

Panel 12

Intermedial Irish Writing

Remembering the Forgotten Generation: Intermediality in *I Could Read the Sky* (1995–2000)

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I Could Read the Sky is an intermedia project developed by a loose affiliation of writers, photographers, filmmakers, and musicians. The project originated as a collaboration between the writer Timothy O’Grady and the photographer Steve Pyke. O’Grady had been commissioned to write the text for a series of photographs, which Pyke had taken in rural Ireland and in areas of London where Irish migrants traditionally congregated.

Inspired by the work of Dermot Healy, O’Grady conducted a series of oral interviews with elderly Irish migrants who had come to Britain in the 1950s and never returned home – the so-called ‘forgotten generation’. O’Grady condensed these stories into a single fictional narrative told from the point of view of an unnamed labourer from the west of Ireland now living in a dingy bedsit in London.

I Could Read the Sky: A Novel was published in 1997. It was subsequently adapted as a feature-length film by Nichola Bruce in 1999, with Dermot Healy in the lead role of the emblematic Old Man. Bruce also commissioned a score from the Irish composer Iarla Ó Lionáird, which mixed traditional Irish music with contemporary urban electronica.

In all of its various forms, *I Could Read the Sky* is a remarkable document of a forgotten generation, made by the diasporic children of that generation. This paper will focus on the dynamic relationship between text and image in the original photographic novel, and explore how *I Could Read the Sky* (inter)mediates a more complex engagement between the lived experience of migration and its traditional cultural representations.

Biography

Keith Hopper teaches at Atlantic Technological University Sligo. He is the author of *Flann O’Brien: A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Post-modernist* (revised edition, 2009); general editor of the twelve-volume *Ireland into Film* series (2001–2007); and co-editor, with Neil Murphy, of *Flann O’Brien: Centenary Essays* (2011) and *The Short Fiction of Flann O’Brien* (2013). He also co-edited (with Neil Murphy) a series of four books by and about Dermot Healy (2015–16). Keith is a regular contributor to the *Times Literary Supplement*. His most recent book is *A Door Opening: Sligo and the Legacies of Partition* (2023), which he co-edited.