

<b>Institution:</b> The University of Manchester		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 (English Language and Literature)		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Changing public perception and creative practice around the Irish migrant experience in Britain		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2004-2017		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Liam Harte	Professor of Irish Literature	2004-present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2015-2019		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  Research at The University of Manchester (much of it AHRC-funded) changed public understanding of, and creative engagement with, the Irish migrant experience in Britain. The research undermined the pervasive characterisation of the Irish in Britain as a homogenous and unliterary migrant group and placed life writing at the heart of new understandings of the Irish emigrant experience. Through a new touring play and a series of creative workshops building on the findings, the research: (i) increased public knowledge of migration and its manifold effects, including cross-cultural understanding of identity and its complexities; (ii) enhanced emigrants' sense of community and cultural belonging; (iii) changed the creative practice and enhanced the self-development of 43 creative writers.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b>  <i>"At the heart of the Irish emigrant experience there is a caution, a refusal to speak, a fear of the word."</i> So declared novelist Joseph O'Connor in 1993, voicing a common generalisation about the Irish in Britain as an unliterary people who cleaved more to the spade than to the pen. Harte's body of underpinning research [1-4] has decisively overturned such perceptions. First, by bringing to light a previously unseen tradition of life writing by Irish immigrants in Britain dating back to the early 1700s. Secondly, by showing how these first-person narratives challenge the myths of literary reticence and homogeneity and illuminate the intricacies of migrant subjectivity and transnational affiliation. A later phase of research produced creative outputs (a play, poetry and short fiction) that further extend this literary tradition [5, 6; see also section 4]. The underpinning research involved two key strategies to generate new insights:</p>		
<p><b>1. Discovery of Irish migrant autobiographies:</b> Supported by an AHRC award (2008) [G1; see section 3], Harte researched a hitherto unexplored literary corpus, the autobiographies of people of Irish birth and heritage in Britain. Having assembled over 100 of these works into a cohesive literary lineage, he selected 63 for inclusion in his 2009 study [4]. A close analysis of this overlooked corpus revealed how (i) the richly varied testimonies of migrants confound equations of Irish exile with suffering and victimhood by illuminating the multiple ways of being Irish in Britain; (ii) these life writings prove that diasporic identity is constituted as much in difference as it is in commonality; (iii) acts of migrant self-portraiture enable us to better understand the role the migrant imagination plays in shaping such fluid concepts as home and belonging, which are themselves cognates of those elusive abstractions, Irishness and Britishness.</p>		
<p><b>2. The development of an innovative research methodology:</b> The research developed an interdisciplinary critical methodology that conceptualises Irish migrant life writing as literary artefact, social history and political utterance [1-4]. This framework posits that the expressive dimensions of autobiographical texts are crucial to Irish migrant autobiographers' interpretation of experience. Most of these writers belonged to subordinate groups that have been silenced by various forms of prejudice, and who adhered to predominantly oral and collective modes of expression that are inimical to the conventions of literary self-portraiture. By focusing on how such writers claim narrative authority, the research produced a methodology that revealed writers' assertions of agency to be inherently political acts. This new perspective transformed subjects from anonymous objects of speculation into known narrators of specific histories (including Ellen O'Neill, a poor, illiterate 17-year-old Irishwoman who was convicted of being a pickpocket by a Preston court in 1850 and sentenced to transportation to Van Diemen's Land). The research's conception of Irish migrant autobiography as a form of resistance writing foregrounds the</p>		

productive tensions that issue from authors' struggles to contain the stories they tell within inherited autobiographical templates. Furthermore, its attunement to the performative quality of Irish migrant life writing reveals how many of these self-narratives constitute sites for the staging of transgressive subjectivities that complicate preconceived notions of nationality and configure hyphenated identities in nuanced, gradated terms (such as John Walsh, born in London in 1953, who experienced a conflicted sense of identity in a middle-class metropolitan family with Irish roots). As such, this disparate corpus supports a view of diasporic Irishness as a continuum of multiple and partial identifications rather than a monolithic category. In this way, the methodology and findings created a model for those of immigrant heritage in Britain to better understand identity and its complexities.

### 3. References to the research

1. **Harte, Liam.** "You Want to be a British Paddy?": The Anxiety of Identity in Post-war Irish Migrant Writing", in *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s*, eds. Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O'Shea, Carmel Quinlan (Cork: Mercier Press, 2004): 233-251. ISBN: 1-85635-418-0. Available from HEI.
2. **Harte, Liam.** "Migrancy, Performativity and Autobiographical Identity", *Irish Studies Review*, 14:2 (2006): 225–238. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09670880600603737>
3. **Harte, Liam (ed.).** *Modern Irish Autobiography: Self, Nation and Society* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). ISBN: 978-1-4039-1268-8. Available from HEI.
4. **Harte, Liam.** *The Literature of the Irish in Britain: Autobiography and Memoir, 1725-2001* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). ISBN: 978-0-230-29636-7. Available from HEI.
5. **Harte, Liam.** "Transforming Research into Art: The Making and Staging of *My English Tongue, My Irish Heart*, a Research-Based Drama about the Irish in Britain", *Irish Studies Review*, 25:1 (2017): 71-87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09670882.2016.1266733>
6. **Harte, Liam (ed.).** *Something About Home: New Writing on Migration and Belonging* (Dublin: Geography Publications, 2017). ISBN: 978-0906602-843. Available from HEI.

### Grants [Harte PI of all three]

- G1. AHRC, "The Autobiography of the Irish in Britain" (2008) AH/E004423/1 GBP24,170.00
- G2. AHRC, "My Country, A Journey: A Research-Based Drama on the Irish Migration Experience in Britain" (2014-15) AH/L014904/1 GBP79,068.40
- G3. AHRC, "Cross-Cultural Connections: Sharing Manchester's Migration Stories" (2015) GBP4,998.50

**Evidence of Quality:** The research for [4] and [5] was funded by the AHRC [G1, G2]. Output [4] was designated "outstanding" by the AHRC in 2009. It was twice named a 2009 'Book of the Year' (Professor Roy Foster, *TLS*; Mary Kenny, *Irish Independent*) and described as "a major work of scholarship" (*Literature and History*, 2010). The President of Ireland, Dr Michael D. Higgins, praised it as a model of interdisciplinary scholarship (*American Journal of Irish Studies*, 2012). [1] was described as an "outstanding" analysis of Irish migrant writing, which "displays brilliant insights into emigrant identity-sense" (*Irish Review*, 2005); [3] was acclaimed as "a text that breaks new ground" (*Irish Studies Review*, 2009); and [6] was praised for showing how Harte's "keen mind continues to examine work produced by the Irish in all their differences and evolutions" (*Breac*, 2019). [5] is the most read article in the 30-year history of *Irish Studies Review*.

### 4. Details of the impact

An AHRC Follow-On Funding award [G2] facilitated a programme of engagement to challenge the public view of Irishness in Britain and change creative practice by transforming the research insights into a stage play, entitled *My English Tongue, My Irish Heart* [A.i]. The play, which was the output of Harte's collaboration with dramatist Martin Lynch and theatre company Green Shoot Productions, toured to nine UK and Irish venues between 1 May and 31 May 2015. It attracted 2,073 attendees (ticketed, paid) at 16 performances [A.ii]. The proceeds from the play's month-long tour (approximately GBP4,000) were donated to two emigrant welfare charities – the Aisling Return to Ireland Project in London and the Safe Home Programme in Co. Mayo – both of which provide support and advice to vulnerable and isolated migrants. The tour purposefully visited the communities that were the subject of Harte's underpinning research, playing in venues along Ireland's western seaboard that have been emigrant nurseries for centuries, as well as in Manchester and London, two major loci of Irish settlement in England.

*My English Tongue, My Irish Heart* attracted notable press attention, including an article authored by Harte in the *Irish Times* that outlined the influence of the research on the creative process [B]. The play received positive reviews [B], with the *Irish News* describing it as a “fascinating” production featuring a “faultless company and precision cast.” Praise emphasised the play’s focus on a new narrative around Irish migration, with the *Belfast Times* stating: “This is a remarkable look at Irish men and women emigrating to England and the heartbreak such journeys have caused through the generations. [...] [I]n many ways this is a history lesson but you’ve never had a history lesson presented like this before” [B]. The London Irish Centre tweeted: “Absolutely loved it.” “Stunning.” “Fantastic.” “Captivating.” “Top class.” [B]

The tour was accompanied by an outreach programme comprising three creative writing workshop series in Manchester, Belfast and Castlebar, which took place between April and May 2015 [C.i, C.ii]. A total of 43 writers took part. The workshops were facilitated by poets John McAuliffe (Manchester workshops; University of Manchester) and Moyra Donaldson (Belfast) and novelist Mike McCormack (Castlebar). The workshops’ central purpose was to engage new and experienced creative writers on the play’s core themes of migration, belonging and identity. All workshop participants were provided with a copy of [4], which was used as a creative stimulus and educative tool. The impact of this creative approach for participants is evidenced by the publication of an anthology of workshop outputs [6] in 2017. A review of the collection praised it as “a celebration of the urge to communicate above all” and commended the inclusion of authors at different stages of their writing careers. It emphasised that it was “nuanced and marshalled... This book deserves attention” [D].

Additional competitive funding was secured [G3] that enabled Harte to widen community engagement with his research, working with a cohort of young people from BAME and disadvantaged backgrounds. This was achieved by running *Show Us Your Manc*, a series of six two-hour workshops for 20 young people (aged 15 to 25) at Z-arts Centre and Rathbone Training in Manchester between June and July 2015. These venues were chosen because they supported the project’s aim to work with BAME and disadvantaged young people. Z-arts focuses on the use of creativity to help young people reach their full potential, while Rathbone Training helps NEET young people into education and training [E.i]. These participatory workshops, co-led by the creative writers from the play workshops and two researcher film-makers from Belle Vue Productions, explored Manchester’s histories of immigration and drew on the outputs of [G1], including the play itself. The core aim was to develop the participants’ imaginative understanding of how the lives of migrants from Ireland and elsewhere matched or differed from their own. The project was evaluated through a participant questionnaire. All ten respondents said they enjoyed taking part in the workshops and eight said they learned from the experience. All rated the overall quality of the workshops as “Excellent” or “Good” [E.ii]. A film about the series [E.i] was shown at the final community event at Z-arts, alongside a screening of *My English Tongue, My Irish Heart*, introduced by Lynch.

These interlinked activities produced three main forms of impact, as follows:

**1. Increased public knowledge and changed public understanding of migration and its effects:** The play tour powerfully demonstrated how research-based drama is an effective medium for increasing public knowledge and understanding, precipitating attitudinal change and enhancing community cohesion and cultural belonging. Of the 2,073 attendees, 744 people completed a questionnaire, 44% of whom were first-time or infrequent theatre-goers [A.iii]. 94% rated the quality of the production as “Excellent” or “Good”; 67% said they learned more than they already knew about Irish emigration and its effects; and 49% said the play altered their views about migration at a local and/or global level [A.iii]. The creative loop achieved by the tour’s design, whereby narratives originating in marginalised communities were routed back into those communities via dramatic performance, successfully amplified the multidirectional aspects of migration, just as the play itself exploited the capacity of personal accounts of actual journeys to initiate reflective inward journeys in those who came to see it.

Attendees’ stated motivations for coming to see the play reveal that it not only reached its target audience on both sides of the Irish Sea, but that it also provided a way of understanding identity and emigrant experience for those from non-Irish backgrounds, as evidenced by the following comments: “It made me see many similarities between the Irish and South Asian experiences of migration and belonging”; “I liked the variety of stories, and although I wasn’t intending to feel part



*of this history (I'm English and Indian) I was interested to find out that many rich Irish sent their illegitimate children to England, because this was the story of my great, great grandfather" [A.iii].* The most marked change in the evaluations was the play's success in increasing people's knowledge and understanding of migration and its effects, as shown by these remarks: *"I learned so much. I had no idea Irish emigration went so far back"; "Particularised the gaps in learned emigration story. Widened my knowledge of the experience of others" [A.iii].* Many forged a strong affective connection with the play, finding in it echoes of their personal experiences of migration: *"This play, more than any other (or any book), gets to the essence of what it feels like to be an Irish emigrant"; "As someone who was born in England, both parents immigrants, and going back to Ireland aged 10, later returning to England – you really have touched me!"; "It has made me appreciate better the complexities of the migratory experience and reflect on my own family's experience of this" [A.iii].*

**2. Enhanced emigrants' sense of community and cultural belonging:** Another prominent benefit was the enhanced sense of community and cultural belonging the play engendered, as these comments attest: *"It has enriched me – I belong now to a CONSTITUENCY of individuals who are a beautiful amalgam of identities and it's OKAY!"; "The play affirmed my feelings and told me that I am confident and comfortable with my identity: London Irish" [A.iii].* Some said the play helped to reconcile contradictory elements of Irish migrant identity, particularly in relation to religion and sectarianism, as this remark shows: *"I'm raised here, both parents from Belfast. One Protestant, one Catholic and grew up confused about my Irish identity. This made me feel like I was one of many, like I wasn't alone" [A.iii].* Many similar responses were voiced during the post-show discussions in Manchester and London, particularly by those with *"feet in two countries"*, who praised the play for affirming their sense of cultural distinctiveness and helping them make better sense of what one described as *"my strange feeling of nationality" [A.iii].* The play also raised Irish-born people's awareness of the negotiated identities of those born of Irish heritage abroad, as exemplified by these remarks: *"I have relatives in mainland GB and never really thought about how my cousins born in Manchester and Birmingham felt about their Irish heritage"; "Now I understand why my dad described his grandmother as Irish when she was born in London" [A.iii].* The play also encouraged fresh comparative perspectives on the moral panic surrounding immigrants and refugees in the Europe of 2015, as evidenced by these responses: *"Made me think about the current situation in the Med and that the initial response to bomb the boats before they set off proved our politicians lack all imagination or sense of history – maybe they should come and see the play"; "We are Maltese and know all about this. You could even say that we are the Irish of the Mediterranean" [A.iii].* Such evidence reflects the beneficial impact of Harte's research on the Irish in Britain on transnational understandings of migration.

**3. Changed the creative practice and enhanced the self-development of writers:** The outreach component of the tour had a demonstrable impact on the skill set of the 43 writers who took part in the three creative writing workshop series, all of whom were recruited via the networks of each workshop venue. In data collected at the time of the tour, approximately 80% of writers responding to a participant questionnaire rated the sessions as *"Excellent"* because they enabled them to develop new skills and enhance existing skills [C.ii]. Interviews recorded after the workshops yielded further evidence of skills development [C.i]. One writer stated that the workshops gave him *"an introduction to a different way of writing"* and raised his subsequent work *"to a different level"*; another said she acquired sophisticated skills of character development that will inform her next book; and another reported that she learned to *"think in a more disciplined fashion"* and discovered *"ideas I didn't know I had"* [C.i]. The interviews also illuminated the workshops' role in facilitating reflections on identity, home and belonging. One writer spoke of how the series helped him to see how *"things that have been your life stories suddenly take on an Irishness which you didn't consider"*; another, of how *"the workshops made me think of my sense of being in a place. It doesn't have to be back there, it's about how we are in this place"* [C.i].

In-depth interviews were undertaken with nine writers (three from each workshop) four years later (March 2019) in order to evolve critical understanding of the longitudinal impact of the series [F]. The interviews assessed the series' practical benefits and the significance the writers attached to it. All nine writers testified to the workshops' value and particularly highlighted three areas of impact, thus illustrating the multifaceted and ongoing nature of the impact of this research:

- i. They reported an **improvement in their skills as creative writers**: *“it did take my writing to – probably – a different level”*; *“There were far more ideas, rockets going off, fireworks as a result of doing the workshop than I could cope with at the time.”* Some testified that the experience led to greater achievements, with one stating that they had limited success before the workshops. The series led directly to this participant switching genres, with tangible benefits: *“I’ve been writing a lot of poetry, and compared to my previous writing life it’s massively successful. I have been published in quite a few poetry magazines, I’ve been commended in a few quite big poetry competitions.”*
- ii. Participants also stated that the workshops **increased their self-confidence as writers**: *“it was a confidence booster”*; *“I do more submissions now... I will say yes to everything, if anyone offers me an opportunity that has a creative edge to it, I will say yes,”* and, *“I have really got confidence and I felt very valued.”* One recalled that the workshops helped the participants to feel that they belonged to writerly communities: *“it galvanised us a little bit to say ‘Actually we have got a bit of credibility here’”*; *“all our voices and all our stories... you could feel yourself being part of some continuum that was improving.”* Others noted that the experience empowered them to forge new partnerships: *“Creatively it was hugely influential... made me think about collaboration differently”*; *“I think there was a high bar set and people responded to it. But I also think it affected, long term, the way in which we functioned as a writers group.”*
- iii. Many participants had experience of migration either personally or through their family members and reported that **the workshops legitimised their own migrant experience**: *“I really liked being identified again as an immigrant or someone with immigrant experience – that was really empowering.”* Others noted the workshops changed their understanding of contemporary issues of migration: *“made me realise that I have an awful lot of confused but quite energised thoughts about migration in both directions”*; *“it brings an understanding to the humanity of others in distress because for me coming across the Irish sea was planned... I can really empathise with people who have to get into a boat or a container, that is airless, to travel just to try and make for a better life.”* By implication, this new understanding shaped their creative outputs: *“that slightly outsider perspective is to me, now, just part of the voice that I have”*; *“If I hadn’t gone to the workshop I wouldn’t have done the poetry...”*.

#### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Play and audience feedback: i) The project website includes a full performance of *My English Tongue, My Irish Heart*, filmed in Manchester in May 2015: <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/mycountryjourney/project-outputs/films/>; ii) Attendance data from the nine tour venues and all 16 performances of the play; iii) Responses to questionnaire (completed by 744 audience members at all 16 play performances, May 2015).
- B. Reviews and press coverage of *My English Tongue, My Irish Heart* can be found at:
  - <http://www.belfasttimes.co.uk/theatre-review-my-english-tongue-my-irish-heart/>
  - <https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/my-english-tongue-my-irish-heart-the-story-of-emigration-to-england-on-stage-1.2195667>
  - <https://www.irishpost.com/news/new-play-my-english-tongue-my-irish-heart-dramatises-the-diaspora-tale-51570>
  - <https://www.irishnews.com/news/2015/05/07/news/bittersweet-taste-of-our-emigrant-history-122616/>
  - <https://twitter.com/LDNIrishCentre/status/605001053147398144>
- C. Creative writing workshops: i) Filmed interviews with three creative writing workshop participants are available at: <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/mycountryjourney/project-outputs/films/>; ii) Questionnaire data from 28 workshop participants (May 2015).
- D. *Breac* review of [6]: [https://breac.nd.edu/articles/a-stranger-here-myself/?fbclid=IwAR2dqkWy2zhQA\\_5LmzP7xn1vWB6wiNSt4aCsW5n6bit06Aa-AF6FP8eCo1s](https://breac.nd.edu/articles/a-stranger-here-myself/?fbclid=IwAR2dqkWy2zhQA_5LmzP7xn1vWB6wiNSt4aCsW5n6bit06Aa-AF6FP8eCo1s)
- E. *Show Us Your Manc* workshops: i) The workshops are documented on the project website at <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/mycountryjourney/project-outputs/cross-cultural-connections/>, along with a documentary at: <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/mycountryjourney/project-outputs/films/>; ii) Questionnaire data from workshop participants (July 2015).
- F. Extracts from transcripts of interviews with workshop participants (March 2019).