



The J. M. O'Neill Papers

P9

**The Special Collections and Archives Department
Glucksman Library
University of Limerick**

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Reference Code: IE 2135 P9
Title: The J. M. O'Neill Papers
Dates of Creation: 1954-1998
Level of Description: Fonds
Extent and Medium: 4 boxes (60 files)

CONTEXT

Name of Creator(s): O'Neill, Jeremiah Michael (1921-1999).

Biographical History: Jeremiah Michael O'Neill was born on 27 September 1921 in Limerick, where his father was the city's postmaster. He was educated at the Augustinian College, Dungarvan, County Waterford. He moved to England in the 1950s where he worked in Barclays Bank (Dominion, Colonial and Overseas) and grew to specialise in colonial banking. He was posted to West Africa and ended up in Ghana and Nigeria. He returned to England with his wife Mary and his children, and became an agent in the building trade in London and the Home Counties. In 1967, he became the tenant landlord of the Duke of Wellington pub in the Ball's Pond Road in Islington. There he established the Sugawn Theatre and Sugawn Kitchen, a well-known venue for plays and folk music.

In 1980, he left the pub trade and settled in Hornsey, where he wrote a number of plays and four novels. During this time he received two *Irish Post*/AIB awards. His plays include *God Is Dead on the Ball's Pond Road*, written for the Sugawn Theatre's 1976-1977 season; *Now You See Him, Now You Don't*, and *Diehards*. His first novels, *Open Cut* (1986) and *Duffy Is Dead* (1987), were hailed as truly original works, earning him the accolade of being 'the laureate of the London Irish'. These first two novels were followed by *Canon Bang Bang* (1989) and *Commisar Connell* (1992). He moved to live in Kilkee, County Clare, where he completed his two last novels, *Bennett & Company* (1998) and *Rellighan, Undertaker* (1999). He died on 21 May 1999, shortly after being awarded the Kerry Ingredients Book of the Year Award for *Bennett & Company*.

Immediate Source of Acquisition: Donated the University of Limerick by Joe and Joan Hartnett on 1 November 2001.

CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

Scope and Content: This collection contains material relating to J. M. O'Neill's career as a writer, including drafts and proofs of his plays and novels, press cuttings, publicity material and correspondence. A thesis discussing the significance of O'Neill's work in the context of Irish writing is also included.

Appraisal, Destruction and Scheduling Information: All records have been retained.

Accruals: No accruals are expected.

System of Arrangement: The collection has been divided into six series. Series 1 contains drafts and proofs of O'Neill's novels and plays as well as other writers' adaptations of his novel *Open Cut* for film. Series 2 contains press cuttings, mostly reviews of O'Neill's novels and interviews with the author. Series 3 contains material relating to publicity and advertising, such as posters, programmes and catalogues. Series 4 contains a small quantity of correspondence, mainly with literary agents and event organisers or from the members of public. Series 5 contains ephemera associated with J. M. O'Neill and Series 6 an analysis in thesis form of three of his novels.

CONDITIONS OF ACCESS AND USE

Conditions Governing Access: Unrestricted access to most items. Some items of correspondence contain personal details relating to people living or presumed living and are closed for 50 years to protect individual privacy.

Conditions Governing Reproduction: Standard copyright regulations apply to all items. For photocopying or reproducing material, please consult with the staff. Please note that the University of Limerick does not hold copyright to O'Neill's works.

Language/ Scripts of Material: English.

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements: Paper documents in good condition.

Finding Aids: A hard copy of the descriptive catalogue is available at the Special Collections and Archives Department, Glucksman Library, University of Limerick.

DESCRIPTION CONTROL

Archivist's Note: Papers arranged and described by Lisa Collins.

Rules or Conventions: This description follows guidelines based on *ISAD(G)* 2nd edition, 2000; *Irish Guidelines for Archival Description*, 2009; *National Council on Archives: Rules for the Construction of Personal, Place and Corporate Names*, 1997; and *EAP Guidance on Data Protection for Archive Services*, 2018.

Date of Description: November 2001. Revised December 2021.

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The J. M. O'Neill Papers

1 WORKS (1954-1998)

1.1 Novels (1954-1998)

- 1/1/1 1954
Typescript draft of *TCH! TCH! A Story in Slapstick*. Annotated.
Paginated. 160 pp.
- 1/1/2 [c. 1980-1985?]
Typescript draft of *Open Cut*. Annotated. Paginated. 201 pp.
- 1/1/3 1983-1984
Typescript draft of *Duffy Is Dead*. Annotated. Paginated. 193 pp.
- 1/1/4 1987
Typescript copy of *Duffy Is Dead* containing passages highlighted 'to facilitate readings given in London and Birmingham'. Paginated. 193 pp.
- 1/1/5 1989
Typescript first draft of *Canon Bang Bang*. Heavily annotated. Paginated.
In two folders. 244 pp.
- 1/1/6 1992
Typescript draft of *Commissar Connell*. Annotated. Paginated. In two
folders. This novel originated as a play, for which see P9/11. 235 pp.
- 1/1/7 [c. 1993-1997?]
Typescript draft of *Bennett & Company*. Annotated. Paginated. In two
folders. 259 pp.

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1/1/8 October 1997
Typescript draft of *Bennett & Company*. Annotated. Paginated. In two folders.
258 pp.

1/1/9 5 August 1998
Photocopy of typescript galley proofs of *Bennett & Company*. Annotated. Paginated. In two folders.
276 pp.

1.2 Plays (c. 1970-1983)

1/2/1 [c. 1975-1976]
Photocopy of a typescript copy of *God Is Dead on Ball's Pond Road*.
75 pp.

1/2/2 [c. 1970s?]
Typescript draft of *Now You See Him, Now You Don't*. Note by O'Neill 'Rewrite in progress'. Annotated. Partly paginated.
72 pp.

1/2/3 1983
Typescript draft of *Commissar Connell* formerly titled *Diebards*. Annotated. Paginated. Also see P9/1/1/6.
80 pp.

1.3 Screenplays Adapted from His Work (1987-1990)

1/3/1 March 1987
First draft of a film adaptation of O'Neill's novel *Open Cut* by Troy Kennedy Martin. Note on folder by O'Neill 'Not a single scene from the novel is treated. Dreadful script rejected by me'. Heavily annotated by O'Neill. Paginated. In three folders.
161 pp.

1/3/2 2 March 1990
First draft of film adaptation of O'Neill's novel *Open Cut* by Eoghan Harris. Note by O'Neill 'I accepted Eoghan Harris' treatment which was purchased by CENTRAL TELEVISION. But never performed!' Annotated. Paginated.
126 pp.

1.4 Articles (1986-1988)

- 1/4/1 March 1986
March 1986 issue of *Books & Bookmen* containing on p. 5 an article by J. M. O'Neill entitled 'In a Word, Irish'.
40 pp.
- 1/4/2 1988
Spring 1988 issue of *The London Irish Writer* containing on p. 9 an article by J. M. O'Neill entitled 'Empire Daze'.
12 pp.

2 PRESS CUTTINGS (1977-1998)

- 2/1 1977:1982
Press cutting and photocopies of press cuttings relating to The Sugawm Theatre and J. M. O'Neill's plays *God Is Dead on Balls Pond Road* and *Now You See Him Now You Don't*.
5 items
- 2/2 1986-1987
Press cuttings and photocopies of press cuttings relating to J. M. O'Neill's novel *Open Cut*. Includes 6 March 1986 issue of *Midweek* containing on p. 13 a review of the novel. In three folders.
35 items
- 2/3 1987-1988
Press cuttings and photocopies of press cuttings relating to J. M. O'Neill's novel *Duffy Is Dead*. In three folders.
45 items
- 2/4 1989
Press cuttings and photocopies of press cuttings relating to J. M. O'Neill's novel *Canon Bang Bang*. In three folders.
20 items
- 2/5 1992
Press cuttings and photocopies of press cuttings relating to J. M. O'Neill's novel *Commissar Connell*. In two folders.
10 items

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- 2/6** 18 December 1998
Issue no. 4994 (18 December 1998) of *The Times Literary Supplement* containing on p. 20 a review of J. M. O'Neill's novel *Bennett and Company*.
32 pp.
- 2/7** 1977:1979:1985-1989:1992:1998
Press cuttings and photocopies of press cuttings relating to J. M. O'Neill. Includes 14 March 1987 issue of *The Irish Post* with the centre spread dedicated to the Irish Post Awards, the recipients of which included J. M. O'Neill (also see **P9/3/2/4**). Also newspaper cutting from *The Guardian* (31 May 1990) by Malcom Bradbury on the subject of film adapters. In three folders.
34 items

3 PUBLICITY AND ADVERTISING (1977-1993)

3.1 Plays (1977-1991)

- 3/1/1** 20 June 1977
Programme of a performance of the Sugawn Theatre Club production of *Shem's Progress: A Celebration of James Joyce's Finnegans Wake*.
1 item
- 3/1/2** [1970s?]
Sheet of writing paper bearing the logo and address of the Sugawn Theatre.
1 item
- 3/1/3** May-June 1983
Programme and promotional sheet of a performance of *Diehards* at the Old Red Lion, Islington, London.
2 items
- 3/1/4** January 1987
Theatre tickets issued by the Sugawn Theatre.
2 items
- 3/1/5** 1988
Folding brochure promoting the Irish Company's 1988 UK spring tour of the play *God Is Dead on Ball's Pond Road* by J. M. O'Neill.
1 item

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- 3/1/6** 13-14 December 1991
Poster promoting performances by the Sugawn Community Theatre of J. M. O'Neill's adaptation of *Sweeney Todd the Demon Barber* at the Marine Hotel, Kilkee.
1 item

3.2 Novels (1986-1993)

- 3/2/1** 15-29 November 1986
Programme of the third Readers & Writers Festival in Birmingham. Guests included J. M. O'Neill, who participated in a panel discussion on 17 November. With a related cover letter from the festival director, Jan Page. Also see **P9/4/4**.
2 items
- 3/2/2** 1987
Photocopy of *The Sunday Times* bestseller list for issue dated 1 March 1987. The list includes *Duffy Is Dead* at no. 60.
1 p.
- 3/2/3** 13-14 March 1987
Poster promoting Irish Book Fair at Camden Centre, London. Also see **P9/4/9**.
1 item
- 3/2/4** 26 September 1987
Menu of a dinner to celebrate the Irish Post Community Awards at Royal Garden Hotel, Kensington, London. Recipients of the award included J. M. O'Neill. Also see **P9/2/7 (20)**.
1 item
- 3/2/5** 4-12 February 1989
Programme of the first Hackney Irish Festival. Venues included J. M. O'Neill's pub, Duke of Wellington.
20 pp.
- 3/2/6** [1989]
Dust jacket of J. M. O'Neill's novel *Canon Bang Bang*. Also photograph and card of illustrations by the dust jacket's designer, Max Ellis, with a related note.
4 items

P9/

- 3/2/7** July 1989-March 1990
Catalogue of new titles by Hodder & Stoughton. Includes a note on *Canon Bang Bang* by J. M. O'Neill on p. 66.
112 pp.
- 3/2/8** 1991
Catalogue of new titles by Hodder & Stoughton's imprint, Sceptre. Includes a note on *Canon Bang Bang* by J. M. O'Neill on p. 3.
8 pp.
- 3/2/9** [1993] (date of original)
Photocopies of the front and back covers of the 1993 paperback version of *Commissar Connell*.
2 pp.

4 CORRESPONDENCE AND INVITATIONS (1985-1989)

Also see **P9/3/2/1**

- 4/1** 3 December 1985
Compliment slip of *The Magazine* with a short note from its deputy editor Lucy Tuck.
1 item
- 4/2** 13 February 1986
Letter from J. Marston congratulating J. M. O'Neill on his TV interview. *Closed. Review 2036*.
2 pp.
- 4/3** 20 March 1986
Compliment slip of William Heinemann Ltd with a short note [from its director Andrew Barrett?].
1 item
- 4/4** 21 November 1986
Letter from David Godwin, Martin Secker & Warburg Limited, 54 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF, congratulating J. M. O'Neill on his performance in Birmingham. Also see **P9/3/2/1**.
1 p.

P9/

- 4/5 2 January 1987
Letter from Diana [Hinds], Books & Bookmen, 43 Museum Street,
London WC1A 1LY, enclosing an interview (for which see **P9/2/7 (15)**)
and wishing him success with *Duffy Is Dead*.
1 p.
- 4/6 8 January 1987
Postcard from [illegible], Bush Theatre, Shepherds Bush Green, London
W12 8QD, thanking J. M. O'Neill for a copy of *Duffy Is Dead*.
1 item
- 4/7 January-March 1987
Letters from the public to say how much they enjoyed *Duffy Is Dead*.
Closed. Review 2037.
3 items
- 4/8 March 1987
Invitation to a reception at the Irish Embassy, London to celebrate St.
Patrick's Day. With related notes and envelope.
4 items
- 4/9 10 April 1987
Letter from Alex McDonnell, Race Equality Policy Group, Middlesex
House, 20 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 2SB thanking O'Neill
on behalf of the organisers of the Irish Book Fair for the part he played
in making the event a success. Also see **P9/3/2/3**.
1 item
- 4/10 11 December [1987?]
Invitation to a *Books & Bookmen* Christmas Party.
1 item
- 4/11 4 February 1988
Letter from Peter Straus, Senior Editor, Hodder & Stoughton Paperbacks
enclosing a proof jacket of *Duffy Is Dead* (now not present).
1 p.
- 4/12 19 February 1988
Invitation to a reception by A. P. Watt [Literary Agents], London.
1 item

P9/

- 4/13** 29 August 1989 (post-date)
Postcard from 'M' referring to a recent article by Evelyn Waugh in *Sunday Independent*.
1 item
- 4/14** 1989
Postcard from 'Roy' thanking O'Neill for a copy of his latest book.
1 item
- 4/15** [c. 1980s?]
Compliment slip from William Heinemann Ltd.
1 item
- 4/16** [c. 1980s?]
Compliment slip from 'Roy' enclosing an unidentified item (now not present).
1 item
- 4/17** [c. 1980s]
Letter from Dr P. Murray, Medicentre, Stephen Street, Sligo, thanking O'Neill for agreeing to sign his books.
1 p.
- 4/18** [c. 1980s?]
Cards bearing the logo and contact details of The Starfish Enterprise Print & Design.
2 items
- 4/19** [c. 1980s?]
Christmas card from Hodder & Stoughton, publishers. (Originally found with **P9/1/1/5**.)
1 item
- 4/20** 7 March 1992
Letter from Majella Crehan, Irish Bookfair Co-ordinator, Green Ink Bookshop, 8 Archway Hall, London N19 to O'Neill thanking him for agreeing to do a reading at the forthcoming bookfair. (Originally found with **P6/1/1/6**.)
3 pp.

5 EPHEMERA (1987-1992)

- 5/1 26 March 1987
Programme of International Concert sponsored by the Mayor of Islington and the Race Relations Committee in aid of the international year of the homeless. With a related compliment slip.
2 items
- 5/2 17 September 1992 (date of originals)
Photocopies of the procedures for election to Aosdána and its 1992 membership list.
2 items
- 5/3 [c. 1980s?]
Three posters featuring photographs and short biographical notes of Tomas MacCurtain, Terence McSwiney and Kevin Barry. Printed in Cork.
3 items

6 ANALYSIS OF HIS WORK (1995)

- 6/1 January 1995
Typescript copy of a treatise/thesis of three of O'Neill's novels: *Open Cut*, *Duffy Is Dead* and *Canon Bang Bang* by John O'Donoghue. Note by O'Neill on folder 'The author of this thesis is now Dr. John O'Donoghue of Sussex University (I am told)'. In two folders.
83 pp.