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Chu He

Faculty Research Grant Final Report

“Brian Friel in Panorama: A Comparative Reading of his Short Stories, Plays, and Essays”

Description of Grant-Supported Activity

Last summer I travelled to Ireland and spent a lot of time in both National Library of Ireland in Dublin and the library of National University of Ireland in Maynooth, studying Brian Friel’s archives which included his personal letters, diaries, interviews, essays, reviews of his short stories and plays published or performed in Ireland, America, and other places. I also spent much time in Hesburgh Libraries in the University of Notre Dame, researching historical and critical materials related to Brian Friel’s works. Throughout last summer I reviewed Friel’s short stories, play, and essays, and read the accumulated materials extensively.

Completion of the Project and Project Results

The project turns out to be bigger than I initially thought: first, I have to sort out the useful materials in tens of thousands of items in Brian Friel’s humongous archives; second, I need to search among countless news reports in Irish and American newspapers for the coverage of John Kennedy’s relationship with Ireland when Friel wrote his short stories in 1961, both of which are very time-consuming. It also takes months to just go over all the materials I have accumulated abroad and at home. That is why I have to use extra time in the fall and spring semesters to finish writing the article “Brian Friel’s Short Stories and Play Revisited: Orientating ‘The Visitation,’ ‘Foundry House,’ and Aristocrats in their Historical and Audience Context.” By now I have revised the article and submitted it to New Hibernia Review, a major journal in my filed. I have not yet heard back from this journal. Due to my pregnancy, I cannot go to any more conferences this year, but I will definitely present parts of this paper at ACIS conference next year. I have also begun to investigate Friel’s other plays, short stories, and essays in relation to each other as well as in their specific historical and cultural context. Ultimately, I plan to bring all of the projects together in a comparative study of Friel’s works.

The time and focus this grant gave to me also made it possible for me to produce and present a conference paper “Sure they never get anything right”: Ledger as History in Friel’s Living Quarters” at a major conference in my field—the 2011 International Meeting of the American Conference for Irish Studies—at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, March 30-April 2, 2011.