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IVRLA¹ RESEARCH REPORT: AUSTIN CLARKE AT THE POETRY IRELAND LIBRARY

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1. CONTEXT

This project investigates the Austin Clarke holdings at the Poetry Ireland Library housed in UCD Library Special Collections. The Poetry Ireland Library contains more than 5,000 volumes, most of which were once part of Clarke's private library. The collection also contains a significant amount of material that belonged to Irish poet and UCD lecturer John Jordan, and to Dutch critic Tanya Touwen; however this project examines the Austin Clarke material only. While the most significant of Clarke's holdings are in the genre of poetry, his library also contains a wide range of critical, historical and biographical works. Each book is a useful resource in itself; collectively these volumes offer fascinating insights into the intellectual life of mid-twentieth-century Ireland and into specific textual influences on the work of one of Ireland's major poets.

Austin Clarke is an important figure in the history of twentieth-century Irish poetry. Publishing his first volume in 1917, he continued to write until his death in 1974. In addition to his work as a poet and his role as founder of the Dublin Verse Speaking Society, he was a dramatist and broadcaster who also worked as a reviewer and a literary journalist both in Dublin and in London. He was the most significant poet of his generation in Ireland, and though Samuel Beckett was to satirise Clarke for the antiquarian leanings of his work, the older poet proved both an influential and supportive figure for the next generation of writers.

Clarke's work ranged from early poems in the Revivalist mode through to satirical and personal poetry in the 1970s. A transition from mythic to historical material can be traced in his work from the late 1920s; this change was indicative of Clarke's increasing preoccupation

¹ The UCD Irish Virtual Research Library and Archive (IVRLA) is a major digitisation project which was undertaken by University College Dublin from 2005 to 2009. Material selected from UCD's extensive resources of archival and rare material was digitised and catalogued before being made available from a single virtual location (<http://ivrla.ucd.ie>). This digitised material covers a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines and is arranged in curated collections which can be browsed, searched, bookmarked, or downloaded. In addition to the digitisation of existing UCD collections, the IVRLA conducted a series of demonstrator projects. The remit of these projects was to develop additional digital research resources and to present these in the form of an exhibition collection. Some of these projects incorporated existing IVRLA material but many generated new content which was inspired by the potential of digital resources. Consequently, the IVRLA and its demonstrator projects show how digital repositories can provide access to diverse archival research materials as well as challenging the ways in which we consider digital content and generate research in a digital environment. The IVRLA is a component of the UCD Humanities Institute of Ireland and is funded under the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTL) Cycle 3, administered by the Higher Education Authority.

with Ireland's intellectual history and in particular with the shaping influence that Catholicism exerted upon it. It was this dimension of his work that would be at once his most distinctive achievement and the reason for his relative obscurity. Although Clarke may be identified with a particularly insular period in Irish history, he was both critical of this insularity and himself open to other cultural influences. Thus, he was writing poetry, and reading it, during a time of huge change and development in the Irish poetry scene, both culturally and formally, and this fact is amply demonstrated in the range and originality of his book collection.

2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

Clarke witnessed the birth of the new Irish state and its growth towards modernity. His library reveals not just the kinds of books that Clarke chose to read, but material given to him both in a personal capacity and in his professional role as a reviewer. Clarke's reviews were published in major British and Irish publications; they are important not only for what they tell us about the work under scrutiny, but as an indication of the important relationship between cultural production within Ireland and abroad. Broadly speaking, this project seeks to investigate this relationship between Irish poetry and international influences. It does so by using the Austin Clarke Library as evidence of the relationship that Clarke himself had with the work of poets and scholars from outside Ireland, and as a starting point for thinking about these kinds of intellectual currents today.

This project has two main outputs: the first is a group of reviews written by Clarke, which have been made available, together with related resource material, in digital form; the second is a symposium on transnational elements in Irish poetry. The first part of the project specifically attends to the relationship between Clarke as reader and Clarke as professional reviewer. In order to understand this dynamic, however, it was necessary to place it first within the broader context of the relationship between the private and public dimensions of Clarke's own life. This enquiry was greatly enhanced by time spent working on the Austin Clarke Papers held at the National Library of Ireland, which include drafts of poems, letters and notes. Both notebook entries and correspondence testify to Clarke's ongoing commitment to his role as reviewer and broadcaster and the care with which he reflected upon his private reading.

Familiarity with the range of material in Clarke's library was another essential prerequisite to work on this project and this was achieved both by consulting items on the shelves in UCD Library Special Collections and by reviewing and editing the shelf list of Poetry

Ireland volumes that had already been compiled by the staff there. The volumes in Clarke's library reflect the extent of the poet's reading, and in turn the way in which he brought this material to bear on his own poetry. His interests ranged widely among works of classical literature and scholarship as well as the work of minor contemporaries who may now seem obscure. One of the most striking aspects of his collection is the number of works it contains by non-Irish writers. Although Clarke is often considered to be a poet obsessed with Irish cultural forms – with Irish myth and history, as well as in Irish current affairs – he also read other poetries widely, not just British and American work, but French, German, Greek and Russian poets, as well as poets from India and from the Middle East. This is indicative not only of Clarke's personal, and professional, interest in these materials, but also of the level of engagement between Ireland and other cultures at this time.

3. DETAILED OUTPUT

Digitised Output: The IVRLA Austin Clarke Collection

The starting point for this project's digital output was the compilation of a select list of Austin Clarke's reviews and essays. This list, which was intended to highlight his attention to a range of Irish material and thus to contribute to a rounded view of Clarke as reader and reviewer, has now been made available through the IVRLA. A small sample of his reviews was then chosen for digitisation, together with visual representations of the relevant volumes from his library. As the overall remit of the IVRLA project was to increase access to UCD holdings while at the same time facilitating scholarship, it was imperative to choose material that was already held within UCD but was not otherwise easily available to scholars. Many of Clarke's reviews were printed in newspapers (for example, *The Irish Times*) that have archives within existing electronic resources, both within UCD and externally. By choosing reviews from *The Dublin Magazine*,² this project facilitated greater availability of material from a source which has no electronic profile but which offers a very valuable insight into the development of Irish literary culture during the twentieth century.

The choice of materials for digitisation was circumscribed both by the availability of the printed versions of these reviews and by copyright issues. As the bound volumes of *The Dublin Magazine* are available on open shelf in the UCD library, it was necessary to select

² *The Dublin Magazine* was a literary journal, which was published between 1923 and 1958. Originally launched as a monthly journal in August 1923, it changed to a quarterly publication in January 1926 and remained so for the rest of its run. It was edited for its entire existence by Seamus O'Sullivan and published by New Square Publications, Dublin. UCD Library holds the complete run of the journal (although some of the earlier issues are held in the library store for preservation reasons).

reviews which had not been subject to annotation over the years. Permission to reproduce the reviews had to be sought from Austin Clarke's literary executor while consent to reproduce images of the books themselves had to be sought from the publishers of each book. Due to the very tight time frame within which this project had to be completed, only six reviews were chosen for digitisation but these are indicative of the great possibilities of this resource for scholars of cultural history during this period. Although small in number, these reviews offer interesting insights into Clarke's cultural achievement and into the role of reviews in literary culture. In making a sample of Clarke's reviews available to readers, we're also suggesting that there is as much to be learned about the writer of a review as about the work under scrutiny. Here it is the eclectic nature of Clarke's engagement that is striking, and it is something that pervades his entire library, not only the books in it that were the subject of his reviews. Each review was scanned and made available as a high-quality digital image. In addition, in order to allow the user to get a sense of the material object with which Clarke himself engaged when writing the review, the front cover/dust jacket (and in some cases the spine, title page, or plate illustration) of the original volume from Clarke's library was scanned and made available digitally. The six reviews are as follows:

1. *Strolling Players and Drama in the Provinces, 1660-1765*, by Sybil Rosenfeld (1939);
2. *The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry*, ed. Hugh MacDiarmid (1940);
3. *Aiothdioghluim Dána: A Miscellany of Irish Bardic Poetry*, ed. and trans. Lambert McKenna (1940);
4. *Intertraffic: Studies in Translation*, by E. S. Bates (1943);
5. *Voltaire: Myth and Reality*, by Kathleen O'Flaherty (1945); and
6. *The Poet in the Theatre*, by Ronald Peacock (1946).

These titles reflect the range of material that Clarke engaged with as a reviewer, from poetry anthologies to scholarly works; they also point to his interest in Irish, Scottish, English and European materials. Clarke's ability to write authoritatively on many kinds of cultural production, including theatre and the visual arts, was informed both by his own involvement in theatre and broadcasting and his consequent familiarity with various practitioners, and by the cumulative nature of his reading. Clarke's career as a reviewer was also shaped by the publications for which he wrote. Beginning with early reviews in *The New Statesman* and *The Nation and the Athenaeum*, Clarke honed his craft through long-term work with *The Times Literary Supplement* and later *The Irish Times*. His work for *The Dublin Magazine*, from which these reviews were chosen, was concentrated mainly in the early 1940s. By choosing a number of reviews from a single journal, we can trace Clarke's continuing relationship with

this publication and the characteristics of his reviewing style – a precise yet richly informative mode – during this particularly intense period in his career as a journalist.

The intensity of Clarke's literary engagement is demonstrated by the extent and range of titles in his personal library. From the preliminary observations of the material³ made during this project, some interesting patterns emerge. In terms of genre and theme, notable points include the remarkable diversity in the prose collection, the substantial representation of lesser-known Irish poets within the poetry collection (possibly because these works were sent to Clarke either for review or by the poets themselves), and the inclusion of volumes on actors and the theatre, which may have been used by Clarke in the course of composing his Abbey verse-plays. Another significant presence in the collection is that of literary biographies and literary criticism. These suggest Clarke's intense interest in the interaction of writer and text, in the psychological dimension of the act of writing and in the emergence of literary criticism. Clarke's interest in diverse cultural sources and practices is also in evidence: many different disciplines are represented here, from fairy tales to the lives of the saints, from women's history to psychoanalysis. Irish literature is pre-eminent, especially the genres of poetry and drama, but the collection also features many non-Irish titles, including an extensive range of international fiction. In addition, there are numerous language instruction and linguistics volumes which range beyond European languages to include Japanese and Arabic.

The many volumes which comprised Clarke's library can now be viewed as an excel list through the IVRLA. This list, which was extracted from the complete list of Poetry Ireland material originally drafted by Eugene Roche of UCD Library Special Collections, helps to put the digitised review material in perspective and provides an insight into the library of one of Ireland's most famous poets. The IVRLA shelf list includes Clarke's library material only. Users of this list should note however that it was difficult to ascertain – at this remove and within the scope of this project – the exact provenance of all the library material and that the shelf list should therefore be regarded as provisional. Nonetheless, access to this shelf list sheds light on the Clarke library and on its importance within UCD's holdings. Although all the individual volumes are available as part of the existing UCD library catalogue, these do not appear as a single group, so the relationship among these titles has not previously been clear to the scholar. Both the shelf list and the list of selected reviews and articles provide a valuable resource for scholars wishing to work further in this area.

³ The observations in this paragraph have been compiled from a summary of Austin Clarke's library prepared by Dr Caroline Magennis (project researcher, July/August 2009).

Discursive Output: The Research Symposium

The second output of the project – the symposium entitled *International Crosscurrents in 20th Century Irish Poetry* – was held on Friday November 20th 2009. The speakers were Professor Peter Denman (NUI Maynooth), Professor Eileán Ní Chuilleanáin (TCD) and Vincent Woods (RTE). Each of the three speakers combines the role of writer with that of critic or commentator and the papers addressed international strands in contemporary Irish poetry directly. In our choice of speakers we sought to bring together eminent figures from Irish academic and cultural life, each of whom would approach the issue of the transnational in poetry from a different perspective. These were also speakers who in their own roles represented the different facets of Clarke's career. Their chosen topics, which ranged from Irish language translations of European poets to the Spanish connections in Pearse Hutchinson's life and poetry, embraced both close textual readings and cultural history. Their attention to contemporary poetry also provided interesting links to earlier generations of writers and to the development of poetry cultures in twentieth-century Ireland more broadly. The symposium was well-attended, with specialists in different areas of modern poetry – including Irish language poetry and American and European work – entering the discussion. In the course of the event, many and fruitful parallels were drawn between poetry cultures in Ireland and abroad, in particular on the issues of translation and reception.

4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Austin Clarke's literary journalism offers a rich vein for future scholars of Irish intellectual history of the twentieth century. More extensive digitisation of this material would maximise its availability, not only to literary scholars but also to researchers in history, sociology and cultural and media studies. This material, together with the important manuscript resources on Austin Clarke at the National Library of Ireland would offer an incentive to scholars to devote further attention to Clarke himself, who is a comparatively neglected figure in the Irish poetry scene.

Already this project has given rise to two connected research developments. The first is a symposium that is part of the UCD Print Cultures series hosted by Dr Marc Caball at the Humanities Institute of Ireland. This symposium, which was held in March 2010 and organised by Professor Andrew Carpenter and Dr Lucy Collins, drew in part on the material of the Austin Clarke Library as a resource for those studying the book as a material object, especially for scholars working on small poetry presses in Ireland in the twentieth century.

The second initiative will be a special issue of the *Irish University Review* in 2012 that examines the intersection between poetry print cultures in Ireland and the reception of Irish poetry abroad. Both of these planned outputs have arisen as a direct result of work on this digitisation project. Taken together with the project symposium, it is clear that the provision of digital access to this material has not only allowed insight into the output of a particular literary figure but has also generated fruitful research strands into wider issues of cultural production.