

Panel 12
Intermedial Irish Writing

Photography and Time in Contemporary Irish Novels

Lianghui Li
Beijing Jiaotong University

In John Banville's *The Sea* (2005), Deirdre Madden's *Time Present and Time Past* (2013), and Sara Baume's *A Line Made by Walking* (2017), photography critically engages with other forms of art such as painting and the self-reflexive act of narration. This transmedial link becomes most pronounced in relation to time, a crucial dimension of narrative representation and a recurring thematic concern in contemporary Irish literature. In *The Sea*, Anna's photographs, which are shaped by her trained and objective perspective, offer a version of the past. Yet somehow, they seem to echo the narrator, Max's anxiety towards his inability to fully capture temporal moments. In Madden's novel, a comparative exploration of photography and memory interrogates the fixed nature of the past and the unavoidable reality of the present. This temporal instability is reinforced by how the omniscient narrator conspicuously jumps between different temporal movements, as the reader moves back and forth across these temporalities. While Baume's novel explores photography through the lens of Conceptualism, which privileges the artistic idea over the material artwork. For the depressed protagonist Frankie, the act of taking photographs becomes a part of her everyday struggle for survival, a continuous negotiation with the present. In these novels, photography is an integral part of a broader philosophical and aesthetic exploration of time. By examining these transmedial experiments with time, this study seeks to illuminate how they reshape our understanding of photography, particularly the ways in which this medium is represented in fiction.

Biography

Lianghui Li is Lecturer at Beijing Jiaotong University. Her research interests include contemporary Irish fiction, time, and narrative theory. She received her Ph.D. from Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, and has contributed to *the ABEI Journal*, *Orbis Litterarum*, *Modern Language Review*, *RISE*, etc. She is completing her monograph, titled *Time in the Contemporary Irish Novel*.