

Black Irish, Wild Irish, and Irish Calibans: Ambivalent Whiteness and Racialisation in Cultural Stereotypes of Irishness

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In March 1870, the London-based *Punch Magazine* published a cartoon by John Tenniel entitled “The Irish Tempest,” an illustration that commented on the Irish Land Act. In this image, Ireland appears twice. It is embodied by a beautiful, fair-skinned, and fair-haired woman who bears a sash with the inscription “Hibernia,” identifying her with England’s neighbouring island. In terms of the Shakespeare play alluded to, she takes the role of Miranda, the dutiful and beautiful daughter of patriarch Prospero. This is reinforced by the white male that she clings to, a Prospero-like figure of authority holding a staff with the inscription “Irish Land Bill,” who bears a striking resemblance to William Gladstone. At the time of the cartoon’s publication, Gladstone was Prime Minister of Britain, and he had famously stated in 1868, just after hearing that he would become Prime Minister, that it was his mission to pacify Ireland.¹ However, Ireland appears a second time in the cartoon, this time as an apish, hairy, and aggressive monster that stands for Fenian violence and extremism. This monstrous creature attacks Hibernia and is fended off by heroic Prospero/Gladstone. The cartoon thus combines a feminisation of a passive Ireland that needs male protection with a racialisation of a violent and primitive Ireland that needs control and civilisation. For both these tasks, the white, heterosexual male from the British middle class is ideally suited, and William Gladstone was seen as the epitome of all these traits. Nineteenth-century political cartoons thus used *The Tempest* and the title “the Irish Caliban” as a model to address the political crisis and ‘savage’ activities of the Fenian movement.² At the same time, cartoons like Tenniel’s also vividly illustrate the ambivalent racialised

1 See Matthew, H. C. G.: Gladstone. 1875–1898, Oxford 1995, p. 147.

2 See the illustration in Callaghan, Dympna: Shakespeare Without Women. Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage, London 2000, p. 136; cf. also McClintock,

position of the Irish as both white and non-white: Ireland is both Miranda and Caliban. A multiplicity of similar images of the black Irish, the wild Irish, the not quite white Irish have been a staple of nationalist discourses in a variety of cultural contexts from the Renaissance onwards.

In the following, I want to analyse such stereotypes of Irishness to outline the outstanding relevance of the Irish example for a discussion of the racialisation and ambivalent whiteness of specific populations within Europe and abroad. Here, my thesis is that the Irish and their changing, mutable, and highly flexible position with respect to white identifications in different times and locations vividly prove the relativity, relationality, and constructedness of white subject positions that extend beyond the Irish context. Before zooming in on my case study of stereotypes of Irishness, I therefore want to introduce critical whiteness studies as a lens through which we can reassess the dynamics and inequalities of social and cultural relations and representations.

Critical Whiteness Studies as an Academic Perspective

Critical whiteness studies is an interdisciplinary area of research that started to emerge during the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s. By far the greatest bulk of research in critical whiteness studies has focused on American geographical contexts, American histories of immigration, colonisation, and social relations, American literature and film, as well as on contemporary America's approach to race relations, affirmative action, and issues of equal opportunities. In recent years, researchers from all over the world have started to adopt the research agenda of critical whiteness studies and have applied concepts, theories, and results to diverse locations, times, and peoples. Mike Hill even talks about "the critical rush to whiteness."³ The publication of the extensive 141-pages-long *Towards a Bibliography of Critical Whiteness Studies*, issued by the Centre on Democracy in a Multiracial Society in November 2006,⁴ or Jack Niemonen's meta-analysis of 245 publications on whiteness studies from the social sciences,⁵ testify to the fact that critical

Anne: *Imperial Leather. Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context*, New York 1995, p. 52.

- 3 Hill, Mike: Introduction: Vipers in Shangri-La. Whiteness, Writing, and Other Ordinary Terrors, in: id. (ed.): *Whiteness. A Critical Reader*, New York 1997, pp. 1–18, here p. 3.
- 4 Centre on Democracy in a Multiracial Society: *Towards a Bibliography of Critical Whiteness*, accessible at: nathanrtodd.net/firms.com/documents/Spanierman_Todd_Neville%282006%29Whiteness_Bib.pdf. [Accessed: 25.6.2018].
- 5 Niemonen, Jack: Public Sociology or Partisan Sociology? The Curious Case of Whiteness Studies, in: *The American Sociologist* 41.1 (2010), pp. 48–81.

whiteness studies has now arrived in almost all areas of the globe and all academic disciplines.

Research on Britain's white dominions like South Africa, Canada, and Australia has been quite productive.⁶ Research on the construction, representation, and effects of whiteness in European contexts started to come into being around 2000, but compared with the breadth of publications on North American and British (colonial as well as multicultural) whitenesses, only a few scholars have addressed European locations beyond Britain.⁷

I want to develop this emerging body of work by tracing how ideas and ideologies of whiteness shape contemporary Europe's sense of self and its cultural representations. I specifically ask how, and with what effects, people's identifications as white and the cultural images these identifications produce configure the relations that we can establish with those who are seen as non-white or ambivalently white in Europe today.

In this context, I define whiteness as an effect of social relations that are structured by inequality and hierarchies of power. Whiteness is neither an essential identity which is tied to bodily attributes or mental abilities, nor is it the objective description of a homogeneous group of people or stable social relations. Rather, whiteness can be described as a social and cultural construction with real and profound effects: it is a "set of contingent hierarchies."⁸

6 For Canada see Clarke, George Elliott: *White Like Canada*, in: *Transition: "The White Issue."* An International Review 73.1 (1997), pp. 98–109; Coleman, Daniel: *The National Allegory of Fraternity. Loyalist Literature and the Making of Canada's White British Origins*, in: *Journal of Canadian Studies* 36.3 (2001), pp. 131–156; for the Australian context see for example Elder, Catriona/Ellis, Cath/Pratt, Angela: *Whiteness in Constructions of Australian Nationhood. Indigenes, Immigrants and Governmentality*, in: Moreton-Robinson, Aileen (ed.): *Whitening Race. Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, Canberra 2002, pp. 208–221; Hage, Ghassan: *White Nation. Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*, New York 2000; for South Africa see Geertsma, Johan: *White Natives? Dan Roodt, Afrikaner Identity and the Politics of the Sublime*, in: *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 41.3 (2006), pp. 103–120; Green, Meredith J./Sonn, Christopher C./Matsebula, Jabulane: *Reviewing Whiteness. Theory, Research, and Possibilities*, in: *South African Journal of Psychology* 37.3 (2007), pp. 389–419, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/008124630703700301>; Steyn, Melissa: 'Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used to Be.' *White Identity in a Changing South Africa*, Albany 2001.

7 For a general look at Europe as a whole see Griffin, Gabriele/Braidotti, Rosi: *Whiteness and European Situatedness*, in: Griffin, Gabriele/Braidotti, Rosi (eds.): *Thinking Differently. A Reader in European Women's Studies*, London 2002, pp. 221–236; for German approaches to what has been termed "kritische Weiß-Seinsforschung" see the edited volume by Tißberger, Martina/Dietze, Gabriele/Hzán, Daniela/Husmann-Kastein, Jana (eds.): *Weiß – Weißsein – Whiteness. Kritische Studien zu Gender und Rassismus*, Berlin 2009; and the essays in Eggers, Maureen Maisha/Kilomba, Grada/Piesche, Peggy/Arndt, Susan (eds.): *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland*, Münster 2005.

8 Clarke, Simon/Garner, Steve: *White Identities. A Critical Sociological Approach*, London 2010, p. 10.

Accordingly, it has a material and a discursive dimension that overlap in our daily practices and cultural representations. Whiteness, in a nutshell, is an experience as well as the knowledge that a hierarchical and racialised system produces about the world. This production of knowledge underlies every single of our daily practices and routines and shapes how we can relate to whom and with what consequences. This then also means that the knowledge that whiteness as a social discourse produces shapes cultural images and representations that we encounter in the media, the arts, literature, or political cartoons such as the one described at the beginning.

Such an understanding of whiteness turns it into a perspective that we can take up in academic research and daily life to look at effects of power on society, knowledge, and human interactions and relations. Garner therefore states that whiteness is “a lens through which particular aspects of social relationships can be apprehended.”⁹ If whiteness is a construction that enables or prevents different kinds of social identifications with very real material effects, then we need to study how groups and individuals have identified themselves and others in the past and in different cultural locations. It is here that the ambivalent position of the Irish in social history and cultural representations comes in.

The Role of the Irish Example in Critical Whiteness Studies

In critical whiteness studies, different populations and groups have been used to point out the constructed character of whiteness. Early publications from the 1990s mostly deal with American contexts and trace America’s history of immigration. The publications by Roediger,¹⁰ Allen,¹¹ Ignatiev,¹² or Jacobson,¹³ which are all now much-quoted ‘classics,’ are concerned with the process of how immigrants became white in America and how immigration and immigrant labour helped to invent American whiteness. Immigration vividly shows how relative and flexible whiteness is. It also shows that the black-white binary is not adequate for analysing the changing nature and fluid semantics

9 Garner, Steve: *Whiteness. An Introduction*, London 2007, p. 1.

10 Roediger, David R.: *The Wages of Whiteness. Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, London 1991.

11 Allen, Theodore: *The Invention of the White Race. Vol. I: Racial Oppression and Social Control*, London 1994; id.: *The Invention of the White Race. Vol. II: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*, London 1997.

12 Ignatiev, Noel: *How the Irish Became White*, New York 1995.

13 Jacobson, Matthew Frye: *Whiteness of a Different Color. European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Cambridge, MA 1998.

of racialisation. Many immigrants coming to America were seen as neither white nor black but in-between. Nevertheless, the way they were treated after their arrival was thoroughly racialised. Where people could live, what jobs they could occupy, what they were paid, or what schools their children could attend was a question of racialised social and political practices. Irish immigrants suffered from this as did immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe, especially in the middle of the nineteenth century when European immigration to the USA peaked. This seems paradoxical today, because these immigrants shared most phenotypical characteristics with Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans, first and foremost their skin, their hair, and most facial features: the Irish seemed to 'look' white. Nevertheless, they did not belong safely to the white mainstream due to additional racialised factors like religion (above all Catholicism), language, education, political backgrounds, or cultural traditions. Irish immigrants could not 'act' white because their lives did not follow 'whitely scripts',¹⁴ a fact which resulted in their exclusion from whiteness and the normative Western model of the self-regulating subject.

Arriving in the USA, Irish immigrants were therefore perceived as non-white and were linked to African Americans, as racist and offensive expressions like "white negroes" or "white niggers,"¹⁵ "niggers turned inside out,"¹⁶ or "Celtic Calibans"¹⁷ illustrate. Black people on the other hand were sometimes called "smoked Irish."¹⁸ This paradoxical combination of the central binary oppositions of the colour line in America shows that the Irish did not fit comfortably within existing racial boundaries, but were indeed what Roediger calls in-between. As the expression "white nigger" specifically shows, their white skin was acknowledged but was not accepted as a valid means to categorise the Irish immigrants as 'really' white.

It is this ambivalent structure of being white but not quite that makes the Irish such an interesting test case for critical whiteness studies. Their in-betweenness has caused theoretical inconvenience, specifically for postcolonial studies scholars who have tended to cling to the equation of whiteness and power: "The English stereotype of the Irish as a simianised and degenerate race [...] complicates postcolonial theories that skin color [...] is the crucial

14 See Gray, Breda: 'Whitely Scripts' and Irish Women's Racialized Belonging(s) in England, in: *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 5.4 (2002), pp. 257–274.

15 Bornstein, George: *Afro-Celtic Connections. From Frederick Douglass to The Commitments*, in: Mishkin, Tracy (ed.): *Literary Influence and African-American Writers. Collected Essays*, New York 1996, pp. 171–188, here p. 174.

16 Ignatiev: *Irish*, p. 41.

17 McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 52.

18 Ignatiev: *Irish*, p. 41.

sign of otherness.”¹⁹ Skin colour here means again only non-white skin, a blind spot that critical whiteness studies have addressed in the context of the invisibility thesis.²⁰ America’s history of immigration and the slow process of inclusion into whiteness in the three-generation-model that is typical for most European immigrant groups in the USA,²¹ thus illustrate the central thesis of critical whiteness studies: whiteness is not a biological fact but a socially and discursively structured process of being identified as white.

However, the Irish also had an ambivalent status in other national and regional contexts. The racialised position of Irish immigrants to Britain has received some attention in recent years, specifically in research on Irish immigrant women and aspects of gendered labour.²² Gray argues that Irish women in Britain are an example of what Mike Hill has called “white remarkability”: they look white, but their dialect and behaviour, their humour and their social conventions do not follow whitely scripts.²³ In this case, whiteness becomes visible and remarkable and loses its status of being normal and the standard. To be accepted as *culturally* white, the Irish women that Gray interviewed in her qualitative study underwent a process of “cultural bleaching.”²⁴ Because they looked white, the women could pass for white if they got rid of their accents, if they restrained their humour and changed their social behaviour, or if they were simply silent in many situations of cultural contact.²⁵ In Gray’s study, the structure of whiteness as a promise that might never be attained becomes clear in Irish women’s ambivalent (non)belonging in Britain.²⁶

It is exactly this difficulty in achieving a belonging to whiteness that made it all the more important for economic success, legal status, and social integration. For the Irish in contexts like Britain, Australia, or America, it was crucial to leave the connection with black or coloured people and allegedly ‘ethnic’ (i.e. non-white) cultural conventions behind: “If there are only two colours that really count, then which you belong to becomes a matter of the greatest

19 McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 52.

20 See for example Ahmed, Sara: *Declarations of Whiteness. The Non-Performativity of Anti-Racism*, in: *Borderlands* 3.2 (2004), pp. 1–54; Dyer, Richard: *White*, London 1997, p. 1; Frankenberg, Ruth: *The Social Construction of Whiteness. White Women, Race Matters*, Minneapolis 1993, p. 197.

21 See Roediger: *Wages*, p. 20.

22 See Gray: ‘Whitely Scripts’; Skeggs: *Beverley: Formations of Class and Gender. Becoming Respectable*, London 1997; Walter, Bronwen: *Outsiders Inside. Whiteness, Place, and Irish Women*, London 2001.

23 See Gray: ‘Whitely Scripts,’ pp. 270f.

24 Gabriel, John: *Whitewash. Racialized Politics and the Media*, London 1998, p. 5.

25 Gray: ‘Whitely Scripts,’ p. 266.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 267.

significance.²⁷ Thus, the white complexion of the Irish and their phenotypical difference to populations categorised as non-white became “a kind of promise to the bearer that he or she may have access to privilege, power and wealth.”²⁸

Racialising Hibernia: Nineteenth-century Scientific Racism and Images of the Irish

This promise was hard to achieve, though. Nineteenth-century British and American images of the Irish underline attempts to racialise the Irish and present them as inevitably and unchangeably non-white: “In Britain, the otherness of the Irish, their status as colonial subjects rather than agents, has been marked both by their Victorian scientific identification as a lower race and by their persistent cultural representation as non-civilised and primitive.”²⁹ The Irish were presented as the missing link between ape and Anglo-Saxon Englishman, a link that was strengthened with the arrival of the first chimpanzees and gorillas in London Zoo in 1860.³⁰ Studies in journalism and political caricature have collected a multiplicity of impressive examples of such animal images, scientific racism, and social Darwinism about ‘the Irish race.’³¹ The Irish were categorised as a race that was called “native Irish,” “Celts,” or “Gaels” and that was likened to apes.³² In Britain, its white colonies, and in the USA, they “were collectively figured as racial deviants, atavistic throwbacks to a primitive moment in human prehistory, surviving ominously in the heart of the modern, imperial metropolis.”³³ In this racialisation, they were lumped together with other ‘deviants’ like the militant working class, Jews, feminists, gays and lesbians, prostitutes, criminals, alcoholics, or the insane, all of which could then be policed and controlled by legal measures.³⁴

27 Dyer: *White*, p. 52; for the Irish in Australia see Heinz, Sarah: *Cú Chulainn Down Under. Peter Carey’s True History of the Kelly Gang and the Ambivalence of Diasporic Irish Identity Construction in Australia*, in: *Breac: A Digital Journal of Irish Studies* (April 2013), accessible at: tinyurl.com/HeinzIrishAustralia. [Accessed: 25.6.2018].

28 Dyer: *White*, p. 52.

29 Bonnett, Alastair: *White Identities. Historical and International Perspectives*, Harlow 2000, pp. 22f.

30 See Dyer: *White*, p. 52.

31 See Cheng, Vincent: *Inauthentic. The Anxiety over Culture and Identity*, London 2004; Curtis, L. Perry: *Apes and Angels. The Irishman in Victorian Caricature*, Newton Abbot 1971; Dyer: *White*.

32 See Ignatiev: *Irish*, p. 35.

33 McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 43.

34 See *ibid.*

The myth of the ‘black Irish’ and the expression ‘Milesians’ for the Irish are good examples for such pseudo-scientific explanations. Both ideas go back to nineteenth-century theories that the Irish were the descendants of the island’s native population that had mixed with a Spanish race that was itself the product of interbreeding between Moors and marrains, “that is between Africans who had Hispanic roots and Spanish Jews.”³⁵ They were therefore seen as a monstrous and impure race and were presented as literally darker in terms of phenotypical appearance and more primitive in terms of their culture. Thomas Henry Huxley’s research into the races of men created the term ‘Melanochroi’ for the “dark whites” of Britain, “a group he considered to comprise ‘a broad band stretching from Ireland to Hindostan.’”³⁶ Other Victorian research into the races of man and their different lineages also stressed the status of the Irish as non-white. John Beddoe’s *Index of Negrescence*, compiled in 1885, is a famous example for such scientific racism directed at excluding the Irish and other Celtic populations of Britain from whiteness and at essentialising and naturalising this exclusion. Beddoe maintained that the Celts were similar to the prehistoric Cromagnon man who was connected to what he called the ‘Africanoid’ race.³⁷

A famous illustration from *Harper’s Weekly* from around 1900 is a representative example of this essentialist racialisation of the Irish and the analogy that was drawn between the Irish and peoples from Africa. The black and white engraving shows the heads of three adult men in profile, labelled as “Irish Iberian,” “Anglo-Teutonic,” and “Negro” respectively.³⁸ In this illustration, skin colour seems to be irrelevant, as all three prototypes are printed as white, a characteristic that this image shares with many other Victorian cartoons about the Irish.³⁹ However, the image uses other phenotypical features like a low, heavy brow, a prognathous, ape-like jaw, and short, upturned noses to present the “Irish Iberian” and the “Negro” as non-white and primitive by activating the contemporary reader’s knowledge about racial hierarchies taken from pseudo-sciences like phrenology or eugenics.⁴⁰ Phenotypical differences between the “Anglo-Teutonic” and his two racialised others thus indicate allegedly biological differences of distinct populations and their

35 Cohen, Philip: *The Perversions of Inheritance. Studies in the Making of Multi-racist Britain*, in: id./Bains, Harwant S. (eds.): *Multi-racist Britain*, Basingstoke 1988, pp. 9–118, here p. 74.

36 Bonnett: *White Identities*, p. 35.

37 See Pickering, Michael: *Stereotyping. The Politics of Representation*, Basingstoke 2001, p. 144.

38 Reproduced in Dyer: *White*, p. 53.

39 See the cartoons in Curtis: *Apes*; cf. McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 53.

40 See Heinz, Sarah: *The Whiteness of Irish Drama. The Irish and Their Black Other*, in: Huber, Werner/Rubik, Margarete/Novak, Julia (eds.): *Staging Interculturality*, Trier 2010, pp. 195–217, here p. 200.

genetic properties. At the same time however, these biological and genetic differences are mapped onto cultural characteristics and psychological and mental capacities. Readers of *Harper's Weekly* could easily draw the conclusion that the 'Irish Iberian' and the 'Negro' were less intelligent and could not therefore be educated as Anglo-Saxons could, that they were not able to rule themselves and should not have the vote, or that they could justifiably be assigned to 'dirty' jobs with a lower income or even slavery. As McClintock has stated, the "poetics of degeneration" is therefore "a poetics of social crisis" that was inextricably linked to questions of labour and economy, poverty and the housing crisis, class insurgency and middle class fears.⁴¹

Ireland's colonial situation and dependence could easily be justified by such images and associations. It is no coincidence that Ireland's racialisation intensified around 1850 when the Fenian movement for Irish independence peaked and British cities and the imperial capital were struck by a series of terrorist bombings and mob violence.⁴² In this period, a multiplicity of cartoons, engravings, and pamphlets depicted the apish characteristics of the Irish along the lines of the illustration from *Harper's Weekly* or *Punch* discussed above. Diverse new features 'proving' Irish racial degeneracy were added: not only did they have a smaller cranial capacity and a 'snouty' profile, they were also shown as having

a long forearm (the characteristics of apes), underdeveloped calves (also apelike), a simplified and lobeless ear (considered a stigma of sexual excess notable in prostitutes), the placing of the hole at the base of the skull, the straightness of the hair, the length of the nasal cartilage, the flatness of the nose, prehensile feet, low foreheads, excessive wrinkles and facial hair. The features of the face spelled out the character of the race.⁴³

This racialisation was complemented by a feminisation that can also be found in colonial depictions of African or Asian colonies: "In the colonies, black people were figured, among other things, as gender deviants, the embodiment of prehistoric promiscuity and excess, their evolutionary belatedness evidenced by their 'feminine' lack of history, reason and proper domestic arrangements."⁴⁴

As a third equally influential metaphor, the image of the child was added to the description of the racial and gender deviant, an image that justified

41 McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 44.

42 See Dyer: *White*, p. 52.

43 McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 50.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 44; see also Loomba, Ania: *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, London 2005, pp. 131–145.

black or Irish people's dependence in terms of political, legal, and economic systems. Children and women did not have the vote and they could not acquire property or represent themselves in court because they were deemed irrational and not intelligent enough to govern themselves. If the colonised in all regions of the globe were like children, then they had to be ruled and controlled by a father figure, the white man. Via this combined racialisation, feminisation, and infantilisation, colonial discourses created a powerful system of knowledge as well as political, economic, and military structures that institutionalised racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression.

Such analogies of race, age, and gender underline how easily such symmetries worked and how racialisation tied in with other forms of intersectional subjection and stereotyping. Homi Bhabha calls this mapping and mixing of forms of exclusion and stereotyping "the polymorphous and perverse collusion between racism and sexism as a *mixed economy*."⁴⁵ Thus, the images of the Irish that I discussed and their intersectional construction as deviants are stereotypes in Bhabha's terminology. They seem natural and self-evident and therefore fixed and always already known. Yet, at the same time, such stereotypes and categories need to be endlessly repeated and mapped onto each other to fight off the disruption and heterogeneity of the group categorised as known, homogeneous, and fixed:

As a form of splitting and multiple belief, the stereotype requires, for its successful signification, a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes. The process by which the metaphorical 'masking' is inscribed on a lack which must then be concealed gives the stereotype its fixity and phantasmatic quality – the *same old* stories of the Negro's animality, the Coolie's inscrutability or the stupidity of the Irish *must* be told (compulsively) again and afresh, and are differently gratifying and terrifying each time.⁴⁶

Such obvious racisms about the Irish might seem an obsolete phenomenon, but a look at contemporary cultural production, especially in the cinema, makes clear that such stereotypes of Irishness are not a thing of the past. American television series like *The Black Donnellys* (first broadcast in 2007) or blockbusters like *The Departed* (2006) and *Gangs of New York* (2002, both by Martin Scorsese) present Irish Americans as violent Catholic criminals who live by the code of 'family first' and who seem to be what McClintock has

45 Bhabha, Homi K.: *The Location of Culture*, New York 1994, p. 98.

46 *Ibid.*, pp. 110 f.

called “atavistic throwbacks to a primitive moment in human prehistory, surviving ominously in the heart of the modern, imperial metropolis,”⁴⁷ only that this time the modern metropolis is not London but New York. Other recent productions underline that such representations can equally be found in British and Irish film, sometimes presented in terms of crime, violence, and terrorism as in *The General* (1998), in terms of a romanticised version of Irish authenticity and Celtic spirituality like *P.S. I love You* (2007), but also often presented as ambivalent and puzzling as in *The Guard* (2011), *In America* (2002), or, quite famously, in *The Crying Game* (1992).⁴⁸

Conclusion

In my short overview of racialised theories about and images of the Irish, I have shown that whiteness is not a race or racial identity, but an intersectional process of identification. Consequently, I have interpreted whiteness as an act of becoming white, not being white. Whiteness is an aspiration and a promise open to all those who conform to and behave according to the norms, ideals, and scripts of whiteness; it is not a natural, genetic, or biological state or origin. Rather, it is deeply dependent upon social relations and interpersonal acts being accepted as white that are paradoxically dependent upon multiple and sometimes subtle acts of excluding others from whiteness.

This relational and relative structure also applies to systems of representation that provide the subject with images, conventions, rules, laws, or wages of whiteness. Media like literature and film offer such templates of whitely scripts and behaviour and they can (but not necessarily must) transport normative ideals about white people, their bodies, and mental characteristics. In this context of the power of representation, the Irish example is not only an important case study for the flexible and relational structure of whiteness in the past and in the Irish diaspora. It can equally be a pathway towards tackling the often underestimated role of whiteness in European contexts today that are still often seen as white majority cultures with more or less homogeneous, allegedly authentic white origins. Whiteness is culturally, historically, and geographically specific, contingent, and constructed, and historical as well as contemporary stereotypes about the Irish or about other racialised groups put this on the table.

47 McClintock: *Imperial Leather*, p. 43.

48 For an overview of Irish film and its engagement with contemporary issues of migration, globalization, and multiculturalism see the essays in Huber, Werner/Crosson, Séan (eds.): *Contemporary Irish Film. New Perspectives on a National Cinema*, Wien 2011.