

## Canadian Association for Irish Studies

### 2025 Annual Conference

#### Boundaries, Borders, and Frontiers in Irish Studies

St. Michael's College and York University, Toronto, June 11-13 2025

Boundaries can be thought of in relation to the political, the historical, the artistic, the topographical, the cultural, the ecological, and so on. But even within these categories, boundaries exist at multiple scales: a national border is a political boundary, but so is a county border or even a property line. Boundaries can sometimes deny passage altogether, or they can invite imaginative forms of transgression. The notion of frontiers prompts consideration of more transitional and shifting entities. The Program Committee for the 2025 Canadian Association for Irish Studies Annual Conference cordially invites the submission of proposals for papers, panels, and other presentations around the theme of boundaries, borders, and frontiers. This year the conference is to be jointly hosted by York University and St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto from June 11-13.

The relationship between Canada and Ireland has throughout its history evoked a complicated process of movement over and across boundaries and borders. During the nineteenth-century era of imperial colonization, the Irish were viewed as a largely desirable immigrant group; by the later twentieth century, this preferential status had disappeared in the face of more precise Canadian admissions policies. The impact of Irish immigration to Canada is felt in both the demographic extent of the diasporic community and the ecological imprints of that movement as preserved on sites such as *Grosse Île*. In the twentieth century, diplomatic engagements between Canada and Ireland often formed around the political imagination of borders and recognition; for example, the historian J.P. O'Grady notes that in 1922 the Minister for External Affairs in the Irish Free State, Desmond Fitzgerald, pointed to Canada as a model for why the Free State should be able to adopt its own passport.

A history of transatlantic immigration has also created a long tradition of cultural exchange. The mixing of folk traditions in both music and storytelling can capture the experiences of border crossing while also presenting the opportunity to blur and cross boundaries of genre and style. That kind of cultural border crossing can also be part of a larger imaginary when it comes to issues of sovereignty, solidarity, and the formation of political and social networks. In 1971, for example, Brian Moore's own experiences as a child growing up in Belfast, and his subsequent explorations of the Troubles in his writing, helped inform his approach to the Quebec October Crisis as detailed in his novel *The Revolution Script*.

Moore's novel instantiates the degree to which the crossing of borders and boundaries is not only a matter of harmonious diplomacy — borders often define, and make legible, forms of power. The border that partitions the island of Ireland has of course brought with it a history and legacy of violence and inequality, one that remains in an uneasy position even after the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. In the Republic of Ireland immigration has, since the turn of the twenty-first century, become a lightning rod for public opinion that also turns on expressions of belonging and of the authority to determine that belonging, as seen through the system of Direct Provision

for those seeking asylum in Ireland, the 2004 referendum removing birthright citizenship in Ireland, and the 2023 anti-immigration riots in Dublin.

These issues of power, legibility, and validity when it comes to matters of borders, boundaries, and frontiers are only becoming more acute in the Anthropocene. A number of increasingly powerful ecological disasters has translated to new patterns of population movement around the world. Climate change therefore presents yet another imaginative boundary and frontier in need of crossing; Ireland and Irish history holds an intimate understanding of the causal links that can exist between environmental disaster and immigration. 'Boundaries and Frontiers' is a theme that therefore encompasses numerous possible approaches amenable to multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives on Irish studies.

Potential paper topics include:

- Contesting territory: the Irish Boundary Commission
- Crossing disciplinary borders: interdisciplinarity and Irish Studies
- Walls, fences, barricades: material boundary-creation and everyday life
- Transnational lives between Ireland and Canada
- Emigration to Canada from Northern Ireland during the Troubles
- Borders and states: militarization and demilitarization
- Crossing genre boundaries in Irish literature, theatre, and film
- Frontline and frontier: Irish medical professionals at home and abroad
- Coastlines and topography in popular Irish culture
- Writing our past: histories of Irish immigration in Canada
- Immigration in Ireland
- Ireland, globalization, and the 'borderless' EU
- Emotions, mentalities, and borderlands
- Ireland and international diplomacy
- The Irish language and translation
- Literary interpretations of Irish Partition
- Canada in Irish literature, theatre, and film
- Beyond Good Friday: New relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland
- The Canadian state and Irish immigration

We also seek papers from any aspect of Irish Studies and strongly encourage graduate student submissions. We accept individual papers or panels (three papers and a chair) in English, Irish, or French.

Please send submissions to [caistorontoconference2025@gmail.com](mailto:caistorontoconference2025@gmail.com) by February 28 2025. Proposals should include a title, 250-word abstract for each paper submitted, a brief biography, and an email address for future correspondence.