadly liberal, gifting the Irish a rule by law. Yet, in Ire-
8 land they were forced time and again to suspend elements
9 of that law because they did not get consent to their rule.
10 The British could not coerce the Irish into fealty; they
11 could not rule by law.
12
13

14 Time and again, the English, and later British, authori-
15 ties reinvaded Ireland, establishing a new landed elite.
16 For much of the eighteenth century, Ireland had some
17 measure of self-government, but when, fired by the repub-
18 licanism of revolutionary France, the United Irishmen
19 recruited French support for a rebellion (1798), the Brit-
20 ish government decided on more direct rule. From 1801,
21 Ireland was a part of a United Kingdom and its represen-
22 tatives sat as a minority part of the Imperial House of
23 Commons. This became one way that the Irish remained
24 able “to lay their hands upon the vital strings” of Brit-
25 ish politics. For example, in the general election of 1910,
26 the Liberal Party got 272 seats, one more than the Con-
27 servatives, but shy of the 335 needed to form a majority
28 government. From Ireland, 103 members of Parliament
29 were returned, of whom seventy-three were in the Irish
30 Parliamentary Party (IPP), whose primary purpose was to
31 get home rule for Ireland. Together with the IPP, the Lib-
32 erals could form a majority coalition government but the
33 price was explicit. From 1912 home rule legislation was
34 debated in the British Parliament, sending Churchill and
35 the Cabinet to examine maps of Tyrone and Fermanagh
36 in hope of tracing out the limits of Ulster’s exclusion from
37 self-governing Ireland.
38

39 The roots and nature of Ulster’s identity remain conten-
40 tious issues in Irish historiography. In the *Atlas of the Irish*
41 *Revolution*, Smyth highlights the importance of 1798.
42 Faced with the insurgency of the United Irishmen, the
43 Protestant Orange Order was “deliberately mobilised by
44 the British ruling elite,” marking “the first time that ac-
45 tive collusion with a defensive-cum-sectarian movement
46 was used by the British state as a counter-revolutionary
47 strategy in Ireland” (p. 22). It would not be the last. After
48 the 1910 election, and faced with the risk of home rule
49 for Ireland, the British Conservative Party formed an al-
50 liance with the Ulster Protestants, presenting home rule
51 as a dangerous first step toward the unraveling of the Brit-
52 ish Empire, and giving Conservatives an ideological pur-
53 pose (the defense of the constitution) around which they
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1 might mobilize, as Callanan noted in his *Atlas* essay on
2 the home rule crisis, “to challenge the intellectual ascen-
3 dancy of incremental Liberal progressivism” (p. 140) and,
4 “[h]alf catalyst, half pretext, the north-east of Ireland
5 transcended its territorial confines to become for those
6 on the right of British politics a highly charged imperial
7 symbol” (p. 142). Within Ulster, the prospect of home
8 rule drew from one leading supporter of the Union with
9 Britain, the threat that “the morning Home Rule passes,”
10 Unionists would be prepared on their own account “to
11 become responsible for the Government of the Protestant
12 Province of Ulster,” and in the following year, the leader
13 of the British Conservative Party encouraged such insur-
14 rection, promising that he could “imagine no length of
15 resistance to which Ulster can go in which I should not
16 be prepared to support them” (p. 142).

17
18 Ireland looked set for a civil war. Organized as the Ul-
19 ster Volunteers, unionists had been importing arms, and,
20 from 1913, had been drilling a militia. In March 1914, a
21 group of about 100 officers with the British Army based
22 in Ireland had vowed that they would not proceed against
23 Unionists if asked to do so. But then World War I inter-
24 rupted matters and the Act was suspended for the dura-
25 tion of the conflict.

26
27 The Great War changed things utterly. Irish national-
28 ists were divided over whether they should support the
29 war or not. The leader of the IPP said that the cause of
30 independence would best be served by showing loyalty
31 to the British Crown. Yet the British Crown could not
32 count on this. By January 1916, the British government
33 had introduced conscription in Britain, but dared not in
34 Ireland. In April 1918, the British Parliament returned
35 to the question and, despite a warning from the head of the
36 British army in Ireland that they “might as well conscript
37 Germans” (p. 324), had passed a conscription act for Ire-
38 land that they then failed to make effective in the face of
39 an Irish general strike. With that failure, as Travers notes,
40 it was evident that “Britain [had] lost Ireland” (p. 323). In
41 the general election of December 1918 that followed the
42 end of World War I, it was the separatist, republican, and
43 militaristic Sinn Féin that swept the Irish seats. The IPP
44 could manage only six from the 105 in contention, and the
45 Irish Unionist Party garnered twenty-two, and Sinn Féin
46 made its debut with seventy-three seats. Refusing to
47 serve in a British Parliament, Sinn Féin members, or at
48 least those not in prison or on the run, convened their
49 own Dáil [parliament] in Dublin. As the military wing
50 of the republican movement, the Irish Republic Army
51 (IRA) now began its war against British occupation and,
52 by 1921, the British army educated the British Cabinet to

1 the view that Ireland could only be held with a level of
2 repression that was surely unacceptable. Instead, a truce
3 and then a treaty were negotiated, and by December an
4 Irish Free State was established on twenty-six of Ireland’s
5 thirty-two counties. The ten years from the introduction
6 of the Home Rule Bill in 1912 to the inauguration of the
7 Irish Free State in 1922 are now being commemorated as
8 a “Decade of Centenaries” by the government of the Re-
9 public of Ireland.

10
11 For the questions of history and memory raised by the
12 Decade, Helen Laird’s *Commemoration* is an excellent
13 guide. Laird considers the Decade agenda as state-centric
14 and progressivist. It is state-centric because it emphasizes
15 legislation and government institutions. It is progressivist
16 because it treats the present as an improvement over the
17 past, achieved by eliminating the obstacles to change. As
18 an alternative, Laird proposes an avant-garde nostalgia,
19 a concept borrowed from a philosopher, Kate Soper, but
20 best exemplified here in an extended quotation from an
21 1897 essay by Irish socialist James Connolly on the con-
22 tinuing relevance of Gaelic communalism:

23
24 The ardent student of sociology, who believes that the
25 progress of the human race through the various stages
26 of communism, chattel slavery, feudalism and wage slav-
27 ery, has been but a preparation for the higher ordered
28 society of the future . . . will perhaps regard the Irish
29 adherence to clan ownership at such a comparatively
30 recent date as the seventeenth century as evidence of a
31 retarded economic development, and therefore a real
32 hindrance to progress. But the sympathetic student of
33 history, who believes in the possibility of a people by
34 political intuition anticipating the lessons afterwards re-
35 vealed to them in the sad school of experience, will not
36 be indisposed to join with the ardent Irish patriot in his
37 lavish expressions of admiration for the sagacity of his
38 Celtic forefathers, who foreshadowed in the democratic
39 organisation of the Irish clan the more perfect organisa-
40 tion of the free society of the future. (pp. 45–46)

41
42 Forgiven Connolly the clumsy double negative, we find
43 in this extraordinary passage a rebuke to progressive
44 views of history, with Connolly arguing that resisting
45 unwelcome change is prescient rather than regressive. It
46 also suggests that some beneficial institutions fall under
47 the wheels of the juggernaut of history, and in recogniz-
48 ing these a backward glance might disclose hope. Beyond
49 this, Laird wants to make a more specific case about the
50 revolutionary decade itself. Turning her gaze away from
51 the parliamentary and social elites, Laird finds the revo-
52 lutionary decade was a time of radical possibility chanced
53 by the rural poor. This is an attempt to give voice to an
54 egalitarian vision that, from the trenches of the Somme,
55 an Irish poet Thomas Kettle described as the cause of his

1 life, “a dream born in a herdsman’s hut . . . the secret
2 scripture of the poor’ (“To My Daughter Betty, The Gift
3 of God”).

4
5 The force that imposed capitalist relations of produc-
6 tion on the poor people of rural Ireland was colonialism.
7 Communalism stalled the triumph of absolute property
8 rights. For the British, then, it had to go. Across extensive
9 parts of rural Ireland, however, resistance to capitalism
10 was granular, guerrilla, and general. The law of the bour-
11 geois property order could not be installed by consent: It
12 had to be imposed by force. Juries could not be trusted,
13 so judgment had to be summary. For much of the nine-
14 teenth century, and unlike England, large parts of Ireland
15 saw the right to bear arms suspended, the right to trial by
16 jury suspended, the right of assembly suspended, and so
17 it went on. The last third of the nineteenth century saw
18 a rural revolt so general as to fairly earn its contempo-
19 rary moniker, the “Land War.” A great Irish revolution-
20 ary, Michael Davitt, described the evils that beset the
21 countryside as landlordism, introduced by the English
22 as a new feudal property when they took the land from
23 the native Irish. As late as 1860, the British Parliament
24 was still passing laws to eradicate communal property in
25 Ireland and to give landowners absolute rights. Irish resis-
26 tance to capitalism was a resistance to this absolute and
27 individual form of property ownership. Because it took
28 colonial force to give capitalism the field, anticapitalist
29 agitation was anticolonial, and, because ejecting colonial
30 power implied self-government, anticolonial agitation
31 was nationalist. In each of his first two periods as Lib-
32 eral Prime Minister, William Gladstone passed Land Acts
33 for Ireland. Gladstone accepted that Irish people would
34 not agree to the English version of landlord rights and
35 he thought that by concessions on this he could spike
36 the anticolonialism that Irish resistance fostered. Acts of
37 1870 and 1881 conceded rights to tenants, setting rents by
38 tribunal rather than in the market, and effectively mak-
39 ing landlord and tenant joint owners.

40
41 Laird describes “periods of potent possibility” (p. 33),
42 seemingly fecund with counterfactual speculation about
43 how things could be better. The rural insurgency fed such
44 a revolutionary imagination. In an essay for the *Atlas*,
45 Smyth finds much of the ideological and geographical
46 basis of the Irish revolution in this rural insurgency. The
47 heartland of the Land War were the districts in the west
48 of Ireland crammed with landless poor people reluctantly
49 accepting any opportunity to emigrate away from shame-
50 ful poverty. The region proved to be a bedrock of political
51 separatism, and Smyth’s essay emphasizes the culture of
52 insurgency nursed in these districts over the preceding
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1 century. This vital, revolutionary heritage looked back to
2 what had been taken away, but it could also engage with
3 contemporary debates about liberalism, socialism, and
4 economics, particularly when in dialogue with organic
5 intellectuals such as Connolly, Davitt, or Lalor (Kearns
6 2014).
7

8 The centrepiece of the revolutionary decade was in some
9 respects a geographical anomaly: The Rising in Dublin,
10 which began on Easter Monday, 26 April 1916, included
11 about 1,400 people. Fearghal McGarry’s *Atlas* essay de-
12 scribes the well-known geography of the rebels’ encamp-
13 ments and attempted maneuvers within the city, during
14 the six days it took the British to force an Irish surrender
15 (pp. 240–57). Jérôme aan de Wiel’s contribution frames
16 the Rising differently. He argues that, having broken the
17 German codes, the British military leaders in London
18 knew in advance of the Rising and its certain failure,
19 and, in welcoming the repressive opportunity that an
20 abortive putsch would give, decided not to tell the Brit-
21 ish authorities based in Dublin (p. 231). The deaths in
22 Dublin were a little shy of 500 and about half were ci-
23 vilians. Sixteen of the insurgents were executed in the
24 six weeks that followed. In some quarters, these sixteen
25 would later be venerated as martyrs who gave their lives
26 for Irish freedom.
27

28 Irishmen, both unionist and nationalist, both Catholic
29 and Protestant, residents either of Ireland or Britain,
30 joined the British army during the Great War of 1914 to
31 1918, and of the 210,000 who enlisted, between 30,000
32 and 35,000 died, a number that, as Horne shows in his es-
33 say for the *Atlas*, was some five to six times the combined
34 mortality of the Easter Rising of 1916, the War of Inde-
35 pendence of 1919 to 1921, and the Civil War of 1922 and
36 1923. Members of the Ulster Volunteers joined en masse
37 under their own officers; nationalist and Catholic Irish
38 were not trusted in like manner and were given British of-
39 ficers. The deaths of these thousands of Ulster Protestants
40 were soon cherished as a sacrifice for Ulster, a blood bond
41 between unionists and Great Britain.
42

43 So things stood at the end of World War I. With the Brit-
44 ish government unwilling to give precedence to enacting
45 the home rule measures that had been suspended for the
46 duration of the war, the IRA began to make Ireland un-
47 governable, attacking police barracks and stealing guns.
48 Martial law was declared across much of south and south-
49 west Ireland, and the British army began attacking vil-
50 lages that were shielding rebels. The army and the armed
51 police in Ireland were supplemented by auxiliaries re-
52 cruited in Britain who, dubbed Black-and-Tans by virtue
53 of their makeshift uniforms, became notorious for their
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1 ill-disciplined violence. Reprisals and collective punish- 1
2 ment were effectively official policy by the end of 1920, 2
3 but from the heartland of the Land War, in the west, 3
4 southwest, and south, the insurgents continued with a 4
5 guerrilla war that the British found difficult to quench. In 5
6 Dublin, the IRA had a few spectacular intelligence suc- 6
7 cesses, including discovering and then, on the morning of 7
8 Sunday 21 November 1920, killing some fourteen British 8
9 undercover agents at their homes. That afternoon a group 9
10 of Black-and-Tans burst into Croke Park, Dublin, firing 10
11 into the crowd at a Gaelic football match, killing four- 11
12 teen civilians and wounding sixty more. The IRA burned 12
13 some 275 (10 percent) of the so-called big houses of rural 13
14 Ireland; some of these had been billeting British soldiers. 14
15 Over 11 and 12 December, Black-and-Tans set fire to large 15
16 parts of the central districts of the city of Cork. In Bel- 16
17 fast, street riots and arsonists' eviction of Catholics from 17
18 mixed areas killed 267 Catholics and 185 Protestants, and 18
19 reduced 650 houses to ash. 19
20

21 There was more than destruction and murder, though. 21
22 Some of the attacks on big houses attempted to evict 22
23 large-scale graziers and reclaim the land for local tillage. 23
24 In Roscommon, land that was held by the Congested Dis- 24
25 tricts Board as part of a planned redistribution to tenant 25
26 farmers, was instead occupied by villagers who set about 26
27 reestablishing communal farming on strips within com- 27
28 mon fields (Laird, p. 54). 28
29

30 The British filled Irish prisons with rebels, and riots 30
31 within and protests without soon followed. The British 31
32 opened internment camps. In 1921 these Irish prisons 32
33 had, as Murphy shows in his essay in the *Atlas*, some 1,343 33
34 rebels incarcerated after the summary justice of courts 34
35 martial. The British sent the more dangerous IRA leaders 35
36 to prison in Britain and, faced with hunger strikes, let die 36
37 three Irish men under their control, recalling the Fam- 37
38 ine to any Irish mind, when, over the seven years from 38
39 1845 to 1852, over 1 million died and a further 1.5 million 39
40 had emigrated from a population of about 9 million. The 40
41 British wanted to clear the potato eaters off the land and 41
42 to consolidate holdings into pastures from which cattle 42
43 would be marched to the table of urban Britain. Unsur- 43
44prisingly, migration continued, and the population of Ire- 44
45 land declined continually from the time of the Famine to 45
46 World War I, when it stood at about 3 million, a third of 46
47 the level some seventy years earlier. 47
48

49 In speaking of dissensus in Ireland, for Churchill to refer 49
50 to the "integrity of their struggle" was imperial disingenu- 50
51ousness of the purest water. The Irish struggle was not in 51
52 the main an internal one. The British Empire was about 52
53 to lose its first significant territory since the American 53
54
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1 War of Independence, but rather than prepare the island 1
2 for peaceful independence, the British were steeling the 2
3 resolve of unionist opposition. In 1886, Churchill's father, 3
4 Randolph, had given Ulster one of its proudest boasts: 4
5 "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right." When an early 5
6 biography of Randolph Churchill was published, one re- 6
7 viewer remarked that it showed Randolph "participating 7
8 in politics for the sheer pleasure of it . . . a cynical politi- 8
9 cian who believed that the gyrations of political parties 9
10 had value for their own sake" (Chartwell Books 2008). 10
11 Could the Ulster policy of Randolph Churchill really be 11
12 a callous excitation of unionism primarily for domestic 12
13 political ends, and Ireland a mere chip in the roulette that 13
14 was British party and parliamentary politics? That early 14
15 biography said as much, quoting a letter of 1888 from 15
16 Randolph to a political ally: "I decided some time ago 16
17 . . . that if [Gladstone] went for Home Rule, the Orange 17
18 card would be the one to play" (Churchill 1906, p. 89). 18
19 The author was his son, Winston. When, as Secretary of 19
20 State for the Colonies, then, Churchill affected dismay at 20
21 the long-standing Irish mutual antipathy that tried par- 21
22 liamentary patience, he knew full well the complicity of 22
23 British politicians in encouraging resistance even to the 23
24 point of insurrection. 24
25

26 This was the legacy the British shaped in 1922. As they 26
27 left, the erstwhile masters extracted from the Irish Free 27
28 State a contentious oath of loyalty to the British mon- 28
29 arch, destabilizing that polity. To the six counties they 29
30 gave untrammelled Protestant majoritarian rule, brutaliz- 30
31 ing that polity. In neither case did the British attend at all 31
32 to the interests, or even safety, of the minority left on the 32
33 wrong side of the line. In the twenty-six counties, stabil- 33
34 ity was installed, but only by giving the Catholic Church 34
35 a force in social policy and civil society that imperiled the 35
36 autonomy of women, children, and free thought generally. 36
37 In Northern Ireland, for the fifty years of the Stormont 37
38 Parliament (1922–1972), the Protestant majority exer- 38
39 cised one-party rule and a permanent suspension of civil 39
40 liberties (special powers). 40
41

42 In *After Ireland* (2017), Declan Kiberd describes how lit- 42
43 erature responded to these postcolonial polities. He docu- 43
44 ments writers' profound and deepening disillusion. For 44
45 Kiberd, Samuel Beckett's tramps are living after a promise 45
46 that was not kept, a world in which people must live in 46
47 the wake of the intolerable. Of course, there were many 47
48 other reasons why Beckett refused optimism, and Emilie 48
49 Morin's brilliant new book, *Beckett's Political Imagination*, 49
50 discusses many of them, but the hostility of Catholic Ire- 50
51 land and its proto-fascist Anglo-Irish cultural elite toward 51
52 cosmopolitanism was certainly primary. 52
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1 If the Republic disappointed, Northern Ireland was ap- 1
2 palling. Inspired by the bravery of African-American 2
3 civil rights campaigns in the United States, northern 3
4 Catholics campaigned for political rights and eco- 4
5 nomic fairness from the mid-1960s, only to be met by 5
6 an armed police force, an armed militia, and later still 6
7 by the British army once again. At this point, their 7
8 peril revived republican, nationalist struggle. On both 8
9 sides, informal militias disciplined their own communi- 9
10 ties to shield their armed men from the police or army. 10
11 They also found easy targets among neighbors from the 11
12 other side. There was extreme pressure on literature to 12
13 serve, rather than remain independent of, the struggle, 13
14 and Kiberd provides a moving account of the courage 14
15 of Nobel Laureate Seamus Heaney, who insisted instead 15
16 on the necessity of facts against the comfort of cliché, 16
17 requiring that culpability be judged rather than excused 17
18 or explained away. 18
19

20 The counterinsurgency tactics developed by the British 20
21 army in Ireland, and inflicted along the ragged edge of its 21
22 unravelling empire from Malaya to Kenya, now returned 22
23 to the six counties. Thirty years of violence and an aver- 23
24 age ten violent deaths per month, however, brought an 24
25 acceptance that Protestant privilege must be qualified 25
26 and that republicanism must stick to the ballot, not the 26
27 bullet. Republicans were given a context in which their 27
28 tradition was promised parity of esteem and in which 28
29 there would be a political context for all-Ireland coopera- 29
30 tion. Protestants shared in a peace dividend. To monitor 30
31 fairness, though, many aspects of Northern Ireland soci- 31
32 ety are now organized for two tribes, reinforcing separa- 32
33 tion. In this respect, Declan Long's *Ghost-Haunted Land* 33
34 shows how some artists at least followed the example of 34
35 the Heaney, anticipating some of the arguments on the 35
36 strategic use of memory in Northern Ireland put forth by 36
37 Robinson (2018) in his recent book *Transitional Justice* 37
38 *and the Politics of Inscription* (reviewed by Sarah McDow- 38
39 ell in this issue). After the heroic achievement of peace 39
40 with the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement in 1998, there 40
41 was a devious invitation to move on and forget. 41
42

43 People were being asked to move into a world in which 43
44 everything could start afresh, a world with no history. 44
45 This is the neoliberal imaginary of absolute property, 45
46 where commodities come with neither messy social ties 46
47 nor historical obligations. In this sense, the spectral, 47
48 the ghosts of the past, as Long points out, might vac- 48
49 cinate against spectacle. For example, Long discusses 49
50 Willie Doherty's film installation, *Ghost Story* (2007 50
51 [AQ1](#)). The film begins by comparing the thin trace left 51
52 by a landscape with the permanent impression of a face 52
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1 seen in a crowd, which, from the context becomes clear, 1
2 was someone fleeing the slaughter of Bloody Sunday in 2
3 Derry, 30 January 1972. The following day, the Brit- 3
4 ish Home Secretary said he believed that the army had 4
5 been fired on and, in protecting themselves, had shot 5
6 dead thirteen armed civilians (another would die later 6
7 from his wounds), but promised a tribunal. The Widg- 7
8 ery Report that followed was quickly issued and included 8
9 evidence that was only heard in private, with no cross- 9
10 examination, and led to the exoneration of the soldiers 10
11 within eleven weeks. As part of the Peace Process, in 11
12 1998 the British Prime Minister promised a new, public 12
13 inquiry. In 2010, accepting the findings of the Saville 13
14 Report, another British Prime Minister said that the 14
15 British government accepted that the fourteen killed 15
16 had been unarmed and that their shooting was "unjusti- 16
17 fied and unjustifiable" (McDonald and Bowcott 2010). 17
18 This is the bloody history over which a neoliberal peace 18
19 barks the peremptory command, forgive and forget. 19
20

21 As in 1912, so in 2017, a general election in the United 21
22 Kingdom left an Irish party holding the balance of 22
23 power between the two largest (British) parties. Once 23
24 again the empire is in question, a vainglorious English 24
25 nostalgia imagining a world where, shorn of European 25
26 obligations, the United Kingdom can swagger abroad. 26
27 Once again, there is an Irish problem. The UK govern- 27
28 ment is committed to the Good Friday/Belfast Agree- 28
29 ment, which, in settling the conflict in Northern Ire- 29
30 land, promised that whoever held sovereignty over the 30
31 six counties would exercise that authority "with rigorous 31
32 impartiality on behalf of all the people in the diversity 32
33 of their identities and traditions" (Belfast Agreement 33
34 1998). In making an agreement with the Democratic 34
35 Unionist Party to ensure Conservatives could govern 35
36 with a parliamentary majority, this impartiality was set 36
37 aside. The election of 2017 had been called in the hope 37
38 that the Conservatives would increase their parliamen- 38
39 tary majority and could thus implement with renewed 39
40 authority the opinion of the referendum of 2016, which 40
41 had only produced a slight majority for leaving the EU. 41
42 In any event, the Conservative parliamentary majority 42
43 disappeared, and hence the deal with the DUP [AQ2](#). It is 43
44 not at all clear that the U.K. government can implement 44
45 a revision of the status of the border between the Repub- 45
46 lic and Northern Ireland without the explicit consent 46
47 of the people of the six counties (who actually voted 47
48 to remain in the EU). The Agreement declared that "it 48
49 would be wrong to make any change in the status of 49
50 Northern Ireland save with the consent of a majority of 50
51 its people." Introducing a land border between Northern 51
52 Ireland and the Republic is certainly a change in the 52
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1 status of Northern Ireland, as would be the introduc-
2 tion of a sea border between Northern Ireland and Great
3 Britain. Brexit in any likely form is precisely a change
4 in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland. A land
5 border sets Northern nationalists further apart from
6 their southern compatriots. A sea border sets Northern
7 unionists further apart from their British compatriots.
8 In any likely version, Brexit makes the dual-identity
9 Irish–British harder to sustain across the two communi-
10 ties in Northern Ireland.
11

12 Yet, some version of this dual identity is central to the
13 resolution of conflict in Northern Ireland. Furthermore,
14 the British were only able to achieve this resolution in
15 the context of EU institutions that dissolved to a very
16 large degree the significance of the border. Now, all of
17 this is cast aside so that Britain can feel more independ-
18 ent, and can desist payments to the EU. The dishonesty
19 of the promises made by the Brexit side is not my main
20 concern here; rather, it is the fact that at no point dur-
21 ing the debate did any of the principal Brexiteers give a
22 thought to Ireland, and that is why we now see a British
23 Foreign Secretary assuring a bunch of Thatcherites that
24 it is mere “folly” to believe that the Irish question places
25 any serious check on UK geopolitical ambition. It should,
26 though, and these books explain why.
27

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