Joint University College Cork and University of Maryland
Seminar on Frederick Douglass and Transatlantic Connections
Monday, October 20, 9am to 4pm
Margaret Brent Room, A and B, Adele H. Stamp Student Union

Program

9:00 – 9:30 Welcome and Opening Remarks

Session I: Seeing Double – Transatlantic Comparatives

9:30 Mary Furlong
Domestic Labor in Black and Green: Deciphering the Shared Experiences of African American and Irish Domestics Working in the same Northern Virginia Households and Communities

9:45 Dan O’Brien,

10:00 Adam Fracchia
Freedom and Slavery: Understanding the Material Landscapes of Labor in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore and Texas, Maryland

10:15 Miranda Corcoran
Negative Space and Narrative Elision in Twentieth-Century Soviet and American Fiction: Towards a Transnational Aesthetic of Paranoid Representation

10:30 Discussion

Session II: Creating Identities

10:45 Katie Ahern
“To Make Myself for a Person”: The Charged Identity Narratives of Anzia Yezierska and Frederick Douglass

11:00 Kathryn Deeley
Who’s Who and How Can We Tell?: The Archaeology of Group Identity and Demonstrating Belonging in 19th Century African American Annapolis

11:15 Eoin O’Callaghan
William Faulkner, Whiteness, and the Transnational Short Story

11:30 Tracy Jenkins
Free Black Communities before Emancipation

11:45 Discussion
12:00 – 1:30 Lunch

Session III: Tracing Origins: Landscape and Influence
1:30 Paul O’Shea
“Webs of influence”: The Transatlantic Social Network of Print Culture
1:45 Beth Pruitt
Transatlantic Roots: Cultural Uses of Plants at the Wye House Plantation
2:00 Stefan Woehlke
Montpelier, a Banker, and the Making of African American Landscapes
Before and After Emancipation
2:15 Discussion

Session IV: Douglass
2:30 Ann Coughlan
Frederick Douglass, the *Columbian Orator*, and Ireland
2:45 Benjamin Skolnik
Archaeologies of Conflicting Ideologies: Frederick Douglass as a
Contemporary Post-Colonial Thinker
3:00 Discussion

3:45-4:00 Closing Remarks
Abstracts

Session I: Seeing Double – Transatlantic Comparatives

1. Mary Furlong:

Title: Domestic Labor in Black and Green: Deciphering the Shared Experiences of African American and Irish Domestics Working in the same Northern Virginia Households and Communities

Abstract: During the late 19th and early 20th centuries wealthy American households relied on domestic labor for the running of the home. In the Northeast, this labor was provided by European immigrants, who often moved from job to job seeking better opportunities. While in the South, African Americans continued to perform the same work many had performed under slavery, often staying in the same geographical region as their family and former owners. In Northern Virginia, these two forms of domestic labor practices came together in the same communities and even the same households. In this paper, I will examine the experiences of African American and Irish laborers who worked and lived side by side in the great homes of Northern Virginia’s most prominent families. Using historical documents, oral histories, and archaeological data, I will consider each worker’s access to family and community support, differences in duties, and relationship with their employers.

2. Dan O’Brien:

Title: “A Jew’s Daughter, All Dressed in Green”: Bernard Malamud, Saul Bellow and Flirtatious Intertextuality in the Early Fiction of Edna O’Brien

Abstract: Since the 1990s there has been some critical recognition of the importance of Southern American authors such as William Faulkner in the fiction of Edna O’Brien. However, there has, as yet, been no consideration of her relationships, both personal and textual, with virtually all of the preeminent Jewish American authors of twentieth century. This paper seeks to fill this lacuna by probing O’Brien’s friendships with Bernard Malamud and Saul Bellow through original research on her correspondence. Her letters to these authors in the 1960s suggest new methods of reading her early work, situating her Irish influences within a broader transatlantic frame of reference.

As a young Irish author living in London, O’Brien was drawn to Jewish American fiction for its concern with exile and belonging. Yet this was not a unilateral exchange. She could not have helped but notice how James Joyce in turn inspired Malamud and Bellow in their exploration of alienation and alterity. Her novels The Lonely Girl (1962), Girls in their Married Bliss (1964), and August is a Wicked Month (1965) all show traces of these Joyce-inflected Jewish authors. Through delineating these links this paper rejects traditional Bloomian genealogy and rather posits that O’Brien’s novels engage with other works in a playful, horizontal and fluid manner. This technique seems fitting considering O’Brien’s own flirtatious relationships with Malamud and Bellow.
3. Adam Fracchia:

**Title:** Freedom and Slavery: Understanding the Material Landscapes of Labor in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore and Texas, Maryland

**Abstract:** Having spent several years in Baltimore as an enslaved laborer, Frederick Douglass later commented that he “endured all the evils of a slave, and suffered all the care and anxiety of a freeman.” Douglass’s experience in Baltimore describes labor relations and the exploitation of different classes of labor during the nineteenth century. Workers were stratified and separated based on socio-economic categories to serve a capitalist process driven by the maximization of profit. The categorization and subsequent marginalization of workers was materialized and reinforced through the landscape and everyday objects. This paper details the capitalist process that Douglass faced and similar patterns of exploitation of Irish and African-American workers in nineteenth-century Baltimore City and the small quarry town of Texas, Maryland. Archaeological excavations of the built environment and material culture of Texas provide specific evidence of the hierarchy and segmentation imposed on quarry workers and the social relations fostered by industry.

4. Miranda Corcoran:

**Title:** Negative Space and Narrative Elision in Twentieth-Century Soviet and American Fiction: Towards a Transnational Aesthetic of Paranoid Representation

**Abstract:** Although their relationship was habitually defined by an animosity that cast a shadow over the wider arena of twentieth-century global politics, the United States and the Soviet Union were, for much of the Cold War period, united by a series of parallel cultural anxieties and an equally pervasive paranoia. Focused primarily on issues of state surveillance, clandestine espionage and excessive governmental control, the congruency of the paranoid fears that haunted both the U.S. and the Soviet Union reveals a shared anxiety that undermines the ideology of moral and cultural “Otherness” reinforced by both nations throughout much of twentieth century.

Drawing on this perspective, this study constructs two ostensibly divergent literary works, Mikhail Bulgakov’s *The Master and Margarita* (completed 1940) and Thomas Pynchon’s *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), as archetypically paranoid texts. Although born out of fundamentally diverse socio-political contexts – with Bulgakov’s mischievous satire exposing the myriad veiled atrocities of Stalinist Moscow, while Pynchon’s novel attempts to unravel the hegemonic materialism of post-war America – both texts foreground the pervasive influence of paranoid cognition within their respective cultural arenas. This paper argues that not only do these novels display an analogous preoccupation with the thematic signifiers of the ubiquitous paranoia which defines their respective socio-political realities, such as the proliferation of state surveillance and the insidious incursion of enemy agents, but that both texts express these parallel social anxieties through the establishment of a complex semantic and aesthetic system, which allows them to mask the true nature of these anxieties. Utilising a plethora of obfuscating narrative devices, ranging from indefinite pronouns and verbs with no clear referents to deliberate gaps in the narrative trajectory of the text, these novels succeed in screening the true origins of the paranoia which consumes their cultural landscapes behind a veneer of silence and ambiguity, thus simulating the manner in which social constraints and didactic political exigencies have rendered
such matters unspeakable. As such, these ostensibly dissimilar novels expose the inadequacy of language to express the intense anxieties which pervade their particular cultural arenas and demonstrate that the psychological trauma engendered by such pervasive anxiety transgresses the limits of literary representation. Ultimately, by undertaking a comparative study of these analogously paranoid texts, this paper seeks to adumbrate the existence of a transnational aesthetic of paranoiac representation which transcends political divides and ideological schisms.

Session II: Creating Identities

5. Katie Ahern:

Title: “To Make Myself for a Person”: The Charged Identity Narratives of Anzia Yezierska and Frederick Douglass

Abstract: In his autobiography, Frederick Douglass expresses a wish to be considered equal to all other Americans, a wish echoed in the writings of the Jewish-American immigrant writer, Anzia Yezierska. Yezierska, writing in the 1920s, also expresses a desire to be seen as wholly American and struggles to evade the oppressions of poverty and ignorance. Yezierska came to prominence during the 1920s as an immigrant writer, but was subsequently criticised for her willingness to condemn the anti-immigrant (and anti-Semitic) sentiments of the time. Although Yezierska’s writings were predominantly fictional, they draw heavily on her own autobiography and so give the reader insight into the often stifling atmosphere of the Jewish ghettos of New York. Many of the themes of Yezierska’s work resonate with those found in Douglass’ work: the difficulties that religion can bring; the need for the education of society; and the repression of people by the wealthy. Both writers found writing to be an act of creation, and through their texts are now considered important American writers who helped challenge the prevalent belief systems of their times.

6. Kathryn Deeley:

Title: Who’s Who and How Can We Tell?: The Archaeology of Group Identity and Demonstrating Belonging in 19th Century African American Annapolis

Abstract: Divisions within a group are an important way in which individuals make sense of their world. Sometimes these divisions can’t be easily distinguished, especially by an outsider. However, this does not mean that those divisions do not, or did not exist. Sometimes the divisions between groups are overt, and the groups are separated physically on the landscape, making their division easy to observe. When this is not the case, maintaining group boundaries must be achieved through some other means. When individuals self-identified differently, the objects that reflect their identity should be different as well. By examining the archaeological remains of four late nineteenth century African American households in Annapolis, Maryland, this paper looks at the patterns of material differences to determine if group identities and group boundaries were reflected in the objects that people used in their day-to-day life and uses the dining table as a landscape for examining these patterns.
7. Eoin O’Callaghan:

Title: William Faulkner, Whiteness, and the Transnational Short Story

Abstract: In 1962, Cork writer Frank O’Connor described the short story as the realm of the submerged population group: "Always in the short story there is this sense of outlawed figures wandering about the fringes of society" (5). Rarely included in the examples of these submerged populations, however—though they occupy this marginal position—are the poor white Snopes family in the work of William Faulkner. Introduced in the 1920s, Faulkner wrote a number of short stories featuring the backwoods folk of the Snopeses before reworking this fiction for the purpose of his extensive Snopes Trilogy in the 1940s and 1950s—thus complicating the Snopeses’ status as a submerged population and mirroring the rise of the once-marginal poor white figure in Southern society. In this paper, I seek to reveal the complex interconnections between whiteness and literary form in the Snopes fiction. Drawing upon notions of transnational short story theory—including the work of the aforementioned Frank O’Connor—it will be possible to bring concepts born on both sides of the Atlantic to bear on this process of adaptation.

8. Tracy Jenkins:

Title: Free Black Communities before Emancipation

Abstract: In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, many African Americans gained freedom from slavery in what has been called “The First Emancipation.” Over the course of several decades, they formed a network of communities throughout the United States in which free blacks offered support to each other and to enslaved individuals escaping to freedom. The African Methodist Episcopal Church led the formation of this network, adapting John Wesley’s movement to organize families and individuals into congregations that served as nodes in an actively anti-racist discourse that challenged a republican nation’s consciousness and social structure. In this paper, I lay out an archaeological research agenda to investigate the spatial organization of this protest discourse and the ways in which material culture were used to create and sustain it.

9. Paul O’Shea:

Title: “Webs of influence”: The Transatlantic Social Network of Print Culture.

Abstract: Akin to how Digital Humanities moves beyond disciplinary boundaries, Transatlantic studies transcends national boundaries by subverting the ethnocentric, critical paradigm of nationhood, cultural, and literary formation as occurring in isolation. National identity, national literary identity, and literary and cultural autonomy were perceived as originating within a self-contained vacuum without external contamination. Examination of the literary and material exchanges between nations challenges the legitimacy of literary divisions and reveals cross-national contamination. There is a misconception that the circulation of ideas is a recent
phenomenon attributed to the social media of the digital age. This work argues that periodicals are pre-digital forms of social media utilised for circulating ideas, disseminating knowledge and creating communities and networks. Periodicals helped shape public opinion in the same way contemporary social media does. It is the aim of this work to use theoretical analysis of the digital media and virtual networks of contemporary social media as a comparative framework for examining the print media and “material networks” of periodicals (Claybaugh 443). In light of Paul Gilroy’s interpretation of ships as microcosms of mobile culture with no cultural or national boundaries, this work examines periodicals as “interfaces to the wider world”(Gilroy 17). Periodicals helped forge a new form of dialogue between “imagined communities,” such as anti-slavery activists (Anderson 6). Periodicals contributed to the culture of social reform because its medium made it possible. The social network of print culture formed a transatlantic public sphere that influenced the development of America’s nationhood, culture and literary tradition, which will be explored in this work.

10. Elizabeth Pruitt:

**Title:** Transatlantic Roots: Cultural Uses of Plants at the Wye House Plantation

**Abstract:** “Nor are the fruits of the earth forgotten or neglected. The fertile garden, many acres in size, constituting a separate establishment, distinct from the common farm—with its scientific gardener, imported from Scotland (a Mr. McDermott) with four men under his direction, was not behind, either in the abundance or in the delicacy of its contributions to the same full board.” (Douglass, 1855)

This paper will examine the cultural connections of multiple locations in the Atlantic—from West Africa to the UK and Ireland to the Mid-Atlantic United States—to the landscape at the Wye House Plantation in Easton, Maryland. Enslaved Africans and African-Americans, imported gardeners, and the Lloyd family, who founded Wye House after emigrating from Wales, came together in this space. Multiple groups would have viewed, understood, and used the gardens and surrounding environment of the plantation in different ways.

In doing archaeology at Wye House, we are also able to recreate the plant life of the past, both in the natural surroundings and the plants purchased and imported by the Lloyds for cultivation in the greenhouse buildings. Soil samples from the standing greenhouse, an attached slave quarter, and an excavated hothouse have been analyzed for fossilized pollen and demonstrate a difference in the types of plants were used in spaces dominated by the Lloyds and those where enslaved people lived.

The Lloyd family ledgers provide another thread of evidence for the plants that were bought and managed in the Wye House gardens. Letters between Edward Lloyd IV, his wife Elizabeth Tayloe Lloyd, their son Edward Lloyd V, and various seedsellers and merchants in England fill in more of the history of garden management. Slave narratives, collected by the Federal Writer’s Project in the 1930s, documented what had been an oral tradition of medicine, healing, and use of the wild apothecary connected to the African diaspora and influenced by Native Americans. Frederick Douglass, who was enslaved at Wye House, describes the gardens and landscape and provides some evidence for spiritual uses of plants in the Chesapeake that connect back to
Africa. The UK and Ireland, too, have cultural and medicinal uses for particular plants, which may have influenced the Lloyds’ choices in their gardening practices.

11. Stefan Woehlke:

**Title:** Montpelier, a Banker, and the Making of African American Landscapes Before and After Emancipation

**Abstract:** 1857-1881 brought dramatic changes to the United States. The nation transitioned from one that condoned the legal enslavement of people with dark skins, to one in which the physical confinement of Africa’s descendants was no longer sanctioned. The dominant means of social control shifted from iron shackles to the forces of capitalism. Financial policies quickly shaped the new American landscape. Montpelier provides a case study for the investigation of changing landscapes during this period due to the archaeological preservation of the property. Additionally, it was owned by a Banker during this period, Thomas J. Carson, and his brother Frank, two wealthy immigrants from Ireland. This paper will examine the changes in the settlement patterns of African Americans under two distinct regimes of control, one physical the other financial.

*Session IV: Douglass*

12. Ann Coughlan:

**Title:** Frederick Douglass, the *Columbian Orator*, and Ireland

**Abstract:** These transnational conversations in Baltimore, Maryland between students from the Universities at Cork and Baltimore offer an ideal opportunity to consider the role of the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century school primer, the *Columbian Orator* (1797), in the autobiographical writings of Frederick Douglass and to explore a striking connection between the *Columbian Orator*, Douglass and Irish political writing of the late eighteenth century.

Caleb Bingham and a group of associates edited and published the *Columbian Orator*, which stood as the cornerstone of American education for half a century. Within the pages of the *Orator*, they sought to cultivate the many and different voices within the new Republic, while simultaneously enabling them to contribute to the national narrative of American identity. The *Orator* was intrinsic to the slave-child, Douglass’, acquisition of literacy. Indeed, Douglass’ different presentations of the *Orator* across the three autobiographies of his autobiographical project demonstrate a changed, albeit expanded, emphasis on the role of the *Orator* in his writing.

Now, in the twenty-first century, transnational studies offers an expanded and less restricted space wherein the *Columbian Orator* once again pushes the spatial and temporal dimensions of Frederick Douglass’ writings. Douglass identified as his favourite speech that delivered in 1795 by an Irishman, Arthur O’Connor, to the Irish Parliament in Dublin. While O’Connor was an unconditional supporter, at enormous personal cost, of Catholic Emancipation, he remained
passionately anti-Catholic and the rubric he employed to fashion his political writing influenced subtly Douglass’ later antipathy to Catholicism, especially Irish Catholicism.

13. Benjamin Skolnik:

Title: Archaeologies of Conflicting Ideologies: Frederick Douglass as a Contemporary Post-Colonial Thinker

Abstract: One of the more prolific writers of the 19th Century was Frederick Douglass. Douglass devoted his career to the abolition of slavery and equality for African Americans. As Archaeology in Annapolis turns to Douglass’s writings to help locate and interpret the sites he describes in his autobiographies, we are increasingly recognizing Douglass’ importance not just as a guide to 19th Century quarters and plantations, but to understanding the ways in which ideologies can be understood, combated, and overcome. This paper examines one of Douglass’ causes. During the American Civil War Douglass pushed for the creation of the United States Colored Troops—segregated units of African American soldiers fighting in the Union Army. In making this case, he invokes the ideologies of democracy and citizenship and marshals it against the racial ideologies used to maintain slavery and inequality. Similarly, many newly-arrived Irish immigrants fought for the Union in ethnically-Irish units out of a sense of patriotism and ethnic identity. However, tension between these two otherwise similarly marginalized groups exploded into the 1863 New York City Draft Riots, which serves as an opportunity to examine underlying issues of labor and class as they relate to race and ethnicity. Archaeologically, AiA has been finding the physical remains invoked in Douglass’ ideological conflict.