

CALL FOR PAPERS:

“Vulnerability, Care and Relational Ethics in Contemporary Irish Culture”

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Guest editor: José Carregal-Romero (University of Huelva, Spain)

In light of current threats and crises –social, economic, political and environmental– causing much insecurity, anxiety and ideological conflict on both global and national scales, with power structures affecting the nature of personal relationships, this special issue of *Irish Studies Review* seeks to explore how contemporary Irish culture addresses the current plight of vulnerable individuals in relation to their communities. Throughout the late years of the twentieth century and early 2000s, many of these crises have been framed, as Liam Harte observes in his *Reading the Irish Novel: 1987-2007* (2014), by representations which focus on issues of individual concern, with protagonists whose private experiences dramatise “the gap between lived realities and inherited narratives of origin, identity and place” (3). Yet, in more recent years, Irish Studies scholarship has seemingly expanded its focus, methodologies and ideologies to foreground the emergence of more positive formulations of common interdependency and shared vulnerabilities which are seen as empowering responses “to the chaos and intensity of the contemporary” (6), as Paige Reynolds notes in her introduction to the collection *The New Irish Studies* (2020). Specifically in the case of contemporary fiction, José Carregal-Romero (2023) has argued that, against a framework of personal crisis and a context of rigidly constructed social prejudices, Sally Rooney’s novels articulate a fresh notion of the self as relationship-oriented: “suffering is eased, and one’s own problems re-assessed, thanks to honest communication, mutual caring and acceptance of one’s and the other’s vulnerability” (230).

Through the prisms of care and vulnerability, which prioritise mutuality over individualism and valorise the affective, socially embedded nature of the self, this special issue seeks to address the relational ethics of contemporary Ireland within a diversity of artistic and cultural expressions (literature, visual arts, film and screen, performance and digital media). Special attention will be given to works which situate resistance and positive transformation in the realm of individual relationships and the

communal, generating a sense of attentiveness and responsiveness towards systemic fallibilities, social frailties and universal human needs. Such relational approaches, as Judith Butler remarked in an interview for *The New Yorker* (2020), contradict the assumption of the “self-standing individual” and reclaim interdependency as “the basis of our ethical obligations to one another”. Drawing on these concerns, this special issue aims to bring to the forefront important relational notions of empathy, intimacy, trust and/or respect for the other’s experience thus imagining alternative value systems to those that support today’s ingrained biases and entrenched inequalities, just to promote a deeper understanding of human interconnectedness and vulnerability.

This special issue on vulnerability, care and relational ethics in contemporary Irish culture welcomes contributions that cover topics such as (but not limited to):

- Class, race and religion: entrenched prejudices and structural oppression.
- Feminist and queer perspectives on gender, sexuality and the body.
- Crises of the self, mental health, alienation and emotional healing through human connection.
- The existential anxieties and precarities of our neoliberal times: the threat of neo-conservatism.
- (Mis)communication and the new forms of sociability brought by current information technologies.
- Environmental crises, communion with nature and ecological interdependence.
- The disaffection and awareness of inequality in recessionary Ireland.
- Irish history and the reinterpretation of the past through the lens of the contemporary.

To propose a contribution, please send a 500-word abstract (with a tentative title, aims and rationale) and a basic bibliography to guest editor José Carregal-Romero (jose.carregal@dfing.uhu.es) by 15 September 2024. Invitations to submit full-length essays will be issued in early November 2024, with a deadline of 30 April 2025.

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