

Belfast and Carrigskeewaun Reconfigured

BY DEREK COYLE

IT WAS WITH GREAT SADNESS that we all heard the news of Michael Longley's passing in January of this year. His contribution to the poetry of our time has been immense. Always warm and generous, his poems so elegant and humane, we will miss the arrival of new volumes from this poet that was so prolific in his maturity (when most enjoyed a relaxed retirement). So it is that we were long overdue a new Selected Poems from Michael Longley. His last was published in 1998 and is missing poems from such astonishing collections as *The Weather in Japan* (2000), and one of my personal favourites *Snow Water* (2004). And that is not to neglect poems from the late flourishing represented by *The Candlelight Master* (2020), followed so swiftly by *The Slain Birds* (2022). And then there is *A Hundred Doors* (2011), which followed *Snow Water*, and with the seven-year gap between these two collections we might have anticipated a slowing down. However, this would have been a false signal or a misreading of the situation that finally played out. *The Stairwell* arrived in 2014 and was subsequently followed by *Angel Hill* in 2017. In his late seventies and eighties Michael Longley was very busy, as creative and productive as he had ever been. Given the quality of the work produced by Michael Longley, new readers will enjoy this opportunity to encounter this precis of one of the most extraordinary poetic careers in post-war Irish poetry, perhaps even post-war poetry in English full-stop.

MICHAEL LONGLEY.

ASH KEYS: NEW SELECTED POEMS
WAKE FOREST UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2024.
\$22.62.

As a new selected poems *Ash Keys* can be understood as a type of poetic equivalent of popular music's "Greatest Hits." Or as an opportunity to offer a succinct insight into a career, a synopsis of sorts—a summary of preoccupations, the revelation of the extent of an artistic landscape, and a representation of formal achievements, poems that stand out in their distinctiveness in the oeuvre, where something new or unique was achieved. All these descriptions can be applied to Longley's *Ash Keys*. Early career highlights include "Wounds" and "Wreaths." "Wounds" combines two abiding Longley preoccupations, the Ulster fallen in World War I, a conflict his father participated in and was to survive, albeit dealing with ongoing "shell-shock" throughout his life; and The Troubles which afflicted Longley's Ulster and which ran parallel with his life-span and literary career. "Wreaths" is a trilogy of poems that deal with ordinary lives snuffed out prematurely, bystanders lost in the on-going conflict in the North. The early "Elegy for Fats Waller" indicates a life-long love of jazz (and music in general); but also signposts something of the commercialization and commodification of culture that has been a feature of life in the twentieth century and beyond; how a popular U.S. mode influences a serious and conscientious and ambitious artist of postwar Belfast. Longley's second lifelong territory was the townland of Carrigskeewaun in Co. Mayo. Very few Irish town-

lands have had such a vivid and memorable chronicling by a major artist. And for such a long stretch too. "The West" captures that tension between the violence of Belfast and the peace of escape across the border, even as in Carrigskeewaun his ear is cocked for "news from home"; and surely Longley was prescient and right when he describes himself

materialising out of the heat-shimmers and finding my way for ever along the path to this cottage, its windows, walls, sun and moon dials, home from home.

In imagining himself associated with this landscape for the type of eternity art allows, Longley was indeed correct. Poems like "Letters: To Derek Mahon" and "To Seamus Heaney," as well as "In Memory of Gerard Dillon," and "Edward Thomas's War Diary," illustrate the importance of dialogue with other poets and poetry, and indeed, artists in general, to Longley's imagination and practice. This inclination was life long as the *New Selected Poems* attests.

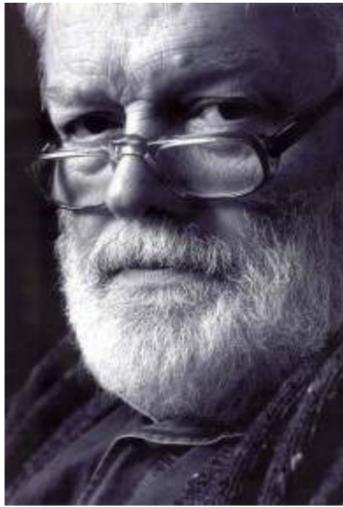
To extend the "Selected Poems" as Greatest Hits metaphor, Longley's *Gorse Fires* (1991) is probably the career defining work, rather like *Blonde on Blonde* by Bob Dylan, *Sgt Pepper's* for The Beatles, or *Dark Side of the Moon* for Pink Floyd. There's a before this collection and an after this collection. Longley has always been an ambitious poet. This is apparent in the very first poem in *Ash Keys*. "Epithalamion" is a homage to the English literary tradition, a nod to Edmund Spenser, as much as it is the first of many love poems to Edna Longley, a life-long muse to the poet. The problem with this poem is that it sits under a literary tradition the poet admires and aspires to, but which is not his natural imaginative territory. This conflict sits behind several poems in Longley's early collections, as the poet has still to find his own proper territory and his own formal mode for expressing it as such.

This conflict is resolved and firmly put to rest with *Gorse Fires*. This collection hits Longley's mother lode with utter confidence. And it is a newfound confidence in his own capacity to imagine that is the hallmark of this fresh departure in the work. There is a daring here, a willingness to take risks, not seen before. And all of this was hard-earned. Longley suffered a decade long artistic silence from *The Echo Gate* (1979) to *Gorse Fires* (1991), broken only by a handful of poems, represented here by one fine poem "The White Butterfly" from his collected *Poems* (1985). However, with the breakthrough of *Gorse Fires*, Longley reached and sustained a new high, an artistic plateau he was to maintain up to *Snow Water* (2004) over a decade later, with a slight dip thereafter, to rise again with his two most recent collections *The Candlelight Master* (2020) and *The Slain Birds* (2022). In my view, this breakthrough made Longley one of the best poets writing anywhere in the English-speaking world. In this respect, the closest career trajectory to Longley's in U.S. poetry postwar

is that of Louise Glück, insofar as I read her 1990 volume *Ararat* as a breakthrough collection surpassing her earlier achievements significantly, and which she would sustain through to her capstone achievement, 2006's *Averno*. Subsequent volumes did not quite match this height. The Nobel Committee recognized the importance of Glück's achievement. It is unfortunate that they never recognized Longley's. His late work merits this level of recognition.

We need to explore more the achievements of *Gorse Fires* (1991). We witness Longley's new confidence in the first poem selected here "Sea Shanty." In the poem the poet can see Eros and Lesbos "from the high ground of Carrigskeewaun." This poet is in control. He can take what he needs from the Greek tradition and mould it to serve his purposes, doing with it what he wills. These figures appear beside "bell-bottoms" and "long-johns." And this poet is comfortable

with what he has learned from his home ground, he can sing "my repertoire of sea shanties and love songs." The landscape is one of rock-fern, lichens, and samphire. With the Pleiades matched and answered, echoed by "a sparkle of sand grains on my wellingtons." Then we have the beautifully confident poem that is "Detour," a poem ostensibly about death, the passage of the poet's funeral cortege (purely imagined) through



"the single street of a small market town." However, the poem is an indirect and witty homage to the dignified life of these towns; respect for the hearty foodstuffs, "grubby parsnips" and "cauliflowers that glitter after a sunshower." Traffic slows to let cows pass. The cast of characters includes the butcher and the publican. The poem establishes a witty and clever conjunction between the size and shape of a phone box and the coffin as he imagines a conversation between the man in the phone box and himself in his coffin "about where my funeral might be going next." The confidence of imagining here carries over to one of the most regarded poems in the collection and in Longley's oeuvre full-stop, "The Ice-Cream Man." This poem is so familiar to us now that we forget how utterly strange it is. The poem is a prayer and a lament, a non-sectarian one at that. Its context is the death of the ice-cream man in the Troubles—how to explain that to your daughter? The poem begins with a brief list of ice-cream flavors—"rum and raisin, vanilla, butter-scotch, walnut, peach"—and ends with "all the wild flowers of the Burren/I had seen in one day," including "thyme, valerian, loosestrife, meadowsweet, tway blade..." and a whole lot more. Over a half of this poem consists of a list of wildflowers. You'd never predict this ending to the poem. Entirely right. Entirely the strategy of a poet way ahead of most of his readers. Entirely the turn of a poet at the height of his powers and in possession of a remarkable confidence. He has said the unsayable. He has protected the innocence of his daughter. He has created a circular wreath from words. He has uttered a type of prayer.

This remarkable achievement has been justly acknowledged.

Longley will sustain this level of artistic achievement for many years after this. Still to come is the reinvented sonnet "Ceasefire," Longley's perception of truce-making and the necessity of forgiveness as imagined with some help from *The Iliad*. Again, the imaginative ground is so neutral and yet so pertinent. As the old king Priam finds it within himself: "I get down on my knees and do what must be done/And kiss Achilles" hand, the killer of my son." This fine poem is from *The Ghost Orchid* (1995). "Above Dooaghtry" is a gorgeous love poem for Edna Longley. It is a poem remarkable for its formal confidence. Its four quintets or cinquains consist of one sentence. Longley has mastered his syntax. He has absorbed the indigenous poetry of the placenames of his chosen corner of the earth, Carrigskeewaun: Dooaghtry to Roonkeel, Templedoomore, Cloonaghmanagh, Allaran Point, Tonakeera Listen to all those broad vowel sounds. This is a poet enriched by the sounds and traditions of the smaller island and is not diminished by that but enlivened and invigorated. Listen to the beautiful conjunction, "sandy dander" as the poet imagines himself and his partner walk this place forever, given how much they have loved it and walked it and known it throughout their long lifetime together.

Longley's "Matisse," from *The Candlelight Master* (2020) imagines an artist, disabled and elderly, wheel-chair bound, still stubbornly working with the help of assistants. This artist was still chasing "the world's peculiar shapes," stimulating his curiosity. While his body is confined, his imagination is not. And he draws on a lifetime of "memory replacing the outside world," his imagination at swim "every day," in this "his submarine kingdom." No doubt Matisse was an emblem or a beacon, a clarion call to the mature Longley, to keep going, to not give up. There is a quiet confidence in aligning himself with this major figure of twentieth-century art, a confidence Longley had earned by this stage of his own imaginative adventure. We'll finish on the final poem in the last collection represented here, *The Slain Birds* (2022). The poem is "Totem", and it references the poet's favored landscape of Carrigskeewaun, his first family, as well as writers who have sustained him over a lifetime. They are imaginatively conceived as part of his artistic totem pole, the house and home of his powers and energies as an artist. Here is the poem:

When the tree-surgeon
cut away
from our top-heavy beech a ton,
I assembled in my mind's eye logs
as a star-surrounded totem pole
with carvings of all the creatures –
concussed tawny owl, sleepy
pot-bellied badger, otter drowned
in the eel-trap, Rosemary's donkeys,
Emma's punctual frogs, hares
and stoats playing scary games
around the erratic boulder—O all
in a ghost dance with my twin brother
and the dead poets and my warrior
father and my mother with her limp.

—Carlow College/St Patrick's,
Carlow, Ireland

Between Two Wars

BY KELLY MATTHEWS

IN THE UNITED STATES, Seamus Heaney is arguably the most universally recognized contemporary Irish writer. His stature as a Nobel Prize winner and his ability to look unflinchingly at troubled times have ensured that memorable lines such as making “hope and history rhyme” will resonate for generations.

EDWARD J. O’ SHEA.

SEAMUS HEANEY’S AMERICAN ODYSSEY
ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN IRISH LITERATURE, 2023.
\$54.99

But Heaney’s fame in the U.S. also owes much to the fact that this is the country where his poetic career found a foothold, first on the West Coast, at the University of California-Berkeley, where he took up a one-year residency in 1970, and later in the East, where he became Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard University in 1984. He annually taught spring-semester courses at Harvard until he won the Nobel in 1995, cementing himself in the popular imagination as the pre-eminent Irish writer of his generation, and he continued as Harvard’s poet in residence on a regular basis until 2006.

As Edward J. O’Shea points out in his monograph *Seamus Heaney’s American Odyssey*, the dates that bookend Heaney’s first and final stays in the United States also anchor his time in this country to our national journey between the Vietnam and Iraq Wars, conflicts that incited protests domestically and abroad and gave the Irish poet insights into American militarism, imperialism, and counter-establishment poetic movements.

O’Shea is Professor Emeritus of English at the State University of New York, Oswego, and has held Fulbright fellowships in India and at Trinity College, Dublin. While at Trinity, he lectured at the Heaney exhibition “Listen Now Again” as well as at National University of Ireland-Galway and Queen’s University Belfast. In his book’s introduction, he explains that its subject is “the arc from

American Pastoral (the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s) to the American Tragedy (9/11) as Heaney lived in it, but also kept himself apart from it, as expressed in memoirs, letters, and his poems and plays.” Elsewhere O’Shea argues that “Heaney was initially receptive to American poetry and culture while his career was still plastic, but as he developed more assurance and fame, he became more critical of America as a superpower, especially in the military reaction to 9/11.”

Heaney arrived in California in 1970 with his family in order to take up a one-year position as a lecturer at UC-Berkeley. Around him, the antiwar movement was gathering steam, and politics dominated American poetry, with Gary Snyder and Robert Bly giving frequent readings on the local scene. From this time period, O’Shea makes good use of a unique archival source, which he dubs “the Bancroft notebook” due to its purchase by the Bancroft Library at UC-Berkeley in 1971, at the end of Heaney’s year on the faculty. In its pages are drafts of the poems Heaney wrote from the time of his arrival in the Bay area in September 1970, which allow O’Shea to trace Heaney’s revisions of poems that were later published in his collection *Wintering Out* alongside some that were never published at all. O’Shea also chronicles a significant incident that occurred on New Year’s Day 1971, when Heaney’s wife Marie was assaulted and nearly abducted on her way to pick up their two sons from a playdate in Berkeley. Heaney was out of town with his brother who was visiting from Ireland; Marie was so badly injured that she was kept overnight in the hospital.

The pacing of this book’s chapters appears to be somewhat dependent on the extent of available source material, rather than on the relative importance of each time span, such that chapter lengths vary from over thirty pages each for the years 1971 and 1979, to a scant thirteen pages for the decade 1985-1995, in a chapter which focuses on Heaney’s Nobel Prize but leaves the ten years that preceded it largely unexamined.

That being said, O’Shea makes the most of often overlooked sources such as the Lilly

Library at Indiana University, which houses the letters of Alfred David, professor of Chaucer and Medieval Studies and editor of the medieval section of the Norton anthology of English literature, who collaborated with Heaney on his translation of *Beowulf*. O’Shea also draws upon interviews conducted with an impressively wide range of Heaney’s American students and colleagues, as well as fellow Irish writers and scholars in America such as David Lloyd.

In addition to sources from well-known written archives at Emory University and the National Library of Ireland, this book emphasizes the “heard Heaney” via recordings of his readings—a valuable and less common approach. O’Shea delves into the extant recordings of Heaney’s readings, such as those now housed in the Woodberry Poetry Room at Harvard. Perhaps more than any other contemporary poet, Heaney’s voice, now available only in recorded form, carried a distinctive timbre, especially when conveying his Irish poems to an American audience. (We can witness a similar dedication in the way that the *HomePlace* in Bellaghy offers visitors dozens of audio recordings of Heaney’s poems in his own voice.)

I would argue that “On the Road Again,” O’Shea’s chronicle of Heaney’s multistate reading tour of 1979-81, is the book’s most entertaining and enlightening chapter, thanks to anecdotal details, all of which are contemporaneous. This chapter provides rare glimpses into Heaney’s anxiety about how his work was perceived and politicized in the North of Ireland and in the United States. O’Shea insightfully reports that Heaney learned from the hectic pace of that reading series and from the danger of repetition that “his own relationship with his own poetry and his audience” was at risk. He quotes Heaney later recounting how, “In a good poetry reading—good for you, the poet, that is—you retrieve something of the quickening that you got when you first wrote the thing.”

O’Shea is at his best when maximizing the use of contemporaneous sources such as Heaney’s letters to his speaking agent Selma Warner, which are housed at Emory University. It is also illuminating to read personal

details such as when Heaney slipped on the ice one Harvard winter and had to manage crutches, then a cane, to navigate from his rooms in Adams House to his poetry seminar in Sever Hall.

The use of Dennis O’Driscoll’s book *Stepping Stones*, by contrast, is occasionally disorienting and at times leads to a somewhat disjointed mix of Heaney’s contemporaneous and retrospective views of the events being described. In this way, *Stepping Stones* seems problematic as a primary source: even though it transcribes Heaney directly, its content is remembered from a distance of years or decades. Additional commentary from O’Shea on how much to trust these opinions on events recollected in tranquility would have been helpful.

As is well known, Heaney didn’t write much about America, preferring to focus more firmly on the nostalgic landscapes of his youth or imagined trips to Aarhus or chronological leaps into early Christian landscapes populated by St. Kevin or the monks of Clonmacnoise. During his residencies in the United States, Heaney seemed to relish his foreignness and wielded it in service to creating space for himself as a writer, earning a living while building his literary reputation in the largest English-speaking market available.

But O’Shea succeeds in showing how influential the U.S. was and continues to be for understanding Heaney’s career and his poetic oeuvre. Beyond the importance of America as “a place of friendship, financial support, and professional validation,” O’Shea convincingly shows how Heaney’s work was shaped and inflected by his time in the United States, not only in his readings for American audiences, but also in his choice of poetic topics and his responses to literary criticism. What also becomes clear from O’Shea’s book is how instrumental Heaney’s time in the United States was to his standing as a public figure, an element of who he was that is at least as important as his poetic accomplishments. By the end of this book, it becomes hard to imagine Heaney without America. •

—Framingham State University

Guests of Nature

BY LUKE GIBBONS

IN ONE OF THE MORE breathtaking exhibits in the “IMMA Collection: Art as Agency” exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Alice Maher’s *Mnemosyne* (2002), the viewer enters a dark room to encounter what looks like a glistening white bed or divan to lie on. On approach, however, there is a chill in the air, as the work turns out to be covered in ice, housing an inbuilt refrigeration unit. The conditions of display soon reveal the precariousness of the work for exposed to the atmosphere and the breath of viewers all day long, the ice begins to melt. In the society of the spectacle, the art work is undone by its own spectators.

Faced with erosion through human presence, it is difficult not to think of a wider crisis, that of global warming and the melting of ice-caps threatening to engulf whole coastlines and islands. The atmosphere itself has become toxic so that, as Lauren Guille-

mete reminds us in her essay, “Atmospheric Intervention” in *Hosting Earth*, it is no coincidence the Covid pandemic was spread through exhalation, breathing itself becoming a danger to life. It is often forgotten that “inspiration” in creativity comes from respiration which, as Jean-Thomas Tremblay notes in *Breathing Aesthetics*, “necessitates a hospitable milieu” in coming up for air.

It is this question of hospitality in relation to ecology and the environment that informs the timely, wide ranging collection of essays in *Hosting the Earth: Facing the Climate Emergency*, a book with an urgency and call to action beyond the academic world. The revival of interest in hospitality as an ethical and cultural concept in recent times derives from the downside of cosmopolitanism, the imperative to address the plight of migrants, refugees and stateless persons cast adrift in the often violent upheavals of globalization. Hospitality so conceived addresses the rights of strangers, the obligations owed to those

who arrive on our shores carrying only the wounds of displacement. The innovative turn in *Hosting Earth* is to look at the shores themselves, and the damage caused to the environment by these upheavals, calling for an extension of duties of care to the land, oceans and sky that sustain us on the planet.

As Brian Treanor shows in the introductory colloquy with Melissa Fitzpatrick, Catherine Keller and Jason Wirth, hospitality is thus not to be confused with generosity towards kith and kin, or concern for members of one’s own society. As against the inward look, it is directed outwards towards others, but with the crucial qualification that it is not at the expense of one’s own attachments and sense of belonging. Contrary to the radical cosmopolitanism of philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas or Jacques Derrida, who argue that the logic of welcoming the stranger is to become strangers to ourselves and forego our own identities, Treanor argues that the very notion of a “guest” presupposes a

“host,” someone who is already in place: “Only an implaced person can be hospitable.”

**RICHARD KEARNEY, PETER LLAPES
AND URWA HAMEED, EDITORS.**

HOSTING EARTH:
FACING THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY.
ROUTLEDGE, 2024. \$42.00

This sense of place need not be closed or fixed, still less in a position of domination, as in the paternalism of certain gift-economies placing the guest or receiver under a complement. There is nothing discretionary in this: for those needing protection and refuge, hospitality is a *right*, as Immanuel Kant argued famously in *Perpetual Peace* over two hundred years ago. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized when self-styled patriots take to the streets with slogans that immigration and newcomers threaten cultural identity, or that closing the borders will make the nation great again. It is precisely out of

attachment and history that cultures are obliged to reach out to those under duress, all the more so as those in the “advanced” West are beneficiaries of the exploitation and degradation of resources of the Global South, including cheap labor, that gives rise to displacement at the outset.

So far, hospitality is dealing with the human world but how then, in the major focus of this collection, can it be extended to relations with the wider biosphere, and the seemingly inanimate earth? Many of the essays address the complexities of who/what is host, and who/what is “out of place,” in these interactions. The difficulty arises historically with the “disenchantment” of Nature under Cartesian ratiocination and early modern science, as the external world was reduced to inert matter to be mastered and pressed into the service of humanity. As against this, several contributors, following Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the embodiment of the self, seek to undo the fatal dissociation between mind and matter and the positing of a mechanistic world “out there,” in which Nature simply takes its course. Ironically, this version of Nature, untouched by human hand, re-entered romantic versions of ecology, venerating the wilderness or a transcendental sublime, oblivious to all mere social and political concerns. It may be that this image of an implacable Nature also leads to an undue resignation, failure to master the environment leading to its reverse, as if humanity is subject to forces (“Nature’s revenge”) entirely out of its control.

In one of the most telling threads running through the book, initiated by Richard Kearney in his “Preface; Towards a Hospitality of Nature,” this fatalism is countered by challenging theories of evolution promoting competition, extinction and domination as “the survival of the fittest.” In contrast, Kearney draws on recent advances in evolutionary theory, associated with Lynne Margulis among others, which look to symbiogenesis and the “Symbiocene” as alternative models of the natural world, in which interdependency, mutual support and collective endeavor prove keys to survival. Contrary to Social Darwinist fantasies, trees are not in competition, elbowing each other out in the woods, but the deeper roots go, the more “the Wood Wide Web” becomes entangled through minute mycorrhizal interactions. The need for roots is not to the detriment of others: as Jason M. Wirth notes in “Hosting Earth,” it also allows trees to extend beyond their native soil to reach for the sky and, in the process, reduce carbon emissions in the world at large.

While the planet as a whole is subjected

to toxic omissions, one of the myths of the “Anthropocene” is to attribute responsibility to humanity as such. A number of essays seek to date the historical origins of the crisis, while others attempt to identify the main geopolitical areas and systems responsible, but all point to the withering hand of capitalist modernity. In her interview with Richard Kearney, former Irish President Mary Robinson suggests the major deterioration began in the 1950s, and it is indeed true that the “great acceleration” following World War II raised the alarm. As the World Wide Fund for Nature reveals, 60 percent of all mammals, birds, fish, and reptiles have disappeared since 1970, and as Donna M. Orange notes in “Climate Emergency and Radical Ethics,” since the Industrial Revolution, the U.S. is responsible for 29 percent of global emissions, the nations of the E.U. 26 percent, and China and India eight and two percent respectively: “half the greenhouse gases in our atmosphere and oceans have come in the past 25 years.”

Much of the fine texture of discussions in the book is devoted to re-imagining relationships to the natural world outside the capitalist logic of extraction and accumulation. References to the writings of leading environmentalists Robin Wall Kimmerer and Erazim Kohák feature prominently, Kohák’s conceiving of Rights of Nature extending hospitality to entities such as rivers—a tendency passing out of wishful thinking into real life in recent legislation to protect the rights of rivers in Ecuador, India, Canada and New Zealand. In these cases, indigenous attitudes to space and time, land and history, come to the fore, but while occasional references are made to “Celtic Christianity,” Irish traditions of hospitality, memorialized by Gabriel Conroy in James Joyce’s “The Dead,” go largely unexamined.

One has to read Richard Kearney’s novel, *Salvage* (2023), reviewed by Fanny Howe in the book, to grasp what these ways of life might look like in the present time. In marked contrast to “New Age” or neo-pagan versions of Celtic spiritualism, Kearney’s novel relays the dense local knowledge and attention to particulars that constitutes the lived experience of islanders, in this case a soulful young woman Maeve, coming of age at the edge of modernity. So far from representing a romantic throwback or pastoral nostalgia, this acuity of the senses is robust equipment for living on islands, the novel relating, in Howe’s words, “a story in the lineage of Irish island stories, so many, so marvelous with fish and fishermen, animals and phantoms, nets and sea wracks, potatoes and plants, and herbs to make living easier.”

Maeve’s ways of looking at things, for her the prose of everyday life, becomes for modern sensibilities, as Kearney shows, an eco-poetics, as if it is only through art that senses dulled by commodity culture can regain intimacy with the real world, let alone that of the imagination.

In telling remarks by the Native Americans Lisa and Wolf Wahpepah at the end of the book, “Listening to the Earth,” it becomes clear that while to deny climate warming is indeed to reject science, “you don’t need a scientist to tell you that the world is changing, unless you’re living under fluorescent lights 90 percent of the time.” By simply being attuned to their surroundings, “we’ve watched several species of birds move into our region that never lived here before” and the local stream has dried up. There is no rejection of science here, only a shift in emphasis from “the Baconian creed that scientific knowledge means technological power over nature,” to a realignment with the goals of climate justice, based precisely on the dire warnings provided by science itself.

The contemporary relevance of indigenous eco-systems are picked up in several discussions of the work of Wall Kimmerer, a professor of Environmental Biology, who is a member of the Potawatomi nation. Her modern classic, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013), weaves scientific and indigenous knowledge in treating land as the commons, and follows up the political implications of this in an ecological critique of private property: “In Western thinking, private property is understood to be a ‘bundle of rights,’ whereas in gift economy property has a ‘bundle of responsibilities’ attached.” It is not just that private property encloses the commons *spatially*, conferring absolute rights to land: there is also *temporal* enclosure in that due to short-term gain, resources are pillaged and ransacked in a generational amnesia, eschewing the obligation to sustain them for the benefit of future generations. “The eyes of the future are looking back at us,” Jane D. Marsching quotes Terry Tempest Williams, “and they are praying for us to see beyond our own time.”

In a searching exchange in “Bringing it Back to Nature,” Jim Morley relates this critique to the work of the radical biologist and geographer, Prince Peter Kropotkin, one of the first major thinkers to redirect evolutionary theory from its right-wing ‘gladiatorial’ models. No sentimentalist of nature, Kropotkin found that faced with harsh Russian conditions, in Morley’s summary, “organisms naturally support each other in a mutually supportive way. The develop symbiotic relationships with each other and the

environment. When the environment is stressful, organisms support one another for mutual survival I think it is vitally important that we support Kropotkin’s evidence based findings instead of the ideological misinformation of ‘survival of the fittest’” in the Social Darwinian sense of Nature “tooth in claw.” So far from being anachronistic, the eminent contemporary evolutionary theorist, Stephen J. Gould, asks elsewhere in a reappraisal of the Russian biologist: “What can we make of Kropotkin’s argument today? I would hold that Kropotkin’s basic argument is right.”

Though conventionally associated with caricatures of anarchism, Kropotkin, an acquaintance of John Butler Yeats, had a notable Irish following, exerting a formative influence on the thinking of AE and T.W. Rolleston in the Irish Co-operative movement, as well as figures as diverse as Bulmer Hobson and James Joyce. Rather than fading in a twilight, Celtic codes of communalism and hospitality were brought by AE into contact with Kropotkin’s ideas to give them a distinctive contemporary relevance, the Irish Co-operative movement making a considerable radical contribution to the War of Independence. Joyce, it is worth noting, had four books by Kropotkin in his library.

If the overall question of the Hosting Earth Project on which this collection of essays is based “engages the question of ecological hospitality by asking what it means to be guests of the Earth as well as hosts,” some outlines of an answer may begin to emerge. Insofar as the planet is the host, our roles as “guests” implies temporary duration, and is a timely reminder that we are passing through, with profound obligations as custodians of the earth to those who will come after us. Insofar as we are hosts, however, drawing on Brian Treanor’s emphasis on emplacement, we are attached to the particular piece of ground we inhabit and the times we are in, but by virtue of hospitality’s address to the stranger, have to attend not only to our local patch, but to the world beyond our native shores. In Simone Kearney’s sculptural relief on the cover of the book, *Hands Bloom*, open palms both protect and yet offer a tree as a gift to the world.

It is striking that Alice Maher’s frozen artwork at IMMA is called *Mnemosyne*, it is as if the past that led to its condition is called to mind, all the more to prepare for a future in which we do not have to hold our breath. As Arundhati Roy, again quoted by Jane D. Marching, proclaims: “Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.” •

The Downfall of the Church in Modern Ireland, from Up Close

BY ENDA DUFFY

A CASE TO BE MADE that the memoir has been the most salient Irish literary genre since independence. From Dan Breen’s *My Fight for Irish Freedom* to Bernadette Devlin’s *The Price of My Soul*, from Frank McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes* to Julia O’Faolain’s *Are You Somebody?* Irish memoirs have stood out for the ways in which they pit the political against the personal, and in the process, reveal both renewed. Memoirs by journalists, as might be expected, perform this turn with extra sharpness. If journalism, as it has been characterized, is the first draft

of history, then the journalist’s memoir becomes the second draft. Fintan O’Toole’s recent *We Don’t Know Ourselves* comes to mind; a classic of the genre is John Healy’s *Nineteen Acres*; both are by journalists for the *Irish Times*. Now comes a thought-provoking, often moving and highly readable memoir from the *Times* journalist who almost inadvertently found himself at the center of reporting on perhaps the most fundamental transformation of Irish culture over the last thirty years: the decline and fall of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Patsy McGarry’s *Well, Holy God: My Life as an Irish, Catholic, Agnostic Correspondent* is a deeply humane and thoughtful book.

Its ease of narrative is the correlative of its impact: the obvious decency and generosity of spirit of its author is exactly what drives him to call out hypocrisy and makes clear his outrage at much of what he has uncovered. There is no shortage of mendacity in the events described, indeed, no shortage of exploitation and horror, yet the book manages also to be humorous as well as poignant. McGarry’s fluent, almost lyrical style traces his encounters with victims and survivors, with a few of their abusers but more often with the self-serving *plamás* (the Irish word for glad-handling) of those who would mini-

mize their misdeeds. We meet too the courageous souls who fought back, those who went public with their testimonies, the campaigners who became leaders and national figures, as well as the hapless bishops who (at best) seemed out of their depth in facing the horrors, and the politicians who finally agreed to official inquiries. McGarry also presents us with the better angels of this imploding church: the selfless long-serving missionaries, often unrecognized, who still toil in every corner of the world to uplift the poor and the oppressed, priests who tried to warn the hierarchy of the coming storm and were exiled for their pains, and figures such as Fr.

Alex Reid, who played a key role in launching and fostering the process that brought peace to Northern Ireland. In all, this is an enormously capacious work, in which a large cast of characters and their hopes and fears, vividly sketched, create a broad yet oddly intimate picture of the change that is surely the signature sign of Ireland's most recent phase of modernization.

Early in the work McGarry poses the question: why did the whole saga of priestly abuse and its coverup, and then, the national uncovering of the institutional abuse on a systematic scale that can be summed up by the words "Magdalen laundries," have such a massive effect in Ireland? Or, more fundamentally, was such abuse, at both the individual and institutional levels, a particularly Irish problem? Was it worse in Ireland, and even among the Irish diaspora, than elsewhere? The answers to these questions are not yet settled, but McGarry provides some plausible leads. He considers the possible exceptionalism of the Irish church as part of the legacy of Paul Cullen, formidable Victorian Archbishop of Dublin, who set out with great success to build a national, and bourgeois, church from an institution that had only recently emerged from Catholic Emancipation. This church, in its rigid organization, may have mimicked the bureaucratic structures being constructed at the time by the new nations of Europe such as Germany; it also fitted well with the British imperial apparatuses of civic control in Ireland. The Catholic arm of this control was conceived in the first instance in carceral terms, so that the building of convents, orphanages, hospitals, boarding schools, and so on was the counterpart to the huge program of building of new churches everywhere in the country. Given Ireland's late-colonial status, and the subservience of the Irish to British norms, this Cullenite church was determined to prove its propriety by outdoing the strict morality (especially regarding sex) that had become dominant in Britain. This meant that when the new state was founded, the Catholic church, first, already had a state apparatus (of schools, healthcare, social welfare) in place, which it controlled, and second, that this willingness of the new state to allow these

functions to continue in the church's hands guaranteed the church enormous ideological power. The church had a monopoly over Irish citizens biopolitically—from the cradle to the grave—and, therefore, ideologically as well. It controlled Irish bodies and Irish minds. It was in this context of a monopoly of control of bodies and minds that the webs of incarceration, exploitation, and endless cruelty flourished, not to mention the attacks upon children by their most trusted guardians. Only in the waning days of the church's power was all of this horror allowed to become audible in public discourse. In making the question of culpability the opening one in his book, McGarry offers us a lens through which to judge the personalities to whom he introduces us in a kind of cavalcade,

PATSY MCGARRY.

WELL, HOLY GOD: MY LIFE AS AN IRISH, CATHOLIC, AGNOSTIC CORRESPONDENT
MERRION PRESS, DUBLIN, 2024. £17.99

One of the appealing aspects of memoir is that history becomes personal; up close, the Irish women and men here are seen reacting with every shade of courage and cowardice to the unfolding horrors. President Mary McAleese, a Catholic leader taking communion in the Protestant Christchurch Cathedral soon after her inauguration and later calling out the endless hypocrisy of the Irish and Roman Catholic hierarchies, emerges as an early heroine: her clarity and decisiveness set the scene for such figures as the extraordinary victim's advocate Marie Collins, the most eloquent speaker of truth to power of all, Christine Buckley, and journalists such as Mary Raftery, who made the documentary "States of Fear," which McGarry describes as "one of the most influential investigative TV programs in Irish history," not forgetting the tireless campaigner and feminist leader Nell McCafferty. Oftentimes, as more recently with the investigator of the Tuam atrocities, Catherine Corless, this is a case a new history being written from below. Each of these truth-speakers, and many others, become vivid presences in these pages, speaking out, achieving various degrees of vindication,

telling truth to a fading power.

At the same time, the book does not shirk away either from pen-pictures of the priests and prelates who perpetrated the horrors or took part in the cover-ups. McGarry places a summary of the notorious career of the priest Tony Walsh over against the harrowing testimony of one of his victims, Darren McGavin. Archbishop of Dublin Desmond Connell does not emerge as a sympathetic figure here, presiding over "a special service of prayer and healing" in St. Andrew's Church; his successor Diarmuid Martin, instead, stands out as much more honest, caring and transparent as he tries to come to grips with the crisis he inherited. Various figures and entities outside Ireland, such as the Roman Curia that refused to release its records to Irish investigators, and Cardinal Dolan of New York, who conducted an inquiry into the Irish College in Rome, appear if anything as more obstructionist than the Irish bishops. And there are many times here when McGarry appreciates the dilemmas in which clerics found themselves. His chapter on the bishop of his own home diocese, for example, opens with a story of how this man had helped him out years earlier when he was a university student; it concludes with a quiet list of the cases of abuse among his clergy that the same bishop failed to report to the civil authorities. At times McGarry invites us to draw our own conclusions, but, with tact, withholds them himself. Nowhere is this more evident than in what may be the tour-de-force of the book, the account of his encounter with the exiled Bishop Casey of Galway, sent away after the revelations that the bishop had a former lover and a son in Connecticut, and, when McGarry reaches him, lives in a damp village high in the mountains of Ecuador. In scenes that might come from Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*, McGarry brilliantly excavates the pathos of this particular exile from Erin, an aging bishop with tears in his eyes because he is hungry for home as he turns to minister to the peasants of another land.

Well Holy God reads as a thought-provoking coda to an era. McGarry is nothing if not modest himself: he takes none of the credit which is his due for being a leader among a cadre of journalists willing to speak

truth to entrenched powers. In the conclusion to the book, he is far from declaring an end to adherence to the Irish church; far from it. As a fine memorist, he wraps his whole account of the last quarter-century of the implosion of the Irish church into an account of his own life, and his personal experience with religion. The most profound chapters of the book may be the opening ones, in which he describes his own childhood. The major event for him growing up was his family's move from a cottage by the bog to a house on the square in the town. There, in the school run by brothers, this sensitive boy, who had dreamed of becoming a priest himself, was at once horrified: "The regime was violent and brutal—and included sexual abuse, although I did not know it at the time...[it] was a deep shock." This marks the start of the author's subsequent loss of faith in established religion and (even if the book's title declares him an agnostic) in God. It is noteworthy that it is at the very moment of his arrival into modernity, represented by the town, that the boy becomes conscious of the brutality that sustained the grip of the church on power in Ireland. The Cullenite church in Ireland had always been a modernizing force, rather than an archaic peasant one, yet its modernizing drives had been built for repression rather than freedom—a repression that showed itself in the horrors that would be revealed by campaigners and journalists like McGarry, decades after the young memorist had been shocked by them.

By now, if the clerical repressive apparatus is consigned to the dungheap of history, Ireland may be entering a new phase of modernity, beyond the post-coloniality which had set the context for the post-Cullenite power apparatus to arise. Certainly, unthinking respect for existing powers, whether temporal or spiritual, has faded in Ireland. Charting the tumultuous disintegration of Irish deference over a quarter century, and, the reader might suspect, all too modestly minimizing his own distinguished and central role in propelling it forward, Patsy McGarry has given us a brilliantly readable, thought-provoking, and even slightly elegiac book. •

—University of California, Santa Barbara

Joyce's Extraordinary Everyday

BY BARBARA M. HOFFMANN

I CANNOT BEGIN TO GUESS the overlap in the Venn diagram between people who seek out self-help books and those who seek out Joycean literary criticism. Perhaps it is larger than one might think. Because, as Vicky Mahaffey's *The Joyce of Everyday Life* reveals, anyone who reads Joyce is necessarily learning to read herself better, to be more reflective of her own, everyday lived experience.

VICKY MAHAFFEY.

THE JOYCE OF EVERYDAY LIFE
BUCKNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2024. \$29.95

Through rigorous close reading, a variety of intertextual references, broad cultural allusions, and encyclopedic knowledge of Joyce's works garnered from her decades of experience reading and teaching Joyce, Mahaffey suggests that the slow, rigorous, and, for

some readers, initially unpleasant experience of parsing Joyce's prose enables a form of self-recognition in the reader, one that ultimately leads to more empathy for self and others. Mahaffey writes that "Joyce was putting the English language through a prism" (73). In *The Joyce of Everyday Life*, Mahaffey puts Joyce's entire oeuvre through a prism; she takes the words and images into which Joyce has packed so much meaning and holds that prism up to them, allowing the separate colors and layers of meaning to unfold and become apparent to her readers. In other words, her book is doing through explicating what Joyce does through complicating, untangling these threads of meaning—like Penelope unweaving the shroud—that run through the history of human thought by way of Joyce's allusions and references. In so doing, she breaks the reader out of complacency and into awareness, which is exactly what she asserts Joyce was doing.

This unpacking, untangling, and unweaving all has a purpose: the reader of Joyce

can become engaged with herself through becoming more engaged in the layered meanings of words and the things those words represent. In reading Mahaffey's book, I was put in mind of Viktor Shklovsky's exhortation in his discussion of defamiliarization to "make it strange." Mahaffey's reading of Joyce also evokes, to me, Wordsworth's "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads*, in which he describes "the principal object" being "to choose incidents and situations from common life," but, in writing about them, "to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way; and, further, and above all, to make these incidents and situations interesting by tracing in them, truly though not ostentatiously, the primary laws of our nature."¹ As Wordsworth and Coleridge set out to do, Mahaffey, by focusing on Joyce's words of everyday life, shows how the everyday is strange and infinitely colorful.

Each chapter is, as their titles suggest, about a different word or idea or object in

Joyce: "On Beds," for example, is chapter one; "On Adultery and Virginitly" is chapter six. While each chapter is about that word or concept in Joyce, it is also about the thing itself. Thus, the book offers extended explorations and meditations on these trappings of everyday life. The book does benefit from being read straight through, since the layering of meaning and references does build over the course of discussion, but each chapter can stand on its own. I do suggest, above all, that the reader take her time with this text, since it is so densely layered, to give herself space after reading each chapter to let it percolate.

While Mahaffey's book can be read and appreciated by seasoned Joyceans, it is equally helpful for those just coming to Joyce studies. She takes the time to explain key references, plot points, allusions, and other miscellany that people who already study Joyce may take for granted as known by all Joyceans. She traces motifs across Joyce's works, and zooms in on a specific work or a specific scene or episode to provide close reading of that moment. And, very helpfully,

Mahaffey clearly summarizes Joyce's "lost work," his play *Exiles*, which even those of us who love Joyce may never have quite gotten around to reading.

In her closing chapter, Mahaffey suggests that "Joyce's work is best read with other people, because groups give a more immediate appreciation to the richness of his use of words" (211). Mahaffey has, as nearly as possible in text form, captured the feeling of being at a really good *Finnegans Wake* reading group, at which each member is able to add his particular knowledge of allusions, language, or history to the group's general understanding. Perhaps one member of the group is well-versed in Joyce's letters to Nora, in all of their salacious glory. Another is familiar with Joyce's notes on *Exiles*, and the references therein to French writers such as Molière and Paul de Kock. The group has a member who knows the life cycle and mating habits of a salmon; another is a classicist who can unpack both Plato's and Aristotle's use of the bed as a metaphor for understanding material reality; the film buff in the group knows all about the promotional material for the 1921 film version of *Jim the Penman* starring Lionel Barrymore; and, the group member who recounts the history of margarine can share, delightfully, that the expression "to make butter and cheese of someone" is to bamboozle them (103). The group even has an expert on Derrida, which, the group concedes, can be helpful.

Of course, all of these references and more come from Mahaffey herself. She does not merely stick with allusions Joyce himself could have made; she shows the way that Joyce's images and words continue to resonate with our world. Her references include Monica Lewinsky's dress; the famines in North Korea, Malawi, and Ethiopia; and a journal entry and autopsy report of an incarcerated alcoholic. And, the reader simply cannot miss Mahaffey's reference to and description of the bed in her neighbor's garden (which elicited a "woah—badass!" in my marginalia).

One almost feels that the linear structure of a book is too limiting for such a discussion; the development of ideas in the book suggest more of a three-dimensional map or chart. In summarizing her goals in her closing chapter, Mahaffey suggests that a productive reading of Joyce "begins with a willingness to engage with unknown particulars, in all their seemingly chaotic profusion"; the reader cannot rely on "reductive synthesis," but must embrace "the web of new connections" (205). In this image of the web, Mahaffey here gives us an apt metaphor for her own style in this book. This exploratory process, this willingness to open things up and follow rabbit holes all the way to their end, works explicitly against a disturbing trend in literary studies of fitting details from a text into "reductive categories," thereby flattening them (205). Hence, the joy of this book comes not only

from its close readings and references and intertextuality, but also from showing the way that a study of Joyce can still help the field of literary studies more generally to move away from the tendency to read literature by forcing it through the tube of a preset analytical lens or category.

The overall question of the book is summarized in Mahaffey's chapter "On Glass," which is ultimately a chapter on mirrors: "Why did Joyce make it so difficult to see or follow what is going on? Why did he darken the glass?" (165). This question permeates the text, bringing the reader to understand that the difficulty helps us see ourselves better as readers and as people. In the introduction, Mahaffey explains some of the techniques Joyce used to "jostle his readers out of boredom and complacency," removing the usual narrative and linguistic elements that readers rely on as a "crutch"—things like an omniscient narrator, a clear plot, and language that operates according to readers' preset assumptions (6). This difficulty also humbles us and helps us see that understanding is not so easy. In this way, "literature (like psychoanalysis) can offer readers the opportunity to reread the self" (indeed, as she clarifies in the Epilogue, the title of the book is in part a reference to Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*) (166). Essentially, as Mahaffey asserts, Joyce has "obscured [his writing] so that the reader can potentially see himself in it instead of judging others through it" (177).

If this book is partly a self-help book, it reveals, in its study of Joyce, that the ultimate way to help oneself is to become more empathetic. And, empathy comes from learning to read oneself and all humans as having multiple sides: "Every individual is both extraordinary and deeply flawed" (80). This duality is at the heart of Mahaffey's text and is in Joyce himself: "whether he was decried as obscene and impenetrable or celebrated as the greatest writer of the twentieth century, he maintained the careful discipline of representing himself as human" (80). The humility we may feel in reading Joyce's works in all of their difficulty and complexity reminds us that "the profoundest incongruity of human existence is the contrast between the intensity of individual consciousness... and the insignificance of a single mortal individual in the context of an immense universe" (155). In her reading of Father Flynn's laughter in "The Sisters," Mahaffey ultimately concludes "that care for the well-being of ourselves and others... helps to make the insignificance of existence more bearable" (154). Mahaffey works to show her readers that such empathy can be gained through a willingness to read deeply: to read words, objects, ourselves, others, and Joyce.

—University of Miami

1. William Wordsworth. "Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*" (1802), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 6th Edition, Vol. 2, edited by M. H. Abrams et. al. W.W. Norton & Co, 1993, pp. 142-43.

Silent Screams

BY VIVIAN VALVANO LYNCH

"When we are silent we are still afraid"
—Audre Lorde, "A Litany for Survival"
Epigraph, *When We Were Silent*

IRISH JOURNALIST AND author Fiona McPhillips, an editor-at-large at the *Forge Literary Magazine*, has to her credit a bibliography of articles focusing on significant, even life-threatening, women's issues. She has published two nonfiction books. The first, *Trying to Conceive: The Irish Couple's Guide* (Liberties Press, 2014), offers medical and practical guidance on an obviously sobering subject. The second, *Making the Home You Love* (O'Brien Press, 2018), co-written with Colm Doyle, Lisa McVeigh, and John Flood, is a light-hearted tome. Having successfully completed a home renovation, McPhillips united with three architects to explain what she learned and experienced throughout the process. McPhillips optimistically encouraged readers, the anticipated audience primarily being women, that they could survive the complexities of renovation.

FIONA MCPHILLIPS.

WHEN WE WERE SILENT
NEW YORK: FLATIRON BOOKS, 2024.
\$28.99/\$38.99 CANADA

With her debut novel, *When We Were Silent*, she returns to her traditional bailiwick of serious social problems and tries her hand at fiction centered on an Irish woman who was sexually abused as a teenager and is living with its effects thirty years later. However, the previous sentence gives a mere iota of information. McPhillips creates a narrative that entangles so many different levels of intricacy that it becomes a metaphoric Gor-

dian knot that the reader must painstakingly work at until it is untied. It will ultimately be the worse for wear, a tired-looking piece of rope, damaged and ragged in places, but it will be untied. Hers is a most impressive and imposing first novel.

I believe this could be an excellent novel for teaching within the historical and sociological contexts of sexual abuse in Ireland; so many other serious, sometimes perilous, topics arise that a compendium of problematic aspects of contemporary Ireland are on view. Of course, for the classroom, this raises the question of effective professional preparation by the instructor. I am not a fan of the term "trigger warnings"; the adjective bothers me. But I do believe that readers, particularly when young and impressionable, must be adequately and thoughtfully prepared if they will be reading about extremely distressing subjects.

When We Were Silent deals primarily with a traumatized protagonist; other traumatized individuals also inhabit its chapters. The plot includes: sexual abuse/rape of teenagers by teachers/coaches; a suicide; an alcoholic mother; and bullying. These are potentially dangerous subjects. Realistic depictions of poverty on a Dublin city estate contrast with scenes at elegant Victorian residences. A disturbing examination of Ireland's social class strata comes forth as secondary school students visually and verbally display their monied or pecuniary status. A posh, grammatical or a careless, slang-ridden accent; immaculate clothing that is the height of fashion or cheap, second-hand apparel; an attitude of entitled superiority or one of ashamed inferiority: students are indelibly marked by such descriptors. McPhillips pays appropriate attention to the power of the Catholic Church; examples of hypocrisy, cruelty, unfairness, and institutional negli-

gence prevail. As all elements of the novel conjoin, a complicated psychological and legal thriller unfolds.

Young and impressionable readers must be adequately and thoughtfully prepared if they will be reading about extremely distressing subjects.

The first-person narrator, Louise (called Lou) Manson, tells her story from two vantage points, present (2016) and past (1986/early 1987), that alternate sporadically throughout the text. In 2016, Lou is an academic in the English Department of Trinity College. Married to a wife she adores, Alex, Lou is the birth mother of a young teenager, Katie; the three live as a two-mother family in a beautiful house on the Dalkey shore. Katie regularly sees her loving father, whose identity is only revealed late in the book. (The sharper the reader, the sooner one will chip away at that mystery.) In the 1980s segments, Lou recalls several months when she was seventeen years old. A reviewer's plot overview must employ considerable finesse to avoid spoilers that would destroy the fabric of McPhillips's artistry.

In the past, Lou's best friend, Tina, formerly a National School student like herself, had been given the opportunity to be trained by a renowned coach. Granted a scholarship to the prestigious Highland Manor, a private Catholic academy whose student body overwhelmingly consists of wealthy, privileged girls, Tina was coached by Maurice McQueen. She was repeatedly sexually abused and raped by him. Pregnant and desperate, she confided only in Lou, but unable to cope and in despair, Tina committed suicide. A devastated Lou, consumed by guilt but clearly blameless, received no assistance or counsel-

ing. When she tried to tell Tina's family at the funeral about the sexual abuse and pregnancy, she became hysterical and accusatory, and they responded angrily, breaking all contact with her. Lou, a good student who aspired to university acceptance, spiraled into poor performance and truancy, but she also conceived the plan that would change her life. She determined to transfer to Highland and expose PT teacher and coach McQueen.

Straining reader credulity, Lou was offered a scholarship to Highland, with the proviso that she must attend for a full academic year. She eventually learns, however, that Lou's mother, in a rare occasion of acting in support of young Lou, had set up the lie of the scholarship with the principal at Highland, a nun who was not adverse to dishonesty if lucre was on the table. Rose (Mam to Lou) borrowed the tuition money from a devious local money-lender. Shakespeare's maxim about weaving tangled webs when we practice deception could easily serve as headline to this novel. Lou was, indisputably, trying to operate in spheres far above the capabilities of even a bright and clever teenage girl, let alone one challenged by grief. Her mother was heading a two-person household mired in chaos. Rose worked at the bar of the local pub, but her alcoholism made for a daily life of disorder, lack of funds, and imprudent, irresponsible decisions. She may have meant well concocting the scholarship scenario, and it is sad to see what she will do to appease the threatening moneylender. One of her improvident decisions, though, will cause such hurtful, devastating repercussions for Lou that McPhillips leaves no doubt as to how destructive life with an alcoholic, incapable parent can be.

At Highland, Lou was quickly subjected to bullying, embarrassment over her lack of social standing and assets, and accused of

theft. But her scholastic abilities shone, and, little by little, she made inroads socially with some of the girls. One of the wealthiest and most beautiful of the students was Shauna, who was kind to Lou, and a friendship began. In tandem with her school attendance, Lou kept a close eye on McQueen, ever mindful of her plan. Shauna was the school's champion swimmer, aiming for the Olympics. McQueen noticed Lou's talent in hockey and arranged for her to play on Saturdays, with him being her personal driver. This, of course, was highly irregular, but Highland's employers never questioned anything McQueen did. He was the untouchable coach of tournament champions. McQueen began molesting Lou, which did not surprise her. It is heartbreaking to read of his increasingly worsening sexual assaults and rape of Lou. She may have expected him to repeat his treatment of Tina, but the more salient point is that she was never capable of handling his deviancy. Lou was still a kid, and the cliché "in way over her head" kept running through my mind, perhaps because of the importance of swimming to the plot. In addition to being abused herself, Lou suspected, correctly, that Shauna was another of McQueen's victims. As she and Shauna became closer, a physical, intimate relationship developed between

them. The evolution of that development is beautifully and elegantly rendered by McPhillips. We shall see that Shauna is, indeed, another traumatized character. I kept thinking: how different life would be for two young, thoughtful women who were attracted to each other and who were growing in the recognition of their sexuality *if* they were not burdened by the crimes wrought upon Shauna and Lou by the likes of the deviant McQueen.

December 8, 1986, the start of the Christmas season, marks the climax of the past portions of the novel. By then, Lou had already reported McQueen's criminality to the principal, only to be cruelly rebuffed. McQueen had verbally abused and threatened Lou, acting as pridefully as a proverbial cock on a walk. Joe, Tina's brother, another character working through trauma, had become Lou's truest friend and ally, but his attempts to help her had failed. So Lou and Melissa (a student whose relationship with Lou had gradually improved) planned to accost McQueen during one of his nights with Shauna: the night of December 8.

Not surprisingly, things went awry. The girls were neither professional investigators nor enforcers; they were teenage girls up against a strong, dominant male authority figure who held all the power and was backed

by a Catholic institution. A further complication was Melissa's deepening jealousy when she discovered the truth of Shauna and Lou's relationship. All I can say here is that McQueen was dead by the end of that night, affecting the girls' lives immensely—particularly Lou's and Shauna's. In her chronicling the immediate aftermath of December 8th, McPhillips shows her expertise in demanding that intense reader focus is required if one wants to follow the labyrinthine sequence of events. As is all good thrillers (and courtroom scenes), one must decide what one believes and what one mistrusts.

Now, to concentrate on present-day segments that I will cautiously impart: Lou, successful professional woman, mother, and wife is plagued by secrets of her past that she has not shared with Alex or with Katie. When approached by Ronan, Shauna's lawyer brother, to assist him with a lawsuit he is bringing against Highland, she panics. She has had no contact with Shauna for thirty years. Ronan needs Lou to provide a statement and, if the case comes to trial, testify in support of a teenage boy claiming sexual abuse by the current PT teacher/coach at the school. Highland, no longer Catholic, is co-ed, and this boy has adults who believe him. The school, again, disavows the charges.

Understandably, Lou wants to speak with Shauna, but Ronan insists that Shauna is adamant: there can be no meeting or discussion. Lou's decisions and indecisions regarding her participation keep the pace brisk. An outstanding strength of the present-day sections is that we often see Lou in a post-traumatic state, portrayed deftly and realistically by McPhillips. Lou is sometimes so paralyzed with fear that any time she resolves to sit down and talk to Alex to reveal a secret or to prepare her for what might lay in store, she freezes, threatening their marriage. Perhaps McPhillips's most brilliant accomplishment occurs in the final 2016 segment, in which her gradual, subtle, and sensitive exposure of *new* secrets (secrets that we readers did not know before) comes to fruition. The Gordian knot unravels. The living traumatized characters at the conclusion of this novel, like real-life traumatized persons, cannot erase their trauma. McPhillips's living characters can, however, tell the truth. Lou's last words to us are: "In the end, we're the ones who have to live with the stories we tell ourselves. This is mine." More than that, I dare not say.

—St. John's University

In the Beginning

BY BARRY HOULIHAN

IN NOVEMBER 1964, Brian Friel wrote a letter to Mary O'Malley, the director of the Lyric Theatre in Belfast. In it, Friel reveals the nerves and doubts he and others had about his then new play, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* Widely recognized as the work that ushered in the new wave and "second renaissance" of Irish theatre of the mid-twentieth century. Friel outlines how:

The Dublin play went v.[ery] well. It was one of those scripts that could have fallen flat on its face, and happily did not. Before it went on no one who had read it could assure me it would stand up. The sweat on opening night was mighty!

Had the risk proven true, and *Philadelphia* had fallen "flat on its face," as Friel feared, it may have proven to be an ending rather than a beginning. Kelly Matthews' new book exploring that very premise—the beginnings of Brian Friel—and covers the period of the young Friel's life through to that celebrated production of *Philadelphia* in 1964 and its later American production that confirmed not just the arrival of Friel as a successful and original playwright, but one which would confirm his status as a playwright of genius.

KELLY MATTHEWS

BRIAN FRIEL: BEGINNINGS

FOUR COURTS PRESS, 2024. €26.95

Matthew's book brings us into the mind, writing, and family life of the young schoolmaster, when a different path in life could have directed Friel to stay within the classroom, like his father before him, or indeed to the seminary at Maynooth where Friel spent two years of his formative years of maturity. Friel absorbed elements of all his surround-

ings and environments. From the American culture of cowboy films and novels to sacred spaces of the Church and perhaps the most influential of all, the people, stories, and landscape of Donegal and Glenties where his mother's homeplace was. There, the young Friel spent summers with his aunts and an uncle, a priest, returned from the missions, and which would later manifest in his Tony-Award winning play, *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Matthew's book outlines what else the young Friel also absorbed as he began his literary pilgrimage.

The exposure to critical support and editing from the BBC radio in Northern Ireland was critical to Friel fine-tuning his stories for broadcast often before they found a stage, and to a ready audience of 75,000 listeners: "Brian was not the only one to benefit. The BBC's national and regional stations aired 600 new plays per year, including early work by Harold Pinter and Tom Stoppard" (25) and also how "the BBC and its generous pay rates were a lifeline for Brian as he attempted to establish himself as a writer" (29). Friel's relationship with Ronald Mason, his editor at the BBC, was truly important. Both showed remarkable patience and friendship, as Friel, perhaps overly responsive to critical edits would frantically revise and re-submit scripts ad nauseum, as Matthews shows how Mason "continued to serve as a guide and mentor" to Friel (31).

Friel's horizons would broaden however, as he was writing and refining for radio and television for the BBC and others, Friel was also dabbling in short fiction. Again, with much rejection and perseverance he made a major breakthrough in 1958, when a story, *The Skelper*, would be purchased for publication in the *New Yorker*, Brian's first such success and in such a substantial publication that already counted Irish writers like Frank O'Connor within its fold. It would also begin, as Matthews explains, a new mentor to enter Friel's world in the form of Roger Angell. Despite still writing for the stage and receiv-

ing rejections from the Abbey Theatre, for his *The Francophile*, Friel continued with his short story writing.

This body of Friel's work generally receives less attention as the work for theatre progressed, and is welcome here to see the gestation and development of these stories within Friel's early years and in the context of his development overall. Friel's success as a short-story writer was significant and Matthews reminds us how Friel's short stories have been overlooked in the wider study of his work, and within wider studies of Irish short fiction generally. Matthews also reveals how characters and scenes from some early Friel short stories, including those rejected, found their way into his later dramatic writing.

The BBC and its generous pay rates were a lifeline for Friel as he attempted to establish himself as a writer.

The ongoing connection with the *New Yorker* and other American publications is important in exposing Friel's writing to an American audience, and for funding and supporting his family as well as his work. The volume of writing that Friel was producing by this time of the early 1960s could have seen him burn-out or risked spreading his creative output too thinly, as he himself acknowledged in a letter to Angell: "I am inclined to over-produce (for all I make of it!) and to work too rapidly. Before I begin a story, I have the whole thing perfectly lucid in my mind but in the process of writing very often slips from me, not rapidly, but slowly, as if it were smoke..." (64). Friel tackled each set of feedback and edits with boundless energy, even when frustrations of constant rejection would have quenched the hopes of many other writers.

Friel's early plays (before the global success of *Philadelphia*), saw his play *The Enemy Within* staged at the Abbey in 1962 and *The Blind Mice* staged at the Eblana, a newsreel cinema-turned theatre in the basement of Busáras bus station in 1963. Matthews outlines how "madness, the individual, and the demands of faith were the common threads" in Friel's plays of this time (90) and we see how that focus on "the individual" and its inner and outer parts become the core elements of his 1964 play, *Philadelphia, Here I Come!*, addressed in detail in chapters 5-6 in particular. Here, Matthew's makes detailed use of the Friel papers in the National Library of Ireland and the voluminous early drafts and iterations of the play.

We follow Friel's thoughts through the scraps of paper and notes as he tries to grasp at what he is trying to formulate achieve in the play splitting the character's private and public thoughts as well as finding a universal story—that of leaving home, to seek new shores. At the heart of this universality is still a uniquely Irish beginning—that of the family. The play was a success of the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1964 and transferred to Broadway and made celebrities of Friel and its cast as they navigated media calls, television interview and heightened Irish-American sentiment of the U.S. of the 1960s and of JFK's America. Friel had arrived. The journey from teacher/priest anxious short-story writer to the now established playwright was not one without many near derailments along the way. In some ways Friel was always a teacher/priest from then on.

Through his later years and particularly when Friel became more and more established we paradoxically see and hear less of him. He was notoriously reticent about interviews and seldom gave any to journalists or academics. The letters archived and drawn on in detail here by Matthews, such as those to Ronald Mason in the BBC Written Archives and to Roger Angell, Friel's editor at the *New Yorker* magazine, is a great act of restoration

of the voice of (young) Friel to the public world and academic space. The letters referenced and reproduced here give us a direct form of “Friel Private,” a figure we cannot otherwise know or hear from only through these written exchanges with figures so important to his development as a short-story writer as well as a playwright.

We find those champions of early Friel on both sides of the Atlantic, and indeed on both sides of the Irish border. In Belfast, Ronald Mason at BBC Northern Ireland was a constant support to Friel in his writing of radio plays. Matthews shows in detail how that apprenticeship in drama as a radio form was so important to Friel’s craft as writing voice and dialogue for radio. Later, Hilton Edwards at the Gate Theatre Dublin, director of *Philadelphia* is another figure who looms large in the story. Also within the letters we

also see the other supporting presence in “Friel Private”—Anne Friel, his wife, who along with their children were at Brian’s side as he persevered in his journey to become a playwright.

A strength of the book lies in its rigorously researched archive material, so much of which is used and explored for the first time. Friel’s own archive at the National Library of Ireland is an incredible resource into the mind, thinking, and writing of Friel as we see the plays develop under his hand.

While the book follows a consistently clear path through successive chapters, its final epilogue jars with its preceding chapters. It is a short conclusion (just five pages) and with a speedy jump forward to the present day, mentioning later key events in Friel’s life, from Field Day in 1980 to more recent productions of Friel’s plays through

the decades, including up to the Covid pandemic-affected Abbey Theatre Dublin production of *Faith Healer* in 2020-21. This seems superfluous to a book that so ably deals with the “beginnings” of Friel.

On the second of October 2015 I had spent the morning in the Manuscripts reading room of the National Library of Ireland where I had spent the time immersed in the early drafts of Friel’s *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* When I retrieved my phone from my locker at lunchtime I read the news with immense sadness that Friel had passed away. I returned to his papers in the afternoon to find the Reading Room filled with journalists. One seated next to me informed me they were sent by their editor to “find a story” and asked if I knew of any letters to Friel from Meryl Streep (who starred in the film version of *Dancing At Lughnasa*). I didn’t, as it happened. Now,

ten years after Friel’s passing, going back to those early drafts, notes and writings of Friel’s archive still feels like a pilgrimage. In *Brian Friel: Beginnings*, Kelly Matthews has gathered a richly detailed, illustrated, and succinct account of the formative years of the one of the most important of Irish writers of the twentieth century. We can journey through the archive of Friel’s thinking, and trace the relationships, the influences, and the mentors that shaped his work and supported his writing and confidence. All great writers have a beginning and it is always worth going back to the source. •

1. Letter from Brian Friel to Mary O’Malley, 18 November 1964, Lyric Theatre/O’Malley Archive, T4/825, University of Galway Library.

—University of Galway

Minding His Manners

BY THOMAS O’GRADY

PROBABLY NOT IMMEDIATELY, but perhaps eventually, an engaged reader of Colin Barrett’s *Wild Houses* will think of the advice that Jane Austen famously gave to her niece, an aspiring writer: “You are now collecting your People delightfully, getting them exactly into such a spot as is the delight of my life;—3 or 4 Families in a Country Village is the very thing to work on—& I hope you will write a good deal more, & make full use of them while they are so favourably arranged.” A simple enough description, Austen’s words have become essentially a working definition of a novel of manners, which at the heart of it is exactly what *Wild Houses* amounts to.

COLIN BARRETT.

WILD HOUSES

GROVE PRESS, 2024. \$27.00

Set in and around the town of Ballina in Co. Mayo, the novel is centered on a small cast of characters entangled in a plot involving drug-dealing, double-crossing, kidnapping, and various other forms of unsavory behavior. The major players are: Doll (Donal) English, a directionless but mostly harmless sixteen- or seventeen-year-old who lives too much under the thrall of his feckless and shameless older brother Cillian; Doll’s loyal but pensively restless girlfriend Nicky Hennigan, who has lost both of her parents to cancer; Dev (Devereaux) Hendrick, a hapless though not utterly helpless seven-footer who lives on the dole with his late mother’s temperamental terrier mix, Georgie, in a rundown house in the middle of a rural nowhere; and Dev’s ruthless cousins Gabe and Sketch Ferdia, enforcers for a local drug lord whom Cillian has gotten on the wrong side of. Minor characters also have their moments in a largely ensemble narrative: Doll and Cillian’s mother, Sheila, who still attends Al-Anon meetings five years after her drink-besotted husband, Vincie, abandoned the family and relocated to Calgary; Cillian and his older partner and enabler Sara Duane; Dev’s estranged (and deranged) father, Martin, and also the specter of his schoolboy tormentor, Joel Calmer; and Marina Scully, who functions quietly as a cautionary foil to Nicky.

Is the plot “ripped right off the front pages” of *Western People*? Plausibly, as Cillian even muses that one of his more audacious deeds will “get a lively write-up” in that local weekly. But as Barrett admits in an essay he wrote for the online publication *The Journal* in 2024, his return to Ireland after a six-year sojourn mostly in Toronto opened his eyes to “a Mayo I would have to get to know again, even those parts of it that have remained the same.” In *Wild Houses* his electing to deploy an omniscient narrative perspective (filtered most frequently through the consciousness of either Dev or Nicky) indeed allows him to view prismatically, through the minds and the deeds of his motley *dramatis personae*, how the social landscape “that seemed, in childhood, to have risen out of eternity” has been altered appreciably by a viral drug culture that has infiltrated the town he knew so well.

As a novel of manners, however, *Wild Houses* is far more than a sociological study. In fact, it is literary fiction of the first order, a richly realized instance of the craft that John Gardner describes in *The Art of Fiction*: “to make us see and feel vividly what his characters see and feel—to draw us into the characters’ world as if we were born to it—the writer must do more than simply make up characters and then somehow explain and authenticate them (giving them the right kinds of motorcycles and beards, exactly the right memories and jargon). He must shape simultaneously (in an expanding creative moment) his characters, plot, and setting, each inextricably connected to the others; he must make his whole world in a single, coherent gesture, as a potter makes a pot.” In Barrett’s hands, latter-day Ballina and environs come fully alive in just such a gesture: his characters are clearly products of their small-town West-of-Ireland milieu (to borrow a word that Sheila gets scoffed at for dropping it into a conversation) where both opportunities and aspirations for advancement and fulfillment in life have low ceilings and lives unfold accordingly.

In that regard, even the surrounding landscape, rendered with Barrett’s acute eye for telling details, is complicit in the entropy which seems not only to envelop his characters but also to enter them as they pass through it by car.

Sheila and Doll lived on the Killala road, several miles outside of Ballina town.

The sun was glinting brittlely in a sky of grey cloud as they passed the grounds of the old Killala Bay Hotel, shuttered years ago. On the tennis courts out front the nets were still strung up, the sagging mesh as frayed as used dental floss. Then came low hills and a wide, flat interval of bogland. In the fields there were dark arteries of turf visible where long channels had been dug out of the bog. A car and a utility trailer were parked down one of the lanes, a dog resting on all fours on the car’s bonnet watching a man and a child dismantle stacks of footed turf and toss the blunt clods into the trailer. The child was wearing Marigold gloves, yellow as the gorse ignited in spiky clusters out along the hills. Then the bog was gone and they entered the town limits.

Yet, the unbridled brutality of the Ferdia brothers and the utter gormlessness of Cillian notwithstanding, *Wild Houses* is not an indictment of Ballina *per se*. Indeed, while the novel’s *plot* is both precipitated and fueled by the dirty business between those deplorable parties, its *story* ultimately revolves around Doll, Nicky, and Dev, each of whom becomes enmeshed in the B-movie thuggery of the local drug trade while simply trying to find some measure of meaning amidst the codes, the values, and the mores—the stuff of a novel of manners—in a dispiriting backwater world.

For Dev, already in his twenties, the prospects are no better at the end of the novel than they were at the beginning. Both physically and socially awkward, bullied and then ostracized as an adolescent, he now appears both doomed and resigned to little more than minding his dead mother’s aging dog in an isolated house down a deeply rutted lane: “He was back where he always seemed to end up. His life, circling, tighter and tighter, in on itself. It was as if every time he tried to move off, however tentatively, in a new direction, he was wrenched back to the centre of himself. And that centre was getting smaller and smaller, more decrepit and ferociously reduced. His mother gone, the father gone, now even the Ferdias.”

Might Doll fare better? The initial impression that he makes on Dev is revealing: “he would have looked like any young fella you’d see shaping around the town on a Friday night, punctiliously spruced for the disco; short black hair brushed emphatically

forward, and so sodden with rain and product it gleamed like melted tar, the top button of his baby-blue shirt closed clerically at the throat, dark jeans and the scouring bang of aftershave crawling off him like a fog.” Even after his ordeal at the hands (literally) of the savage Ferdia brothers, Doll seems unchanged and oddly unaffected either for better or for worse. A sympathetic character (his interaction with Georgie is particularly endearing), he is also a pathetic character: with no strong role model, and no apparent gumption to map a future for himself, he seems destined to live down to his nickname, remaining a diminutive version of whatever potential may lie within him.

In contrast, Nicky has caught a glimpse, in the person of Marina Scully, four years her senior and a student at Trinity College Dublin, both of life beyond Mayo and of the risk of succumbing to the inexorable draw of the familiar world of Ballina. Home for the summer, Marina shares with Nicky an epiphany that explains how she ended up at a boozy druggy party of horny teenagers: “On Monday that seemed like a profoundly sad prospect but as the week went on . . . no better option presented itself.” Of all the characters comprising Colin Barrett’s “3-4 families,” Nicky seems most likely to follow options beyond the confines of Ballina and environs.

Knowing of Colin Barrett’s own trajectory beyond those same confines, and knowing how he has returned to Mayo over and over again in his two celebrated collections of short stories—*Young Skins* (2013) and *Homesickness* (2022)—a reader might recall an admission by American Southern gothic writer Carson McCullers: “I must go home periodically to renew my sense of horror.” And yet Barrett’s inscribing of that world suggests almost as much affection for as aversion to its dark richness: the descriptive writing shimmers, and the dialogue, ripe with local color, belies the pervasive squalor of the lives he depicts. *Wild Houses* is a remarkable

and fully accomplished first novel. •

—University of Mass. Boston



Deep Diving and Fiberoptic Couplings: Colum McCann's *Twist*

BY THOMAS F. SHEA

GET READY TO DIVE DEEP . . . deeper . . . deeper . . . and still fathoms farther through wonder-filled strata of earth's oceans and through multiple narrative layerings in Colum McCann's latest novel, *Twist*. By 2025, McCann hardly needs any introduction. His previous seven novels and three collections of short stories have won numerous awards (e.g. National Book Award 2009) and have been translated into a United Nations of languages.

COLUM MCCANN

TWIST

RANDOM HOUSE, 2025. \$28.00

Twist hinges on a fundamental misconception. Most of us picture our internet files, applications, financial records, photos, and passwords as existing in the "cloud," somewhere up there, with our data bouncing between satellites in orbit. The cloud is actually a metaphor for a vast network of earth-bound data center servers, interconnected within individual countries as well as among the earth's seven continents. The vast majority of our international interactions occur via hundreds of garden-hose thin cables transversing the depths of the world's oceans. These cables, owned by conglomerates such as Microsoft, Google, and Meta, contain at their center tiny glass fiberoptic lines, each thinner than an eyelash, conveying pulses of light, encoded in binary ones and zeros, travelling at almost the speed of light (186,282,423 miles per second). But what happens when one of these cables breaks, due to undersea volcanic activity, climate change tsunamis, or even covert military actions? The answer constitutes the frame story of the novel.

Our narrator, Anthony Fennell, an Irish playwright floundering in a funk of writer's block, accepts a freelance journalism gig to accompany and report on the South African ship Georges Lecointe as it embarks to repair a catastrophic cable break 350 miles west of the Congo River. One break turns into two. And then two turn into three—all distinct and all lost amid their own uncharted canyons, cliffs, caves, and chasms at depths where no light can penetrate. The frame narrative is a fascinating blend of adventure tale and scientific tutorial. Surprisingly and ironically, repairs involve methods from the nineteenth

century, developed when Cyrus Field was laying and splicing the first Transatlantic Cable in 1866, linking Heart's Content, Nova Scotia to Foilhummerum Bay, Ireland. Locating the approximate area of a break via electronic pinging, the Georges Lecointe drops what amounts to a grappling hook and drags the ocean bottom in patterns, hoping to snag an end of cable. This system of "fishing" along a very irregular and unpredictable seabed—often miles down—can take days, even weeks. Once snagged, a damaged cable end is brought to the surface, and the grapnel begins searching for the other cable end. On board, in a sterilized "Hospital Room," the severed ends are coupled with a section of new cable: "The fibers were matched in the fusion machine. . . . The arc of the electrical pulse had to be perfect, like a lightning bolt that knew exactly where it wanted to go. The joiners . . . were precision men. Jewelers. They wore gloves and safety glasses and lap aprons. Booties over their shoes. Masks. They tested and retested. Optical. Electrical" (134-35).

Similar to these wondrous cables, composed of a Kevlar coating, protecting copper wiring, encasing the precious fiberoptic lines, *Twist* comprises a series of intriguing narrative layerings within the frame story. Narrator Anthony Fennell's broken life is one such stratum. Not only is he an author whose creative juices won't flow; he is battling an alcohol dependency while hoping to reconnect with a sixteen-year-old son whom he has not even communicated with in years. The Georges Lecointe's mission imbricates with Fennell's personal journey: "I had a feeling that I had exhausted myself and that if I was ever going to write again, I would have to get out into the world. What I needed was a story about connection, about grace, about repair" (5). The inner core of the novel spotlights the self-reflexive quandaries and qualities of our narrator's "memoir, or half memoir, unfolding, as it is now, in front of me" (22). Simultaneously, it helps us more fully appreciate features of McCann's deft craftsmanship. Throughout the novel, we hear periodic interruptions such as Fennell reminding "myself that if there's a benefit to hindsight, there's an inherent distortion too" (29). Fennell's self-conscious, writerly ruminations become a sizable, savory cud: "It is, I suppose, the job of the teller to rearrange the scattered pieces of a story so that they conform to some sort of coherence. Between fact

and fiction lie memory and imagination" (117). Through his narrator, McCann accents creative "distortions," highlighting how memory and imagination are never discrete, distinct vectors. Via Fennell's imaginative memory, McCann gifts us with a fecund garden of original metaphors and piquant literary allusions.

In terms of metaphor, I.A. Richards astutely reminds us, "It is the supreme agent by which disparate and hitherto unconnected things are brought together in poetry for the sake of the effects upon attitude and impulse which spring from their collocation and from the combinations which the mind then establishes between them" (*Principles* 240).

In this respect, McCann's prose has always been poetic; in *Twist*, however, his metaphoric collocations are particularly creative. Two examples will suffice. Awaiting departure from South Africa, our narrator says, "In the early morning, the fog came in fast around the mountain and struck a tuning fork in my chest" (8). The visual and tactile effects of the fog (greyish mist, moisture, chill) are augmented by even more tactile sensations as well as auditory perceptions. The primary term or "tenor" of the metaphor, "fog," acquires tactile vibrations as well as pitched sound through the agency of the secondary term or "vehicle" of the trope, a tapped "tuning fork." The movement from visual through tactile to auditory effects is gently sensuous. A similar segue occurs when Fennell responds to a publicist's warning: "Her voice was a controlled skid" (98). The aural properties of the publicist's voice are augmented by both visual and tactile imaginative phenomena. The tone and speed of the voice Fennell hears are visually "seen" in a dangerously swerving, skidding motion which also acquires the feel of a tactile squeezing grip of hands on a steering wheel fighting to maintain control. Superbly crafted, creative concoctions such as these abound in the novel.

Perhaps even more engaging are the exuberant literary allusions that generate potent valences between *Twist* and a variety of literary predecessors. A list of works reverberating in *Twist* would be extensive, including William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming," James Joyce's *Ulysses*, T.S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," The Talking Heads' "Once in a Lifetime," Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, F. Scott Fitz-

geralds's *The Great Gatsby*, and Homer's *Odyssey*. But the work with which *Twist* vibrates most fully is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Many of the allusions are appropriately subtle but many others are overt and enthusiastically inviting. In Conrad's novella, Charlie Marlow finds himself centripetally drawn to Kurtz, whom he keeps insisting "is a remarkable man" (134). Similarly, Anthony Fennell finds himself inordinately attracted to Chief of Operation, John Conway, emphasizing twice, "I was not about to discount any chance to stay in his orbit" (18). The final scene of *Twist*, aboard a small boat on the Thames, during "flood tide," with London "brooding" in the background, is a direct descendant of the opening page of *Heart of Darkness*: "The *Nellie*, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor The flood tide had made . . ." while the atmosphere of London casts an ominous "brooding gloom" (1). McCann also develops a trenchant correlative with the movie *Apocalypse Now* while our narrator directly states, "Joseph Conrad rang in my head. *Heart of Darkness* had had its day for me" (60-61). Jorge Luis Borges points us in the right direction when he asserts "The fact is that every writer *creates* his own precursors. His work modifies our conception of the past . . ." (*Labyrinths* 195). In this regard, each allusion gently nudges us to re-explore facets of earlier texts that we may have neglected or thought we already "knew." In a recent interview for the *New York Times* "Book Review Podcast," McCann acknowledges the myriad allusions in his novel as "overtones," explaining "I'm not trying to echo" anything that came before. Rather, he wants to initiate "a new investigation" of prior creations refracted through the lens of *Twist*. This reconsideration often prompts invigorating reconfigurations of literary predecessors. The exciting interplay of texts is, of course, reciprocal. During metaleptic moments when we temporarily break through the frame of the present narrative, we also appreciate how the book we hold in our hands is intriguingly invigorated by its vibrations with its forebears. I leave it for each reader's fun and edification to wrestle with how "*the horror, the horror*"—explicitly quoted by Anthony Fennell—galvanizes as well as grounds Colum McCann's *Twist* (148). •

—University of Connecticut

"You touch me and I become something else"

BY KYTHE HELLER

SIMONE KEARNEY is an Irish-born and New York-based poet and visual artist whose distinctive ethos and practice begins with a redefinition of "the ineffable." Here, that which cannot be expressed in words is pressed into time, layered in ever-renewing variations of intense presence made visible as an elusive prism of language and of form. Internationally recognized for her practice, which includes stone and ceramic sculpture, drawing, painting, textiles, and text, her materials distill and compress visual and linguistic elements into minimalist abstractions that mark moments of confluence and rupture, where the ineffable, and all the intangible,

invisible, immaterial elements of emotion and insight, break through into the felt surface of the body. We glimpse the spacious and vulnerable relations between lovers, for example, in her latest poetry and artist book *Dim, Dahlia, Violet, Stone*—a space and time where self and other are longed for, invented, separated, or dissolved, where images, colors, words, and objects telescope out to become elemental processes of making, of love and of time. In and through the compression of these elements, an assemblage of words, images and things track the momentary immediacy of form's fluctuations to create a spacious and tender translation of desire.

Published as an artist book of Kearney's poetry and sculptures in collaboration with

photographer Hannah Whitaker, the book opens across a horizontal spiral the size of a musical score, in which the poems fall and clump and scatter in layers of text and inked design across photographs of Kearney's un-

SIMONE KEARNEY.

DIM, DAHLIA, VIOLET, STONE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HANNAH WHITAKER

ITI PRESS, 2024. \$25.00

abashedly sensual stone sculptures. "First, I will begin," she writes, "with a description of you...an impossible task." A stone bird dreams itself aloft. And there is a hole that is

left. "The sun's shadow left in the heart." "I am writing to you at 12:59," she writes, and with a shiver I realize that this is the exact time I am reading her words, years after they have been written and in a different city. The words are searingly alive; they want to be read aloud, and so I read passages of *Dim, Dahlia, Violent, Stone* to the friends I have rented an Airbnb with this weekend in Northampton, Massachusetts. We immediately begin to speak about the subtle moments of our experience we have no words for in the English language, and one friend tells me there is a word in Korean for the joyous melancholy feeling one has in autumn when you are alone and shuffling at dusk on a sidewalk through dried leaves. There is

something in this poetry of an invented language of signs and images and words that calls to the surface and explores the subtle intimacies of the body's experience of being alive, of being in love, a more subtle lang-

uage within language that invents a way to describe the intricacies of the interior life. The poems register things as they happen, moment by moment, in time signatures

throughout the pages juxtaposed with the timeless expansiveness of what is being described. "The beginning of something is always a wound, I said." "Time tears through

me, unbuckles me, and I feel time as a thing, a kind of material that stretches out and I am fastened to each moment." •

International Collaboration in Irish Drama

BY ANTHONY ROCHE

IN 2007, THE ABBEY THEATRE celebrated the centenary of J.M. Synge's masterpiece, *The Playboy of the Western World*, with a new production. There had been many such since 1907, and not just by the Abbey. Garry Hynes of Galway's Druid Theatre had directed what many regard as the best contemporary version, restoring an edge and a good deal of violence to the original. But what Hynes worked on was still Synge's original version. What the 1907 centenary presented was a new version of *The Playboy of the Western World* by Nigerian playwright, Bisi Adigun and by Dublin novelist, Roddy Doyle. It was not the first. Synge's has proved the most adaptable of plays, most famously in *Playboy of the West Indies* by Mustapha Matura from the 1980s. What Adigun and Doyle presented was a resolutely contemporary version. The pub is installed with CCTV cameras, which show who is approaching and enable scenes which take place outside in the original to be seen. The action is still in Ireland but is relocated from a rural setting to one of the newer Dublin suburbs. Pegeen's father is not only a publican but a gangster, with the pub serving as a convenient front for his criminal activities. This is a nod to the Matura, where the setting is a brothel fronting as a hairdresser's. The greatest change of all is that Christopher/Christy is no longer white but black, as of course then is his father. Christy is a Nigerian asylum seeker but he holds two postgraduate degrees and his father is a business man. Having said all of that, the version largely adheres to the outlines and verbal content of Synge's original.

The linguistic range of the original is considerable, from Christy's "poetry talk" when he meets Pegeen to the description of her as "a girl you'd see itching and scratching." There is an immediate juxtaposition in the description of Pegeen. It alternates between exalted lines like Christy's "Amn't I after seeing the love-light of the star of knowledge shining from her brow" to the Widow Quin's ultra-realistic account of Pegeen Mike as a girl "with a stale stink of poteen on her from selling in the shop." Even Pegeen herself is moved to remark: "And to think it's me is talking sweetly, Christy Mahon, and I the fright of seven townlands for my biting tongue." In the Adigun/Doyle, there is less of the poetry and more of the itching and scratching in the account of Pegeen. She is a deal more resistant to Christy's blandishments and has a more consistent tougher exterior. Accordingly, when she falls, she falls hard. But the romantic outcry of the play's final lines—"Oh my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only playboy of the western world"—is cut completely and she ends the play with inarticulate sobbing and the dismissive "Fuck off." Many of the *Playboy's* greatest lines are preserved largely intact, with only minimal variation. Christy's notorious line—"what'd I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their

shifts itself maybe, from this place to the Eastern World"—becomes "You can present me with a long line of the most beautiful girls in Ireland—naked! beautiful!—I am not interested." Editor Ann Saddlemeyer's illuminating scholarly notes on the play's many drafts points out that "originally the final typescript read 'stripped itself' in place of the offending 'shifts'." Synge at the last moment clothed the vision of naked women in "shifts." The line and the word "shift" still caused ructions and the more inflamed the audience with this display of female underwear. "Well, the heart's a wonder" is retained intact but Adigun and Doyle are moved to gloss its archaism with "[m]y granny used to say that. Now I know what she fuckin' meant." The resounding line "there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed" becomes the nearly identical "[t]here's a huge difference—right?—between a big story and a dirty deed," with "big" replacing the obscure, albeit fascinating coinage "gallous" [pertaining to the gallows].

But on other occasions there is a major rewriting and bold modernization. The toast that is proposed by Sara Tansey—"Drink a health to the wonders of the western world, the pirates, preachers, poteen-makers, with the jobbing jockies, parching peelers, and the juries fill their stomachs selling judgements of the English law. [*Brandishing the bottle.*]" is replaced by the following: "To the two of yis, the walking killers [...] [a]nd all the others like you; the hitmen, the heroin dealers, coke dealers; crooked cops, and politicians, and publicans and lawyers; celebs and DJs, and the whole fuckin' lot of them." Pegeen's cowardly intended, Sean Keogh, and the two barflies Jimmy and Philly are all seen snorting a line of cocaine in the course of the play; drugs are now vying with alcohol as the national addiction. Sean is still something of a born again Christian. But his life is no longer dominated by the fearsome offstage presence of the fearful Father Reilly (and behind him the bishops and the courts of Rome). For the modern Sean is something of a mother's boy, with the figure of the "ma" dominating his psyche more than any cleric. Again, remaining offstage, we only hear of his mother's machinations in organizing the finances of the marriage of her son and Pegeen Mike.

BISI ADIGUN AND RODDY DOYLE.

THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD: A NEW VERSION.
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2024. \$34.95

The introduction of Sean's mother into the *dramatis personae* draws attention to the

lack of a mother, present or absent, alive or dead, in the lives of the play's two main protagonists. Christy has an all-too-alive father, but there is no mention of a mother, except for an Oedipal reference to the Widow Casey. Christy gives her as a reason he attempted to slay his father when the latter is insisting his son marry her. "I won't wed her," says I, "when all know she did suckle me for six weeks when I came into the world." And there is no mention of a mother for Pegeen, to offset the looming presence of her father, Michael James. Adigun and Doyle briefly supply both, to account for their absences. At one point, Pegeen asks Christy: "How did your mother die?" Christy gives details of the motor accident which killed her. Pegeen's response to the same question is much more succinct: "Cancer." There is a mother in the play, the Widow Quin, and in this version, like many recent productions, she is played as a woman in her thirties, a sexually attractive young woman, as the photos of Angeline Ball dressed in her "bling" attest. In earlier productions an older Widow Quin emphasized the grotesque whereas Ball's Widow Quin provides a powerful romantic alternative to Eileen Walsh's Pegeen. The latter is



a virgin; the widow is not.

The decision to change Christopher from Irish to a Nigerian immigrant has major repercussions for the play. Up until very recently, the presence of a black actor in a lead role on the Irish stage was an extremely rare phenomenon. The Adigun/Doyle version appeared all of eighteen years ago and was groundbreaking. The London actor Giles Terrera played Christy and his father Malomo was Olu Jacobs, a classic Nigerian actor. The accounts of how they got from Nigeria to Ireland rather strains credibility. The description of Christopher as an asylum seeker is an inspired move, since during this period the presence of foreign people in Ireland increased considerably. According to the Introduction, in 1996, it was 5%; in 2011, 17%. The casting change to a Nigerian father and son addresses directly "the question of how immigrants adapt and integrate into their host societies, and how those societies adjust to the immigrants in turn." The issue of Christy's Otherness is heightened when Pegeen begins to develop a romantic interest in him. Adigun and Doyle's Sean is markedly more agitated on this score than Synge's, the hostility ramped up by a strong dose of Irish racism: "And you'd prefer to be with *him*!?"

He's nobody, Pegeen. He's black. He's a Nigerian, for the love of God." Pegeen's response is immediate and adamant: "And he's lovely. And look at you—[...] a chinless muppet with no guts or fine words in him at all." The version follows the original in that Pegeen and Christopher do not marry. Rather, father and son leave the stage and a forlorn Pegeen. In the last and most valuable of the six critical essays in the volume, Bisi Adigun reflects that a more radical adaptation would have had Christy stay rather than leave: "Charlotte McIvor might be right when she posits that Doyle and I should have considered parting ways with Synge by ensuring that Christopher Malomo remains in Ireland—and on the Abbey stage—at the end of our new version, rather than returning to Nigeria with his father. That way, McIvor reckons, the Irish preconception that immigrants will one day return to wherever they came from would have been truly challenged." [Adigun's references are to a 2011 essay by Charlotte McIvor which is not included in the volume.] Ironically, as a cited article by Colin Murphy points out, "the commercial success of this version should have propelled Adigun to further high-profile stage work." Instead, he was leaving to take up a position as a university lecturer in Nigeria. What changed everything was the legal case.

Given the success of the 2007 production, it was not surprising that the Abbey should undertake a new second production in 2008-09. For that second production, lines were rewritten and new lines added. Adigun was excluded from that process and took a legal case against the Abbey Theatre, claiming "that his moral rights to the play had been violated, due to textual changes made in rehearsal without his consent." (Introduction, 2). The editors usefully define "moral rights" as referring to "the right of an author to prevent unauthorized alterations to a copyrighted work, and to be given appropriate credit as the creator of such work." I knew about the case but not the outcome. It turns out that the case was settled in 2013, "largely in Adigun's favor, with Adigun received 200,000 euro from the Abbey and full ownership of the play." The full cost to the Abbey was 600,000 euro, most of it going on the legal costs of both sides. Not surprisingly, the play has not had a production since and, in the opinion of its editors, is not likely to do so. A great lost opportunity. But this volume makes that first fascinating text now widely available for the first time, for interested readers and for students of Irish literature. Only one sentence in this entire volume refers directly to Roddy Doyle. Emer O'Toole in her essay "The Intercultural Theater Wars and *The Playboy of the Western World—A New Version*" writes: "I am aware from having spoken to Doyle on this topic that Adigun does not have the monopoly on personal hurt in this story." Clearly, there is another story to be told. But this volume does full justice to Bisi Adigun's experience of intercultural collaboration in the Ireland of the early twenty-first century. •

—University College Dublin

Here's the Thing ...

BY MAUREEN O'CONNOR

COLLEEN TAYLOR'S DENSELY contextualized study of Irish politics, industry, economy, and culture in the long eighteenth century offers new, enriched possibilities for such analysis by bringing the theories of new materialism to bear on complicating the history of colonial dynamics in the period. The study comprises five sections, each focusing on one subject: coins, flax, spinning wheels, mud, and pigs, all material which provided symbols or metonyms for either the "native" Irish themselves or aspects of their place under colonial dispensation, specifically whether they could be made into useful imperial subjects or whether they resisted such "improving" efforts. Taylor takes what we might be tempted to think of as matter entirely other to humanity, whether object or animal, and releases it from a perceived submissive utility, granting the nonhuman potentially transgressive agency in a colonial context. New materialism challenges hierarchies and dualisms, contending that all bodies and beings, animate, inanimate, human, and nonhuman, are parts of an inextricably enmeshed whole, a perspective that recalls traditional worldviews of existence as a vibrant and interdependent collective. The connections between new materialism and indigenous systems of thought in an Irish context have been suggested by David Lloyd when he discusses the "terror that attends the dissolution of culture into nature," which, in the nineteenth century, during and after the Great Hunger, threatened to reveal the "precariousness of subjecthood itself" to English observers of Irish hunger and misery. Lloyd's account of "the nonhuman manifest[ing] itself as the defining moment of commonality at the heart of the human,"¹ is a formulation which recalls new materialism's contention, according to one of its leading theorists, Karen Barad, that "all bodies, not merely human bodies, come to matter through the world's performativity—its iterative inter-activity."²

COLLEEN TAYLOR.

IRISH MATERIALISMS: THE NONHUMAN AND THE MAKING OF COLONIAL IRELAND, 1690-1830
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2024. \$90.00

But while Barad is a presence in Taylor's text (though not the essay quoted above), there are some gaps in the bibliography, including Bruno Latour, whose concept of the "actant" would have been useful in Taylor's analysis, as would geologist John McPhee's notion of deep time, which has become central to ecocritical literary criticism. More surprising, there is an odd erasure in the book's introduction of the now nearly thirty-year history of Irish ecocriticism in general and of more recent new materialist analysis of Irish literature, in particular. In her introduction, Taylor makes the inaccurate claim that "the dialogue between Irish studies and ecocriticism has begun to germinate recently" (12; emphasis added) and expresses the hope that the "ideas and methodology" she is modelling "will be applied to other literatures, cultures, and areas of specialization in Irish, Anglophone, and postcolonial studies" (15). This follows another remarkable statement regarding new materialism and postcolonialism, asserting that their "fruitful integration has yet to be fully realized" (11), an assertion that disregards the last decade of literary analyses in journal articles and book

chapters that deploy new materialism in (often postcolonial) discussions of Eavan Boland, Elizabeth Bowen, Flann O'Brien, James Joyce, Mike McCormack, Edna O'Brien, Claire Boylan, Tim Robinson, Emily Lawless, Eva Gore-Booth, and Moya Cannon, to name just a few. The earliest of these writers were active in the last hundred years or so, therefore outside of the scope of Taylor's area of expertise, but it is nevertheless an indication of a lack of awareness of the field, an unfortunate way to begin what proves, aside from some questionable assertions in the introduction, to be a valuable and insightful study.

What Taylor does offer is a systemized development of the extant and ongoing work of using new materialism in Irish Studies, firmly locating the possibilities of such praxis in the colonial period, thereby suggesting a kind of nonhuman Subaltern Studies (though she does not use that phrase), which takes seriously the benefit of giving voice to those "ostensibly silent objects and materials [that] can fill some historical and literary silences" (xvii). This specific approach to postcolonial readings of a material archive can, Taylor persuasively argues, "retroactively change our understanding of colonialism's victims" (2), as she articulates the extension of "anthropocentric ideas like objectification" to colonies and the colonized, rendered thereby into "lesser object[s], thing[s] to be controlled" (4). The study is both historical and literary, in its literary focus most often featuring the writings of Jonathan Swift and Sydney Owenson, while also ranging across a number of writers and genres including the pamphlet, the folk ballad, the travelogue, work songs, the "it-narrative," and the novel. The elegantly imbricated elements of each chapter offer an instance of what Donna Haraway refers to as "the systemic stories of the linked metabolisms, articulations and co-productions [...] of economies and ecologies, of histories and human and nonhuman critters."³

The first chapter on coins is, perhaps expectedly, the most abstract of the chapters, animated by the appearance of two it-narratives, *The Adventures of a Bad Shilling in the Kingdom of Ireland* (1805), an anonymously published serial allegorizing the degrading effects of the Act of Union on Ireland, and Charles Johnston's earlier *Chrysal, the Adventures of a Guinea* (1769-1805), an only occasional and subtle critique of the British empire, which Taylor identifies as a significant precursor to the later *Adventures of a Bad Shilling*. These works share themes of the emergence of commercialized nationalisms and culture, the reach of empire, expanding "networks of economic, political, and material relations" (26), and the lability of national identity and its value (as the coins are repeatedly re-cast) with more familiar texts discussed in the chapter, such as Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl* (1806), Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800), and Swift's *Drapier's Letters* (1710-1724), as well as his "The Story of the Injured Lady" (1707), another Irish allegory. This first chapter introduces the book's practice of generously illustrating the discussion, featuring images of the material objects themselves, period cartoons and illustrations, and advertising.

The chapters develop an increasing warmth as they proceed and the objects

become more intimately connected to the human actors in the narratives, whether historical or literary. The flax and spinning wheel chapters are unexpectedly moving in their accounts of intricate relationships between workers and their materials, an intense, living collaboration that not only produces beautiful linen, but also provides subversive material for transvaluing the imposition of a feminized stereotype of productive and compliant Ireland that has been pacified by the powers of commerce and empire. The description of the process of transforming the recalcitrant yet ultimately yielding flax, a process that requires the violently physical act of scutching, is fascinating in itself and almost overdetermined in its metaphorical resonances. A recurring theme in Taylor's analysis is the period's prevailing "improvement" discourse used in reference to Ireland. The alteration of flax into highly prized, supple, pure white cloth in the era's burgeoning linen industry could apply to the ethically "bleached" and refined Irish subject. But the unity of spinner and her wheel threatens to destabilize boundaries between the human and the nonhuman, and hints at an interiorized Irish subjectivity beyond the reach of imperial control, sometimes externalized in women's subversive spinning songs. These rich chapters embed the long-enduring symbol of the spinning wheel in Western philosophy as well as in fiction, including Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Mary Leadbetter's *Cottage Dialogues among the Irish Peasantry* (1811), John and Michael Banim's *The Croppy: A Tale of 1798* (1828), and Owenson's novels, *The Wild Irish Girl* and *Florence McCarthy* (1818).

Taylor's reading of the spinning wheel in Owenson's fiction offers fresh insights into work by an author whose actively syncretic sympathies have frequently been recognised in recent scholarship. To the constellation of liberatory causes promoted across Owenson's writings, fiction and nonfiction, can be added heightened sensitivity to the feminist potential in "a material subculture" represented by the spinning wheel and the relationships that cluster around it (140). Taylor refreshes another often-discussed novel, Edgeworth's *Ennui* (1809), in her chapter on mud, specifically the traditional mud cabin described repeatedly and at length by appalled English observers. The cabin of *Ennui*'s Ellinor is a vibrant, multivalent signifier of abundance and vitality. Such a "primitive" dwelling served as a "visible and symbolic locus for emerging semiotics in Irish racial identity and stereotyping of the Irish peasant, vindicating the British Empire's civilizing mission in Ireland" (143), but the mud cabin is a literally breathing, growing, living entity, an ecosystem of interdependence between human and nonhuman elements. The mud cabin and the dungheap at its door indicated conditions of filth and squalor to the English observer, while the peasant inhabitants understood and participated in "mud's biological narrative of regeneration, vibrancy, and protection" (156). Taylor makes the argument that the mud cabin is a testimony to native resilience in the face of imperial destruction, specifically of alternative building materials, such as timber. Like the spinning wheel, the mud cabin could gesture to hidden depths of the Irish character, unaccounted for in imperial discourse of the irrational, bestial Irish. Other fictional

texts brought into the chapter include *Florence McCarthy*, *Gulliver's Travels* and the lesser known *The Fool of Quality* (1760-1779) by Henry Brooke, in which the moral character development of the hero, young Harry, is indexed to his "intimacy with dung" and nonhuman animals (169).

The nonhuman animal of the book's final chapter is the undeniably charming "gentleman who pays the rent," the charismatic pig, for centuries a valued member of any native Irish household, who slept and ate with their human companions. As in the preceding chapters, a history of the subject is provided here, in this case the history of the native Irish "greyhound" pig, described by Cambrensis in the twelfth century as "cowardly," "degenerate," and ferocious, another apt symbol for the Irish themselves in the eyes of their colonizers (186). It is a treat to learn that the eighteenth century was a time of "growing fascination with performing pigs," and, even better, the fact that in the period, "several stories about learned pigs, told from the pigs' perspective, were published" (197). Swift appears again, as does "*Cabhair Ní Ghairfead*," a poem by Aogán Ó Rathaille (c.1729), but the show-stealing fictional text of the chapter is William Carleton's short story, "Phil Purcel, the Pig Driver," from his 1830 collection, *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*. While the inclusion of the story puts some pressure on the concept of the long eighteenth century, it is a delightful way to move towards a conclusion of this fascinating and deeply informative study. The amusing story of the knowing and clever collusion between Phil and his pig in swindling members of the Anglo-Irish gentry relies on an interactive dynamic and affectionate, sympathetic appreciation deeply entrenched in Irish lore and culture. In heroic Irish legend, the pig bestowed status and brought good luck, an idea that has survived to this day in the expression, "on the pig's back" (from the Irish *ar mhúin na muice*), meaning very fortunate, indeed. Once again, the colonial stereotype is invested with subversive, even rebellious, potential when deployed by the native Irish.

Taylor outlines a powerful, convincing "material narrative of the native Irish" in her study, demonstrating "how things like flax, mud, and pigs offered the Irish people survival as well as creative, metaphoric languages of national resistance and national loss" (205-06). While this is not the first work of new materialist analysis of Irish culture and literature, it does provide a solid framework for the continuing development of the application in Irish Studies of the newest theories and philosophies, like posthumanism and new materialism, that have grown out of the urgent need for humans to re-assess our roles and responsibilities towards the nonhuman, reposition and humble ourselves in recognition of our shared fate. The eighteenth-century Irish peasant has a great deal to teach the modern Western human.

—University College Cork

1. David Lloyd, 'Indigent Sublime: Specters of Irish Hunger', *Representation* xcii (2005), p. 164

2. Karen Barad, 'Nature's Queer Performativity', *Kvinder Køn og Forskning* i & ii (2012), p. 32.

3. Donna Haraway, "Staying with the Trouble: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Cthulucene." *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, ed. James W Moore., PM Press, 2016; 52.

Who We Are in Irish Studies



(L-R) TRISHA OAKLEY KESSLER, CHRISTINA MORIN, JONATHAN CHERRY, CONOR MULVAGH

TRISHA OAKLEY KESSLER is an historian of the Jewish minority in Ireland. In particular, she explores how Jews navigated their place in Ireland through an economic lens. Her research also focuses on Jewish footprints outside of the main cities of Dublin, Belfast and Cork. She has published numerous articles and book chapters on this topic. Most recently, her chapter, “Jews as a threat to Irish society? Economic antisemitism and the Limerick Boycott,” appears in Natalie Wynn and Seán W. Gannon’s *The Limerick Boycott in Context* (2025). Her forthcoming book *Economic Nationalism, Factories and Jewish Refugees in Ireland, 1933-1945* (Palgrave Macmillan) is based on her PhD thesis at UCD, completed in 2020. Outside of Irish history, she is working on a collection of business correspondence between the Böhm family and their global trade networks following the Aryanization and expropriation of the Brüder Böhm hat factories in Vienna and Czechoslovakia, see “Letters of loss and urgency: Jewish refugee industrialists, trade networks and pathways of rescue,” *Journal of Jewish Culture and History*, 23, no 1, 2023. Trisha teaches on the advanced paper “Ireland and the Irish since the Famine” at the Faculty of History, University of Cambridge, with a focus on religious minorities and the Irish in Britain. She is a Co-Convenor of the Cambridge Modern Irish History Seminar. Trisha is a Research Associate at The Herzog Centre for Jewish and Near Eastern Religions and Culture, Trinity College Dublin and also a Research Associate at the Woolf Institute Cambridge.

What are you working on right now?

Head in hands...I am trying to finish my book. Factories rarely feature in Irish history, particularly in the historiography of 1930s Ireland, which is surprising considering Ireland experienced an impressive industrial development during that period. New factories, benefiting from tariffs and quotas, were built across Ireland promising economic change. Right now, we are witnessing a new protectionist era and the economic impact of tariffs and quotas fill our newspapers. The book explores Fianna Fáil’s protectionist policies through a microhistory of three factories with refugee management and workers that manufactured ladies hats and ribbons on an industrial scale in Galway, Castlebar and Longford. By examining how these factories came into existence, the economic networks that enabled them to arrive, the challenges they faced entering a protectionist economy and their political and economic impact, the book disentangles the complexities of economic nationalism.

Who helped you the most as scholar? How?

Three scholars, in particular, have supported me as I’ve journeyed along a new career as a historian. Eugenio Biagini, Professor of Modern and Contemporary History at Cambridge, encouraged me to do a PhD and offered me the opportunity to teach with him on a Special Subject Paper, “An Alternative History of Ireland: Religious Minorities and Identity in the 26 Counties, 1900-1959.” My academic background was in theology and religious studies, so working with Professor Biagini immersed me into a fast-paced and wide-ranging intellectual journey. I applied to UCD for my PhD to work with Professor Mary E. Daly, whose contribution to the social and economic history of

Ireland is remarkable. Her research is foundational to my work on factories in Ireland. She encouraged me to think creatively about the economy as a sphere in which the hopes and promises of the nation-state played out. Finally, Lindsey Earner-Byrne has been instrumental to the way I think about history. As my supervisor, she inspired me to look to those voices on the margins of Irish history, to illuminate the lives of those obscured in the story of Ireland.

Which historians have had the greatest influence on you?

Clair Wills has had a huge influence on my work. Her book *That Neutral Ireland* piqued my initial interest in Irish history and opened a door to my exploration of Irish responses to Jewish refugees. One of the subjects I teach at Cambridge is the Irish in Britain, and her book, *The Best Are Leaving* is a must on the reading list. I ask all my students to read her preface, which draws out issues of gender, occupation and family dynamics that greatly impacted the Irish experience. The fractured nature of the migratory experience can have a long reach in Irish families. This is something Clair explores in her latest book, *Missing Persons, Or My Grandmother’s Secret*. People left Ireland for many reasons and, in this case, an intimate family secret continued to shape relationships through the generations. How many of our families have similar stories. In Jewish history, Salo Baron stands out for me. His rereading of a lachrymose history to highlight Jewish agency and vibrancy reminds me always to read history against the grain.

What book in your field should everyone read?

My go-to book for my research on factories and the Irish economy is Mary E. Daly’s *Industrial Development and Irish National Identity, 1922-1939*. She brings to the fore how nationalism shaped the economic sphere and draws out the complexities of the Fianna Fáil government in bringing about economic change while fulfilling the promise of an Irish-Ireland landscape. For my work in Irish-Jewish history, there are a number of new books which nuance this idea of Ireland’s exceptional tolerance of Jews in Ireland, while also moving beyond a repetitive focus on Rabbi Isaac Herzog and Robert Briscoe that has obscured a diversity of Jewish voices in Ireland. I would definitely recommend Zuleika Rodgers and Natalie Wynn’s book, *Reimagining the Jews of Ireland, Historiography, Identity and Representations* (2023) especially their introduction. Other new works include, Aidan Beatty and Dan O’Brien’s *Irish Questions & Jewish Questions, Crossovers in Culture* (2018); Natalie Wynn, *Community, Identity, Conflict, The Jewish experience in Ireland, 1881-1914* (2024), and Natalie Wynn and Seán W. Gannon, *The Limerick Boycott in Context* (2025). As Guy Beiner noted, there is a rediscovery of Jewish Ireland.

Which moment in Irish history would you like to go back to?

My family, on my grandfather’s side, hails from Swinford, Co. Mayo, and I would love to be in the heart of home and community as tales of General Humbert’s army reached us in August 1798. Can you imagine the exhilaration, gossip and fears as the soldiers neared Swinford? Did we close our doors until they left or were we keen to witness to this moment? What did we make of this proclamation of the Republic of Connacht? No doubt, chores were disrupted by endless whispers and home was the center of heated discussions with warnings to be cautious. Or maybe, we were encouraged to be subversive!

You have been exiled to Hell or Connaught. Which

books would you take with you?

I was given as a present Catherine Flynn’s *The Cambridge Centenary Ulysses*. Imagining a day in Dublin, walking the streets with Bloom, would be a great distraction when the rain is lashing. Edna O’Brien’s *The Country Girl Trilogy* will also be coming along. I read it every couple of years, and the boldness of Kate and Baba always lightens my heart. If I could squeeze one more book in then it would have to be Michael Longley’s *A Hundred Doors*. I love his poetry, and this collection is my favorite for it captures the landscape of my home in

Louisburgh, Mayo. Surely, I’ll be exiled to Mayo!

Which historical figure would you walk around Dublin with?

I would love to saunter around Dublin with Jewish writer and then-book shop owner, A. J. Leventhal in the early 1920s. Known as Con Leventhal, his milieu comprised writers, artists and modernist voices hopeful for the promises of a forward looking Irish Free Nation. In the first edition (and only edition) of his magazine the *Klaxon* (1923), he wrote,

We are the offspring of a gin and vermouth in a local public house. We swore we were young and could assert our youth with all its follies. We railed against the psychopedantic parlours of our elders and their old maidenly consorts.

Furious that his review of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, due to be published by Seumas O’Sullivan in the *Dublin Magazine* had been sabotaged by the printers, Leventhal used the *Klaxon* to print a shortened review. I would love to hear all the thoughts and hopes circulating Dublin at this moment as Leventhal and his friends sought to navigate a new Ireland. Shaped by his Jewish upbringing, Leventhal’s home was very much in the Dublin Jewish community. He would be the perfect companion to help me map the many Jewish footprints of the city.

What is the most valuable museum for your work interests? Why?

For my book, the most valuable museum is the Montreal Holocaust Museum as it houses the archive of the general manager of the hat factory in Galway, Les Modes Modernes. Serge Philipson, a Polish citizen, arrived with the factory from Paris in 1937. His wife, Sophie, and brother-in-law, Henri Orbach, a director of the Irish factory were trapped in France after war broke out and both were murdered in Auschwitz. Serge’s daughter, Rachel, was hidden and survived. Consisting of personal letters, postcards and business letters, the archive offers an insight into the challenges of entering the Irish economy in the late 1930s and of keeping the factory going during the Emergency Years during a period when their business networks were decimated across Europe and family and friends faced ever increasing dangers. Working with this archive alongside local archives in Galway highlight how Ireland was not immune from the impact of the Holocaust.

Three Irish historical characters you are having to lunch

I’m going to be bold like O’Brien’s Baba and cheat on this one. My main guests would be Maria Edgeworth, her father Richard Lovell Edgeworth; the English industrialist Jedediah Strutt; and Rachel Mordecai Lazarus, a young Jewish woman from North Carolina. Jedediah Strutt and his son William corresponded regularly with Maria and her father. I was born in Belper, Derbyshire, the home of the Strutt family and their mills, schools, chapels and hospital shaped the town. It is here where I found my love of factories. I have so many questions about his passion for industrial technology, his vision for this small industrial midlands town and his Unitarian faith. I wonder whether Jedediah’s Belper inspired the Edgeworth family to envision a similar landscape for Longford? Rachel, an admirer of the Edgeworth’s progressive views on education began corresponding with Maria to express her dismay at the ways Jews were represented in her early novels. This initial concern turned into a lifelong correspondence between two women. The lunch would be at Maria’s home in Longford

and I imagine conversations filled with discussions about education, gender, religion, science, industry and enlightenment values.

What books are on your nightstand

Right now, I am reading Sarah Moss's new book, *Ripeness*. Set in Italy in the 1960s and present-day Ireland, it explores loss and generational trauma through the experiences of two sisters who are navigating the impact of an unwanted pregnancy. Alongside this book, I have two others on my nightstand. I'm currently writing a book chapter on Jewish youth voices in the 1960s, a decade that is underexplored in the history of Jews in Ireland. Seen by these youth voices as a kind of golden age, the 1960s in Ireland witnessed a greater awareness of the dangers of antisemitism following the Eichmann Trial in 1961 and the hopes of better relations between Jews and Catholics after Vatican II, although this was slow to play out in Ireland. To understand better Irish

youth in this decade I am reading Carole Holohan's excellent book, *Reframing Irish Youth in the Sixties*. My third book is Louise Ryan, Grainne McPolin and Neha Doshi's new book exploring Irish nurses in the NHS, allowing these women to frame their experiences in their own words. My mother came over from Mayo in the 1950s to train as a nurse in England and I wish I had asked her more about her experiences.

What archive would you most like to tackle?

I would like to spend sometime in the RTE archives, both radio and television, as I'm interested in how religious minorities have used both mediums to articulate their place in Ireland.

Which person in Irish history would you most like to meet? What would you ask him/her?

It would have to be Seán Lemass. Although there has been much written about him, he is hard to read in the archives,

hence John Horgan's description of him as an "enigmatic patriot." Others have described him as ruthless, pragmatic, impatient, and un-Irish! I'm fascinated by how he had to tread a fine line between de Valera's ideological vision of Ireland and his own pursuit of increased industrialization that demanded an embrace of modernity for the benefit of nation-building. What would I ask him? At what point did you realize Fianna Fáil's protectionist agenda was not going to work?

Is there an important historical text you have not read?

Oh, there are so many texts that I need to engage with. I recently read an excellent article in the *Financial Times* by Mark Mazower on the relationship between Europe and America and it prompted me to read Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.

CHRISTINA MORIN is Professor in English and Assistant Dean of Research for the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Limerick. She is the author of *The Gothic Novel in Ireland, c. 1760-1829* (2018) and *Charles Robert Maturin and the Haunting of Irish Romantic Fiction* (2011), and co-editor of the collections *Traveling Irishness in the Long Nineteenth Century* (with Marguerite Corporaal, 2017) and *Irish Gothics: Genres, Forms, Modes and Traditions* (with Niall Gillespie, 2014). Recent publications include a special issue of the *Irish University Review* on "Irish Gothic Studies Today" (2023; co-edited with Ellen Scheible) and *Irish Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion* (2023; co-edited with Jarlath Killeen). Tina is Chair of the International Association of Irish Literatures (IASIL), co-editor of *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, and a founding series editor of Bloomsbury's Global Perspectives in Irish Literary Studies series.

Who helped you most as a scholar? How?

I had a high school English teacher—Mrs. Kecy—who inspired me with a love of literature and writing, and who made me think seriously about academia as a career. I'm not sure I realized at the time how impactful she was, but I trace a lot of what I do now—in the classroom and in my research—back to her. Cheers, Mrs. Kecy! Beyond that, my PhD supervisor, Professor Ian Campbell Ross, has been hugely influential in my development as a scholar. From the start of my PhD, he encouraged me to pay attention to the lacunae in literary history—the authors whose voices were no longer being heard, and whose texts had been excluded from traditional literary canons. He was also a meticulous and critical reader, which I didn't always appreciate at the time but which undoubtedly benefited my writing, both in content and in presentation. Nearly twenty years after I finished my PhD, he still reads drafts, discusses ideas, and supports my research in a variety of ways, for which I'm extremely grateful.

What research have you just finished?

I was recently awarded an Open Fellowship from the British Association for Romantic Studies to progress research on my current monograph project, *Irish Gothic in the Global Nineteenth Century*. The fellowship allowed me to travel to New York earlier this year to work in special collections in the New York Public and New York University Libraries. I was researching the connection between the New York-based French émigré bookseller Hocquet Caritat (1752-182?) and William Lane (1745/6-1814), the proprietor of London's Minerva Press. Minerva was infamous in the Romantic period for driving a precipitate increase in novel-production and supplying ever-increasing numbers of circulating library readers with literary "trash." Caritat, meanwhile, operated a short-lived but remarkably influential circulating library on Broadway, forming an official partnership with Lane in 1800 to supply readers in New York with the latest publications.

While in New York, I consulted a number of catalogues and circulating library announcements that Caritat published or had published; related newspaper coverage of his library; first edition novels and reprints of Minerva novels printed for Caritat; and early twentieth-century scholarship on

Caritat. I'm now drafting a chapter of my monograph focused on the circulation and dissemination of Irish-authored Minerva Press novels in the early American republic.

What's the most important lesson history has taught you?

The lesson that I learn every day in my research is that the omissions—of the archives, of the official records—are often as important, if not more so, than the inclusions.

What work of history has had the greatest influence on you? How?

Deborah McLeod's unpublished PhD dissertation on the Minerva Press (University of Alberta, 1997) has arguably driven much of my research over the past ten years. It is a meticulously detailed piece of bibliographic history that, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, challenges many of the traditional views of the Press, evidencing, for instance, that it didn't just publish the work of women writers or cater to an exclusively female audience. McLeod's work has been instrumental in encouraging new attention to Minerva in the past ten years, and there has been a welcome increase in scholarship, including work by Hannah Hudson, Elizabeth Neiman, Megan Peiser, and Yael Shapira, amongst others.

Which historians have had the greatest influence on you?

Some of the literary histories that have really helped shape my own research and which I often recommend to my students include Marilyn Butler's *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries*; Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*; Katie Trumpener's *Bardic Nationalism*; Claire Connolly's *A Cultural History of the Irish Novel*; and Emma Clery's *The Rise of Supernatural Fiction, 1762-1800*.

What book in your field should everyone read?

Jarlath Killeen's *Gothic Ireland* is a must-read for scholars of Irish gothic literature. It really is a landmark publication in terms of expanding the received chronology of Irish gothic literary production and thinking about how and why Irish writers found gothic modes so compelling well before the works of the traditional gothic trio—Le Fanu, Wilde, and Stoker—were published.

Which historical figure would you most like to walk around Dublin or Belfast with?

As my PhD thesis and first monograph focused on the eccentric Anglo-Irish clergyman Charles Robert Maturin (1780-1824), I'd quite like to meet him! Years after Maturin's death, James Clarence Mangan wrote of the three occasions on which he encountered the older author, each time following Maturin clandestinely around Dublin. I'd love to recreate those routes with Maturin while also considering the major sites of Maturin's life in Dublin; for example, the church in Aungier Street at which he spent most of his career and the house in York Street where he lived with his family in genteel poverty and tutored TCD students. Most of these places no longer exist, or at least, not as they did in Maturin's time, so it'd be fun to get a sense of what they were like in the early nineteenth century from the man himself.

You've been exiled to Hell or Connaught. Which books would you take with you?

How many boxes can I bring?! If I'm limited at all, I'd

probably concentrate on old favorites—books I've loved and know I'd enjoy reading again. These would include L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* series. As a child, I read these books repeatedly, and I still love them, admittedly largely for the nostalgia factor. Her darker YA series, *Emily of New Moon*, though less popular than *Anne*, is arguably more interesting, not least because it gives a sense of Montgomery's own reading and suggests her interest in writing a modern version of female gothic. Austen's novels would have to come with me, preferably a collection of all, but if I had to choose: *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, and *Mansfield Park*. Similarly, I'd want Maria Edgeworth's fiction, especially *Castle Rackrent* and *The Absentee*, Sydney Owenson's *The Wild Irish Girl*, Regina Maria Roche's *The Children of the Abbey*, a selection of Agatha Christie novels, Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer*, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, all of Dorothy Macardle's novels (the Tramp Press editions are wonderful). For more recent fiction, I'd pack as many titles as I possibly could by, among others, Maggie O'Farrell (definitely *Hamnet*), Tana French, Donal Ryan, Claire Kilroy, Claire Keegan, Emma Donoghue, and Emilie Pine.

Which person in history would you most like to meet? What would you ask him/her?

I do a lot of work on the Irish writer Regina Maria Roche (1763/4-1845), whose third novel *The Children of the Abbey* (1796), was one of the most widely read and reprinted Irish novels of the Romantic period. Born in Waterford and raised in Dublin, she relocated to London shortly after her marriage in the mid-1790s. By that point, she had already published two novels, but in London she began working with the Minerva Press and became one of its "favorite" authors, as declared in the press's 1798 Prospectus. As with many female Minerva Press authors, the known details about Roche's life are few, in part because of archival silences. I'd love to meet Roche and ask her all the questions I haven't been able to answer in my own research: how did you learn about the Minerva Press? What was it like to work with its proprietor, William Lane? How much did he pay you for your novels? Did you know how popular *The Children of the Abbey* was with readers across the world?

Three Irish historical figures you're having for lunch.

I'd quite like to have lunch—or a "raking pot of tea," as described in the glossary of *Castle Rackrent*—with Maria Edgeworth, Sydney Owenson, and Regina Maria Roche.

What historical topic have you changed your mind about?

When I first started working on Irish gothic literature as a PhD student, I often thought about it as a principally late-nineteenth century phenomenon, as is encouraged by our focus on Sheridan Le Fanu, Oscar Wilde, and Bram Stoker as the major Irish gothicists. I gradually but decidedly changed that view as I worked on my PhD and first monograph, beginning to see Irish gothic literary production as much more chronologically expansive and formally varied than I had previously understood. In my current work, I continue to challenge and expand traditional, restrictive ideas of Irish gothic.

What archive would you most like to tackle?

For most of the authors and historical figures I research, there simply aren't any reliable archives available. They just weren't considered culturally significant enough for their records to be retained and maintained in a considered manner. So, I piece together my own archives, drawing, for example, from the British Library (e.g. Royal Literary Fund correspondence), the National Library of Scotland (e.g. Walter Scott's correspondence), and the Archives Nationales (e.g. paperwork related to Hocquet Caritat's attempt to regain French citizenship after being declared an émigré in 1795). Digital resources have helped make the fiction I study more accessible, and I rely a lot on Eighteenth-Century Collections Online, Nineteenth-Century Collections Online (when I can access it—we don't, unfort-

unately, have an institutional subscription at UL), Google Books, and Archive.org for Romantic-era novels that have not been re-printed in modern editions.

What's the most valuable museum for your work-interests? Why?

The Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) is a great museum that makes Irish literature really exciting and accessible; its exhibitions go beyond the expected, both in subject matter and presentation, and help expand traditional ideas and understandings of Irish literature. Although not a museum per se, Marsh's Library Dublin also offers fantastic exhibitions that showcase its holdings and help visitors understand their significance. (Full disclosure: I helped curate an exhibition at Marsh's a number of years ago; you

can view it online here <https://web.marshlibrary.ie/digi/exhibits/show/melmoth.>) I love library exhibitions for this reason—spotlighting authors and texts, uncovering their material and cultural significance, and inviting readers and visitors to dig deeper.

What books are on your nightstand?

I'm currently reading an eclectic mix of books, from genre and literary fiction (the fifth book of Sarah J. Maas's YA *Throne of Glass* series and Joseph O'Connor's *The Ghosts of Rome*, respectively) to eighteenth-century scholarship (Amy Prendergast's *Mere Bagatelles: Women's Diaries from Ireland, 1760-1810*) and literary memoir (Stephen King's *On Writing*).

JONATHAN CHERRY IS AN historical geographer based in Dublin City University (DCU) School of History and Geography. His varied research interests coalesce around a central aim of further understanding the evolution of the Irish landscape over the past four centuries. He is particularly interested in the influence of the landowning elite—both private families and institutions—on both rural and urban landscapes; the demise of this elite and their legacy in the form of planned towns and villages, “big houses” and demesne landscapes during the period.

A history and geography graduate of University College Dublin, his PhD focusing on the “rise” and “fall” of the Farnham estate in his native Co. Cavan was awarded by the NUI in 2005. Between 2004 and 2005 he held the National Library of Ireland Studentship in Irish History where he catalogued the Farnham estate papers before returning to UCD as teaching fellow in the School of Geography. In 2008 he was appointed lecturer in Geography in the Geography Department at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, which was incorporated into DCU in 2016 when DCU School of History and Geography was established. Since 2024 he has chaired DCU Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, BA Joint Honours program. He is author of *Cloverhill: A Church of Ireland Parish in County Cavan, c.1720-2010* (2010) and co-editor of *Cavan History and Society* (2014). A long standing member of the Geographical Society of Ireland and former Book Review Editor of the journal *Irish Geography*, he was appointed its honorary secretary in 2024. He is a member of the editorial committee of *Studia Hibernica* and a committee member of the Church of Ireland Historical Society.

What research have you just finished?

At the moment I am completing research on the interactions between the Irish Land Commission and Lord Farnham relating to their compulsory purchase of some of his demesne lands in Co. Cavan during the 1920s. A number of years ago when the Records Branch of the Irish Land Commission was held in the National Archives, Bishop Street, Dublin, I was fortunate to be granted access to it. One of the most intriguing set of documents that I consulted was the “Acquisition file” comprising correspondence, statements and maps among the Land Commission, Lord Farnham and his solicitors. This started in 1924 when the initial report of the Land Commission inspector was filed, through the negotiations as to the lands that would be purchased, the amount that would be paid for them, through to the maps which showed the division of these lands into new landholdings in 1930. What this research highlights is that the Land Commission was pragmatic in its negotiations as it sought to balance both local circumstances and needs and those of the former landlord. This research will be published as a journal article.

The other significant research project that I am involved with and which is nearing completion is the Cavan volume of the *Irish Historic Towns Atlas* series, published by the Royal Irish Academy. Each volume contains a series of maps, an extensive dataset of topographical information compiled from a variety of sources relating to the town and an essay that traces through the towns location, origins and evolution down to the early twentieth century. This research, coauthored with historian Brendan Scott, illustrates the richness of interdisciplinary research and high-

lights once again the natural synergies between historians and geographers.

Interdisciplinarity is also a feature of my most recent research project funded through the Research Ireland, New Foundations program. Working alongside my DCU colleague An Dr. Brian Ó Raghallaigh from Fiontar & Scoil na Gaeilge, we are devising a guide and providing workshops that will promote and facilitate a “citizen humanities” approach to the collection of minor placenames in Ireland. Such names are an integral component of our intangible cultural heritage that strengthens cultural identity and place attachment and our project will leverage the existing Meitheal Logainm.ie platform, which was designed for the decentralized collection and dissemination of minor placenames.

Who helped you most as a scholar? How?

Without a doubt the individual who has helped me most as a scholar is Emeritus Professor William Nolan, an historical geographer who was based at UCD. I had the immense good fortune to be taught by him as an undergraduate student. As I completed his courses dealing with the *Historical Geography of Ireland* and *Settlement and Society in 19th Century Ireland*, I realized that my own personal interests in landscapes, places, agents of landscape change and settlements had a natural academic home in geography and my passion for historical geography was ignited. My specific interest in landlords and their landscapes—big houses, demesnes, estates—as a focus of research was initiated during my final year dissertation which Professor Nolan supervised. The relationship forged during this time, meant that he was the person who I hoped would agree—thankfully he did—to supervise my doctoral research. His distinctive research supervision style which while relaxed was always professional, guiding me to sources, literature, refining the research focus while providing introductions to archives and archivists alongside insightful feedback on my writing. His genuine interest in my research findings and his inquisitiveness about Cavan was also significant in encouraging me during the often solitary process of archival research. As a graduate student in the Department of Geography at UCD between 1998 and 2004 I was also very fortunate to have a number of other historical geographers on faculty there at the time who helped and advised: Anngret Simms, Arnold Horner and Joseph Brady.

Which historians have had the greatest influence on you?

Both historical geographers and historians have influenced my research and directed some of my research interests over the years. In addition to William Nolan, the works of two other historical geographers have been influential. The broad sweep of interests that I have—from big houses to minor placenames—grounded in the landscape has been shaped by Patrick J. Duffy (Maynooth University) in particular his *Landscapes of South Ulster: A Parish Atlas of the Diocese of Clogher* (1993) and his *Exploring the History and Heritage of Irish Landscapes* (2007). Completing this trinity of historical geographers who have influenced me is William J. Smyth (University College Cork) *Map-Making, Landscapes and Memory: A Geography of Colonial and Early Modern Ireland, c.1530-1750* (2006) has stressed the colonial project and processes in Ireland during the period. In turning to historians, I am going to single out Terence Dooley (Maynooth University), whose *The Decline of the Big House* (2001); *The Land for*

the People (2004) and *Burning the Big House* (2022) have collectively provided the national context for the demise of landlordism and the fate of landowning families in Ireland during the later nineteenth century and into the troubled 1920s. His *Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates* at Maynooth University and the annual “big house” conference has also provided me with an opportunity to present some of my own landlord landscape focused research, in addition to contributing to one of the edited volumes that have emanated from these conferences.

What book in your field should everyone read?

I would expect anyone who is interested in the evolution of Ireland's landscape and the historical geography of Ireland should read the *Atlas of the Irish Rural Landscape*. Edited by F.H.A. Aalen, Kevin Whelan, Matthew Stout and published by Cork University Press in 1997, with a second edition published in 2011. I purchased a copy in the Campus Book shop at UCD during my final undergraduate year in 1998 and I regularly still turn to it for an overview of a particular component or aspect of the landscape that I might be unfamiliar with.

You've been exiled to Hell or Connaught. Which books would you take with you?

The lack of time and space to read more is something I regularly bemoan. In exile, I would take a set of the monumental *County History and Society Series* published by Geography Publications, Dublin, under the stewardship of William Nolan and his wife Teresa. The series, which began in 1985 with the publication of *Tipperary: History and Society*, will have achieved its aim of providing a library of county histories for all of Ireland, with the publication of *Antrim: History and Society* in 2025. Taken together the 32 volumes contain 918 essays. The series' interdisciplinary nature is one historians, librarians, linguists, novelists and poets amongst other scholars working outside of academia providing essays that cover various aspects of the landscape, history and society of the county in focus. I am honored to have co-edited the volume for my own home county, *Cavan: History and Society* (2014) and to have contributed essays on estates, demesnes and big houses to several of the series.

What archive would you most like to tackle?

The one archive that I alongside every other academic with an interest in the history of Ireland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries would like to access is that of the Irish Land Commission, today held in warehouse facilities in Portlaoise, Co. Laois. The “warning to the historian” that “the land commission is a working department of government, and not primarily a research institution” given by K. Buckley, in an article published in *Irish Historical Studies* (Vol.8.No.29) in 1952, still stands today. Over the intervening years, access to the archive for academic purposes has been heavily restricted. The Land Commission archive materials relating to Farnham estate that I was fortunate to access, and which most likely are available for other estates included the “Originating Application” or the “Statement of Ownership” which listed and named each townland owned by the landlord, the extent of these land occupied by tenants and that which remained untenanted in landlord ownership. In proving ownership of the lands listed, landlords were obliged to provide copies of, or the original title deeds to these lands in what is referred to as the “Abstract of Title.” In cases where title deeds or estate papers are no longer extant, this document allows for the

origins of the specific estate to be established. The “Statement of Charges” and the “Particulars of Allocation”/“Allocation Schedule” provides an overview of the debts and incumbrances secured by the lands that the Land Commission needed to clear before reimbursing the landlord. Such files illustrate the sources and levels of indebtedness experienced by landlords prior to the sale of their estates, while the “Schedule of Areas” listed the names of the townlands comprising the estate, the names of tenants and the area of their farms recorded in statute acres. Together, such a suite of documents provides scholars with material with which to trace through the origins, finances and demise of the estate network that extended across Ireland. In particular, I would like the opportunity to explore how the former landowning elite negotiated their continued

ownership of lands during the period as the Land Commission attempted to resolve the problem of uneconomic farm holdings. Numerous attempts to lobby governments to make the Land Commission archive available for historical research have been made over the years. For one of the most recent and strongest see Terence Dooley’s essay in *Land Reform and Legislation in Ireland 1800-2024* (2024)

What books are on your nightstand?

Considering my research interests, it will come as no surprise that I am currently reading Myles Dungan’s *Land Is All That Matters: the Struggle That Shaped Irish History* (2024). It charts, as Dungan notes, “the struggle for hegemony over Ireland’s land” (556) from the confiscation

and plantation of the lands, through various phases of agrarian conflict to the demise of landlordism. Next academic year, I will be adding it as required reading to the syllabus for my module Historical Geography of Ireland that I teach at DCU.

Although not perhaps immediately obvious, land—in particular, maintaining and safeguarding ownership of the family farm—is also a theme that emerges in the other book that I am reading at the moment, Clair Wills’ remarkable *Missing Persons: Or My Grandmother’s Secrets* (2024). Writing of her grandmother and uncle on their small farm in West Cork, she observes how “Their lives outlasted their livelihoods” (page 11).

CONOR MULVAGH IS AN associate professor in modern Irish history at the School of History at University College Dublin. His work focusses on Irish politics and political thought mostly in the years 1870-1925. He is the author of *The Irish Parliamentary Party at Westminster, 1900-18* and *Irish Days, Indian Memories: V. V. Giri and Indian Law Students at University College Dublin, 1913-1916*. He co-edited *Eoin MacNeill: The Pen and the Sword* with Emer Purcell which was published in 2022. He did his BA (Mode I History) at UCD followed by an M.Phil in modern Irish history at TCD. He was awarded an IRCHSS scholarship in 2008 to undertake a PhD on the Irish Parliamentary Party under Michael Laffan and Diarmaid Ferriter at UCD. He began as an occasional lecturer at UCD in 2012 before becoming an editorial assistant on the Royal Irish Academy’s Documents on Irish Foreign Policy series in 2013. In 2014 he took up a five-year lectureship at UCD covering the decade of centenaries and was made permanent in 2018. He has undertaken visiting roles in HSE Moscow, JNU Delhi, Loyola College Chennai, and Hertford College Oxford. His interests range from agrarianism to partition and political ideas; university students; encounter and small group migration in and out of Ireland; the relationship between the Catholic Hierarchy and constitutional nationalism; paramilitarism; and political violence. He teaches the history of Northern Ireland 1920-2010 as well as modules on the Irish revolution, political thought, historical theory. He is director of UCD’s MA Public History and works in historical broadcasting and the media in both Irish and English.

What research have you just finished?

I submitted two articles in the last few months, one’s in print now with *Studies in History*, edited by Jyoti Atwal at JNU Delhi and the other is pending for a volume on partition centering on Lord Curzon and the Treaty of Lausanne. My chapter in the Lausanne volume is a joint study of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the Treaty of Lausanne which concludes that British policy in the early 1920s was reactive and coming from a position of weakness rather than strength in reaction to armed groups in Ireland, Turkey, and elsewhere. I’ve been really interested in following the arc of Lloyd George’s premiership in recent years, and this was a way to explore the Chanak Crisis and the end of Lloyd George’s involvement in the Irish question from a British vantage point. The other article is a revisit of work I did almost a decade ago on Indian law students in Dublin between the Lockout and the Rising. One lingering question from that book was about the legal basis for Indians travelling to Britain and Ireland and the admission of Indian students to British and Irish law schools. I did a deep dive into admissions regulations for the Bar in Britain and Ireland and uncovered some really interesting findings about migration, structural barriers for colonial subjects in the British isles and how the First World War also played a role in these questions. It advances an idea I’m playing around with which I’m starting to call “the paper Empire”: where notional equality of opportunity and access existed for subjects across the British Empire but ad hoc, structural, or cultural barriers were placed in the way of those who were not deemed to be the “right” type of person trying to gain access to certain professions and spheres. My India-Ireland research has a thread within it on racism towards

Indians in Ireland and Britain, and this article really advanced the structural elements of this discrimination while also pointing out interesting differences between British and Irish regulations.

Who helped you most as a scholar? How?

I’ve been very lucky at different points of my career where someone has shown me kindness or given me a shot at something for something for which I was arguably too junior. Kindness goes a long way and I hope I’m paying some of it forward. Michael Laffan and Diarmaid Ferriter, my two PhD supervisors, continue to be huge mentors for me. Paul Rouse and Sarah Campbell both looked out for me and were the most collegial of colleagues when I started out teaching at UCD. When Sarah got her current position at Newcastle, she recommended me to take over her teaching at UCD and that was my foot in the door in deepest darkest recession when there were few jobs anywhere. I am eternally grateful to her for believing I could take on teaching the Northern Irish Troubles, something which remains a big part of my teaching, if not my research, up to the present day. Mary Daly has always had the perfect advice at the right moment and continues to be a close friend. Finally, Tom Bartlett took a huge punt on me when he asked me to be one of the contributors to the Cambridge History of Ireland. I was the youngest contributor to the volume and my IPP book hadn’t even come out at that stage. Tom had taught me as an undergraduate and his edits to my far too long first draft for the CHI was some of the best—and frankest—feedback I’ve ever got: “Parnell’s ‘passing’: passing what? His driving test? If you mean death say so.” I printed that line out and have it pinned up in my office. I often use his good editorship as an example when discussing editorial practice with students.

Which historians have had the greatest influence on you?

When I was studying for the Leaving Certificate, I figured that the canon of modern Irish history could be navigated with the big four: Lyons, Lee, Foster, and Ferriter. *Transformation* had been published the year before. The most important addition to this group was Rosemary Cullen Owens’ *A Social History of Women in Ireland, 1870-1970*. It came out the year I took Lindsey Earner Byrne’s module on modern Irish women’s history and it, alongside Maria Luddy’s work, Diane Urquhart’s *Irish Women’s History Reader*, and Margaret Ward’s *Unmanageable Revolutionaries* taught me to follow the stories that sit under the grand narratives. Cullen Owens in particular stood out. One of her other works—*Smashing Times*—gave me an insight into how to write the history of tactics and a movement rather than of an era. I think a lot of my own work has been on tactics and connections and it stems from these inspirations. When I was writing the history of Indians in Dublin, I found a lot of the same feminist activists, especially Helena Moloney, at the forefront of solidarity between Ireland and India. Her newspaper *Bean na hÉireann* is such an important source for understanding the world of radicalism, republicanism, feminism, and socialism before 1914. Women like Nancy Dryhurst spanned causes and those like Jennie Wyse Power crossed generations, linking the Ladies Land League to the 1916 Proclamation which was signed in her restaurant on Henry Street.

Outside Irish history, the work of Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora has been some of the most important for understanding memory and commemoration in relation to

the work I undertook during the decade of centenaries. Bonnie G. Smith’s *The Gender of History* is one of the most important works on how and why history is written and who it is written (and claimed) by. I applied these concepts when I wrote about Eoin MacNeill’s family and the production of history back in 2022 and it’s a chapter with which I am still quite pleased.

What work of history has had the greatest influence on you? How?

I’m going to go a bit left field on this one and say Eugen Weber’s *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. Early on, it taught me that little things can add up into big changes and that institutions which can appear ancient may in fact be creations of more recent times. The idea that modern France was created through a process of table manners and language and deportment in institutions like the army and schools is one that undermines a whole array of suppositions. The books also shows how a culturally heterogenous France was assimilated into what we now think of as “French” culture and that languages and customs were erased along the way. Just as imperialism and colonization invariably bring cultural erasure, so too do nationalism and nation building projects subsume regional, minority, and subnational cultures as they expand. The application of these ideas to Ireland not only helps us understand Ireland under British rule but also a series of projects in independent Ireland from the treatment of the Travelling community to the Caighdeán Oifigiúil. Language simplification and standardisation is an interesting facet of post-revolutionary state building in Ireland, Russia, China, Turkey, and so many other states. I see the benefits it brought in terms of increasing literacy in each language but I also think about all the regional languages and dialects subsumed along the way. In terms of both language and cultural homogenization, the same process can be seen in pretty much every big state be it in Europe or elsewhere. The idea that Italy and France didn’t really exist as we think of them before the late nineteenth century is profound and it diminishes the already problematic concept of the nation state. My thinking on this all started with Eugen Weber. Much of our worldview is based on very recent constructs. This is also the theme of another key text: Hobsbawm and Ranger’s *The Invention of Tradition*.

What book in your field should everyone read?

This raises a bigger question which I ask myself all the time: what is my field? Go read Bonnie G. Smith’s *The Gender of History* because it’s about the process of writing history and it’s a challenging and enlightening book which will make you think differently about how history is written and everything you read thereafter. It also has a lot about Alice Stopford Green in it which is always a bonus in any book. If you’re looking for some interesting primary sources, read anything in Alice Stopford Green’s papers in the NLI. Her anti-war correspondence with officers in the First World War are powerful and her letters to Roger Casement are wonderfully fun.

Which historical figure would you most like to walk around Dublin or Belfast with?

I took a module on the United Irishmen with Tom Bartlett in 2005/6 and we spent a lot of time reading Wolfe Tone’s diary which starts with him and Thomas Russell in Belfast during the autumn of 1791 meeting with all the Belfast radicals and drinking a lot of claret. Tom brought the whole

period alive and I reckon you'd see a Belfast unimaginably different from today if you had Tone and Russell as your guides.

You've been exiled to Hell or Connaught. Which books would you take with you?

Eoin MacNeill worked through the corpus of Irish Brehon law contained in the six volumes of *The Ancient Laws of Ireland* while he was locked up in Mountjoy from 1920-21. I reckon my equivalent of *Ancient Laws* would be a full set of *Hansard* parliamentary debates. If I was stuck somewhere, I could find endless topics to research from a set of *Hansard*.

Which person in history would you most like to meet?

What would you ask him/her?

On reflection, I want a word with Richard Pigott. He is such an enigma and he crops up in the most unlikely of places. James Connolly uses him as an important source on the history of Fenianism in *Labour in Irish History* and there's just so much more to him than the sometimes two-dimensional character in the dock at the Parnell Commission. The question I'd ask Pigott is why Madrid and why did he do it. Margaret O'Callaghan has done all the heavy lifting on showing what a complex figure he is in her DIB article on him. Sentences like, "It is perhaps worthy of comment that Pigott met his death (1 March 1889), apparently by suicide, in Madrid, a city in which O'Shea had a network of connections, and Pigott himself had apparently none" raise so many questions that I hope some day to find the time to try to answer them. I feel some of those secrets died with Richard Pigott so yes, he's the historical figure I'm pulling back for interrogation.

Three Irish historical figures you've having for lunch.

Okay so there's a whole series of considerations we need to make first: they'd have to be from the same era or they'd spend the whole lunch asking each other questions about what happened next. Secondly, I'd have to travel to their time as opposed to them coming to 2025 because then they'd spend the whole lunch asking me to explain contactless payment and foods we take for granted: I am not fielding questions on food from a time traveling Fenian. This is by way of saying I'd like to go back to some time between 1911 and 1913 and have lunch with the aforementioned Helena Moloney, Thomas MacDonagh, and Joseph Mary Plunkett—maybe in Algeria during Plunkett's roller-skating days there. In spite of his rollerskating, Plunkett seeming like quite a serious chap but I want to observe the friendship between him and MacDonagh: they edited a journal together. MacDonagh was by far the better writer. His plays *When the Dawn is Come* and *Metempsychosis* are properly readable. The latter is a genuinely funny lampoon of Yeats and how seriously he took himself. I'm pretty sure

Helena Moloney knew both of them, but I reckon she'd be a fascinating dinner guest with or without the other two. Between her trade unionism and her acting, I reckon she'd have got on well with MacDonagh and there'd be lots to talk about.

Which moment in history would you most like to go back to?

The past is a nice place to visit, but I wouldn't like to live there. The here and now has so much going on I'd like to stay and see how it all pans out. The pre-revolution years seems like such a febrile time that I'd love to visit that Dublin lit with the ideas and possibilities of change before all the killing started in the Irish revolution.

What historical topic have you changed your mind about?

Constructive unionism. It's thanks to Andrew Gailey's book *The Death of Kindness*. It's a magisterial study which shows just how complex this phenomenon was. From the Irish origins of the policy to its unforeseen consequences including the suggestion that what the policy killed was not home rule but rather "kindness itself." It's an essential book for understanding late nineteenth-century British policy in Ireland. I've been assigning excerpts from it to my students for the last few years, and it consistently sparks a lot of interest in the classroom and many students have chosen either to do a book review on it or to write their final essay on some concept that has arisen from this reading.

What archive would you most like to tackle?

The Walter Long papers at the Wiltshire Records Office. A small cohort of historians have made it as far as Wiltshire to consult these and joining their ranks is on my bucket list. In 2018, I was able to do a deep dive in the Birrell, Nathan, and Asquith (both Herbert Henry and Margot) papers at the Bodleian Library and I found the answers to some key questions, most importantly on partition. I'm convinced that the next step to getting a layer deeper into the history of Ireland's partition is through the Walter Long papers, and the thought of spending a quiet week or two in Wiltshire immersing myself in the collection has an appeal to it.

What's the most valuable museum for your work-interests? Why?

Recently, a series of podcasts I recorded with Harlan J. Strauss went live as "Recording the Revolution: The Harlan Strauss Tapes." Harlan had recorded interviews with participants in the Irish revolution back in 1972 and we met up fifty years on to review the tapes. In the episode on Christy Brady, printer of the 1916 Proclamation, he mentioned his brass "shooter"—a printing tool—having been donated by him to St Enda's and how it ended up in the National Museum. In 1972, he told Harlan that he could go to the National Museum to see the object and, 50 years later

again, I was able to look up the same object which is in the museum collections today. From Liam Lynch's rifle to Thomas Ashe's prisoner cap, I had reason to consult material culture like this over the years, and the National Museum is as good for objects, as its sister the National Library is for documents, and I'm always amazed at what they have. Shout out to Lisa Godson and Joanna Brück's *Making 1916* which has really amplified the value of material cultures for students of the Irish revolution.

What books are on your nightstand?

Primo Levi's *Periodic Table*, a 1932 biography of Annie Bessant by C. Jinarajadasa, and I've just finished *Nature's Mutiny* by Philip Blom which is a study of the Little Ice Age and how weather shaped Europe's seventeenth century. I like reading things a bit further away from what I work on for fresh perspectives. Thinking about how things like climate can shape historical events has really wide ranging ramifications for all kinds of historical research. I often think about how poor harvests and the global collapse of grain prices in the late 1870s were contributory factors to the outbreak of Ireland's Land War. We don't think about those factors as much as we should and the links between climate, food, finance, and agitation are pretty universal.

What's the most important lesson history has taught you?

A few years ago, I learned from *In Our Time* that dinosaurs didn't really go extinct, they just evolved into birds and crocodiles. I think about that fact more often than is probably healthy, especially when I see a robin or a magpie. Apart from that, when working on anything vaguely biographical, I've learned to appreciate quite how profoundly people can change over a lifetime and sometimes in a single moment. What someone did yesterday doesn't define them today. It was reading Roy Foster on Yeats where this really landed. There's a comment in Foster's introduction about accident and how difficult a subject Seán Ó Faoláin found Yeats: Ó Faoláin was one of several writers who started and later abandoned a biography of WBY. I never take any individual from the past at face value since then, and I'm very wary of typecasting any historical figure. We can be lulled into seeing people as archetypes. Real people are not like characters in novels where their purpose is to serve some plot point. Historical figures are just like us: complex, messy, multifaceted, and figuring out who they are. We wouldn't treat someone we know in real life in a two dimensional way and the same goes for people in history. Both gradual and sudden changes in a person's outlook or beliefs are possible and we have to be open to that as historians.

Keeping It in the Family

BY MAEVE O'RIORDAN

LOVED, DESPISED, CELEBRATED, & taken for granted in equal measure, siblings form one of the most important relationships in a person's life." So begins Shannon Devlin's fascinating study of middle-class siblinghood in nineteenth-century Ulster. Within these pages are stories of siblings rearing each other, brokering each other's marriages, falling out, housing each other, doing business together, holding each other's secrets and supporting each other through the tumult of life. Over the six thematic chapters of *Siblinghood and Sociability*, Devlin succeeds in reimagining the Irish family. So often, the vertical or marital relationship is foregrounded, but Devlin has convincingly argued for the pivotal role horizontal, and indeed, diagonal family relationships played in an individual's life. The fact that this is the first such study might be surprising as siblinghood was the default experience for Irish people in the past. With the average number of children born to Irish women peaking at 6.53 in 1871 (4), most

Irish people "had a sibling, half sibling or step sibling" (p.2). Devlin, therefore, should be congratulated for taking on this project, which like all great projects, has been hiding in plain sight for so long.

SHANNON DEVLIN.

SIBLINGHOOD AND SOCIABILITY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ULSTER
LIVERPOOL UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2025. £92.00

Piecing together the relationships and connections of these 25 sets of siblings was a considerable feat. Some collections were uncatalogued, while only snippets of others survive. Siblinghood is a lifelong status, and so families are followed from the cradle to the grave. Women changed their name upon marriage while fathers, sons, uncles and sometimes even brothers shared given names. Children, adults and the aged, brothers and sisters all had very different opportunities and so the book necessarily spans the worlds of home and of business, philanthropy and politics, childhood and old age. The book is

divided into six thematic chapters moving from the sibling household across the life stages to explore education, courtship and matchmaking, provision and inheritance, work and the public sphere. This is a study of Ulster society, and there is no question that Ulster had a stronger middle-class than the rest of Ireland, outside Dublin at least. Nonetheless, one would have to assume that many of these themes of respectability and sociability would translate to other large middle-class families. Especially as all the leading religions were represented in this sample and some family members spent at least a portion of their lives in other parts of Ireland. Devlin found that "the emotional and supportive bonds between siblings did not differ by religion" (226). Perhaps future work will expand to look at siblings across the island. Emma Rothschild's contention that a family history is "a sequence of incomplete stories" (10) may well be true, but Devlin successfully manages to weave together these incomplete stories to allow the reader to get to know several key figures within these families. Layers of detail are added with each passing

chapter, making for an enjoyable read. The level of detail increases as the century progresses as developments in education and society had direct impacts on these families lives. The second-half of the nineteenth century was an important period of development in terms of access to education for women, for example, something which had a big impact on the Wakefield family, particularly Anne, who excelled at Cambridge.

In the first chapter, Devlin convincingly argues that we must imagine the household as containing several "physical household units" as stepsiblings and older and younger siblings were often to be found at different addresses and yet conceptualized themselves as belonging together in what Horn described as "imagined sibling households" (29). Here, Devlin also argues that we need to rethink the stereotype of the home with adult siblings as a contested space. She found that, particularly in the countryside, siblings and in-laws could provide valued companionship (41). Of course, these families typically had plenty of space, so the same might not be said for those in overcrowded lodgings. She found evidence

of siblings choosing to live together at various life stages.

Gender and family order both impacted on these individuals' lives, their access to education and other opportunities, though it was not, necessarily, the case that older siblings fared better. Married daughters, who had already received a dowry, for example, were unlikely to receive an inheritance (144). By balancing her analysis of the surviving wills with other family documents, Devlin can provide a rich analysis of family dynamics which builds on the work of Wilson and others in following money and property within families. For example, one sister received no inheritance, but the money was given to her siblings who were already funding her care in an asylum (143). One quibble in the discussion of wills is that it is difficult to judge the relative generosity of bequests which varied widely from around £50 pounds to £1000 without knowing the entire value of each estate discussed. The boundaries of the nineteenth-century Ulster "middle" class were porous and there is wide range of wealth experiences within this sample, and even within families as fortunes were gained or lost over time. Despite these differences in wealth, Devlin is convincing in her justification for the inclusion of each of these

families in the study. They were all middle-class in their outlook. This is made evident in the final three chapters which document siblings' business activities (where they, and particularly brothers, were preferred partners), philanthropic activities (where aunts and nieces worked together) and political life.

One of the most valuable contributions of the book is not exactly siblinghood, but rather what it revealed about diagonal relationships in families. Uncles and aunts, those with children and without, played important roles in their nieces and nephews' lives and in return, were cared for in old age by those same nieces and nephews. An extreme example were the brothers Daniel and Robert Taylor who paid for the schooling of fourteen nieces and nephews in addition to Daniel's own five children (72). This act, as well as the many other examples of valued care and mentorship provided by aunts and uncles in the study really enforce the importance of expanding our notion of family beyond vertical lines.

Despite this being a book on the most platonic of relationships, there is a lot here for the historian of marriage and sexuality. Siblings, Devlin argued, were key players in facilitating courtship. She rightly critiques the foregrounding parents have been given in discussions on matchmaking and astutely

observes that siblings had a good deal to gain, and to lose, by the success and respectability of their brother or sister's marriage partner. Mixed-gender siblings in this sample were able to speak openly about their desires and preferences in potential marriage partners, suggesting an openness to sexuality not often associated with the Irish family (100-04). Devlin also argues that supposed "surplus" unmarried siblings often remained unmarried by choice, sometimes as in the case of Anne Wakefield as they were engaged in same-sex relationships (120). An obvious sequel to *Siblings and Sociability* would be to explore the cousin relationship more fully. Some cousins discussed here were like additional siblings as close sibling relationships in one generation lead to close cousin relationships in the next. Cousin marriage was still a feature of Irish society during the nineteenth century, and it seems to have been practiced, but severely frowned upon within this sample.

As someone interested in the humans behind the manuscripts, I, as always, started with the acknowledgments. It was great to see the kindness with which Devlin constructed these, with an eye to those coming after her. The chapters that follow lay down an exam-

ple for those aspiring historians wishing to delve into family and social history. There is a wealth of research here which is expertly woven to build a rich tapestry of family life in Ulster. Across the entire book, the importance of family reputation is revealed to be paramount. Siblings supported each other and pooled resources in terms of housing, wealth, care, contacts and business opportunities. In helping each other, they were also helping themselves as "assumptions of an individual's worth could be made based on their sibling's reputation or actions" (220). While the conclusion is a little short, the book itself is a fascinating study of middle-class life. There are scandals and black sheep in several families (e.g. p.198), but overall, the mutual support, and the strength of these connections are what shines through. There is food for thought here for historians of the family, as well as those interested in business, philanthropic, educational and political networks in nineteenth-century Ulster. *Siblinghood and Sociability in Nineteenth-century Ulster* should provide a reference point for anyone interested in understanding the history of the Irish family for many years to come. •

—University College Cork

Seeing is Believing

BY STEPHANIE RAINS

THE "GREAT EXHIBITIONS" of the imperial age need to be seen to be believed, and for modern eyes scrutinizing the lithographs, postcards and photographs of their staging there is something both mesmerizing and unsettling about them. The sheer scale of these events, in many cases comprising entire "cities" constructed across several acres, is part of this response when set alongside the fact that they were so ephemeral, existing for perhaps six months and then disappearing almost without trace. Their unrestrained fantasy architecture, in which Japanese pagodas sat next to Mughal palaces and both were surrounded by stands promoting cheap household products also contribute to their sense of unreality. They seem to embody the strutting confidence and imperial imaginations of their age, appropriating the cultures and architectures of the entire world for both a performance of power and popular entertainment on a day-return ticket. The fact that (in some cases) their "native villages" were staffed by workers from distant continents performing their racial and cultural identity for those day-return visitors is perhaps the most shocking feature of "great exhibitions" to contemporary readers, and it was this feature which attracted some of the first postcolonial critiques of the phenomenon.

SHAHMIMA AKHTAR.

EXHIBITING IRISHNESS: EMPIRE, RACE, AND NATION, c. 1850-1970

MANCHESTER UNIV. PRESS, 2024. £85.00.

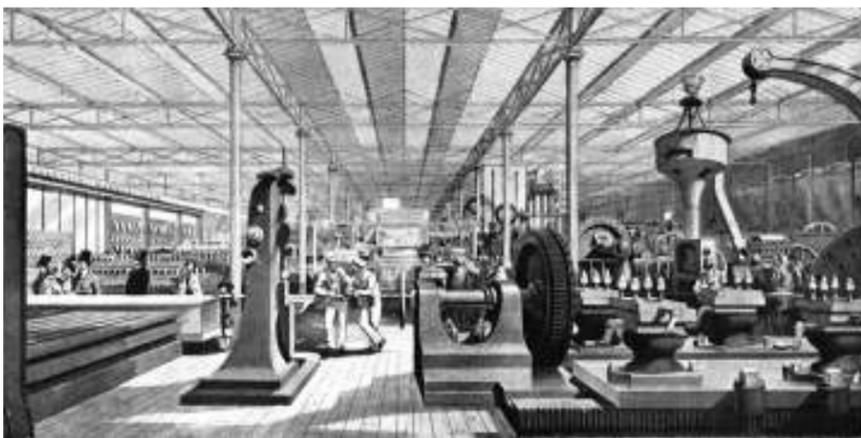
PHOTO: THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF 1851

For scholars of Irish history and culture, the "Irish villages" and then later the official state pavilions staged at exhibitions all over the world from the later-nineteenth century onwards have long been a lens through which to interrogate the ways that Irishness was performed for different audiences across

time, as well as to map the shift from colonial to postcolonial status within the international community. Over many years, books and articles have explored various aspects of the Irish villages and pavilions, including the bizarre tale of two competing Irish villages (staged by rival philanthropic organizations) at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, and the fact that both villages (which featured replicas of Blarney Castle and St. Lawrence's Gate among other attractions) were staged in the honky-tonk Midway of the Fair rather than among the official state pavilions because Ireland was not yet an official state itself. The fact that the "Ballymaclinton" Irish village at the 1908 Franco-Irish Exhibition in London was a marketing campaign by McClinton's soap from Co. Tyrone which also somehow managed to exhibit modernist paintings (an excellent example of how difficult it is to capture in words alone how visually surreal these enterprises were) has also been discussed in analyses of Irish visual and consumer culture, and the dramatically modernist Irish pavilion staged at the 1939 World's Fair in New York has attracted attention as a symbol of independent Ireland's attempts to industrialize and modernize.

One of the many strengths of Shahmima Akhtar's new book *Exhibiting Irishness: Empire, Race, and Nation, c. 1850-1970*, is the attention it pays to that visual and embodied nature of "great exhibition" displays in general, and their staging of Ireland in particular. The book includes 30 illustrations (although it is a shame that Manchester University Press did not take better advantage of these images and facilitate color reproductions), but more importantly it adopts a rigorous and detailed

visual critique across all of its historical sweep, covering the layout, architecture, staging and costuming of these outposts of Irishness as their aesthetics shifted over time and across locations. That historical sweep is perhaps the book's greatest strength, as this gives it a range and depth of analysis far beyond any of those previous discussions of individual Irish villages and pavilions. It allows Akhtar to develop her arguments about the ways that the meanings and limitations of Irish representations on the international stage were mutable over time, and explore the different flows of power and agency (and those permitted to exercise it) across history and geography. And across this shifting landscape, she discusses the exhibiting of Irishness through the narratives of gen-



der, ethnicity, nationhood and development, all the while emphasizing its fluidity and adaptability. Because of this range combined with its clear discussions of visual and material style, the book is a significant step forward in understanding and explaining the uncanny and excessive form that was the Irish village.

The book is ordered chronologically in order to guide us through the shifting styles and contexts of representation in "great exhibitions" themselves as well as Irish experiences of them. The first chapter covers the origins of these displays, when Ireland was one

of the first countries in the world to copy the triumph of London's 1851 Exhibition, in the (forlorn) hope that to do so would conjure Britain's industrial power and wealth. The 1852 Cork exhibition and the larger 1853 Dublin Exhibition were also of course organized in the shadow of the Famine, and Akhtar carefully examines the ways they staged national identity in an effort to preserve Ireland's place within the Union while also promoting its own industry. These earliest exhibitions are the only ones staged in Ireland which Akhtar discusses—and it would have been interesting to have included more consideration of the much later 1907 Irish International Exhibition in Dublin. This event included a "Somali village" staffed by "Somali" workers for the entertainment of Irish crowds,

and it would have reflected an interesting contrast within this book's analyses.

The rest of the book maps the staging and re-staging of Irish villages and pavilions throughout the diaspora and within the imperial heartland. Chapter Two covers the Irish contributions to the enormous 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, and discusses those two competing villages which were staged for Irish-America by Lady Aberdeen and Alice Hart, both examples of that key nineteenth-century figure the "lady philanthropist" who was excluded from political and business spheres and therefore exercised her considerable energies in charitable activities. Akhtar presents a fascinating analysis of the visual and material meaning these villages had for Irish-America, and the ways that they simultaneously embodied nostalgia for a national past and optimism for its future. Chapter Three's focus on the 1908 Franco-Irish Exhibition in London brings the staging of Irish-

ness home to the imperial center, and Akhtar does an excellent job of working through what may be the most complex and contradictory of these national performances as she analyses the ways in which the “Ballymac-linton” village was simultaneously a commercial operation to market soap and also a staging of Home Rule ambitions and anxieties.

The final two chapters cover the period after Irish independence, and the book’s coverage of this shift from a colonial to post-colonial experience of participating in “great exhibitions” is one of its key contributions to the topic, as most analyses of the phenomenon cover only one or the other of these

periods. Akhtar’s discussions of the move from “Irish villages” to “Irish pavilions” once they were being staged by the governments of an independent state are fascinating. Chapter Four focuses on the 1924 British Empire Exhibition in London, the 1938 British Empire Exhibition in Glasgow (a welcome addition as it is rarely discussed) and the 1939 New York World’s Fair at which the Irish pavilion was famously a modernist shamrock designed by architect Michael Scott. This section of the book would really have benefited from more generous illustrations, but Akhtar’s discussions of the visual and material staging of Ireland for international

audiences in the Free State years is nuanced and makes a fascinating distinction between the Northern Irish exhibits and those of the Free State. The final chapter covers the 1960s contributions to two more World’s Fairs in the United States and the 1967 Expo in Montreal. These later events have received very little prior discussion in Irish Studies and Akhtar’s analysis of them is long overdue—her discussions of their role in more modern international trade relations between Ireland and North America, the fading belief in their value by Irish governments and the growing divide between Ireland and its American

diasporas are all valuable and original.

This book is a fascinating and welcome full-length examination of the Irish participation in the “great exhibition” culture of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and is highly recommended to anyone interested in Irish visual and material culture, the relationships between Ireland and its diaspora as well as the British Empire, and the wider Irish Studies community who will value its tracing of shifting and fluid performances of Irish identity.

—Maynooth University

Beliming the Anglo-Irish

BY ROSS CARROLL

IN A MEMORABLE LINE from *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes described how a philosopher who fails to define their terms clearly risks becoming “entangled in words, as a bird in lime-twiggs; the more he struggles, the more belimed.” Mathew Ward has written an excellent book about how seventeenth-century Anglo-Irishmen became similarly entangled in Hobbes’s own philosophy, even as they tried in vain to escape it. Philosophers, clergymen, and authors of political tracts continually and forcefully disavowed Hobbes in their writings and sermons, while also proving themselves profoundly indebted to him. Very often, the disavowals and the debts became apparent in one and the same work. Even if Hobbes’s answers to key questions of ecclesiological authority, sovereignty, and political obligation were frequently too scandalous to publicly embrace, the influence of his thought on the ways those questions were posed, and the conceptual apparatus used to address them, was undeniable in the Ireland of this period.

MATHEW WARD.

THOMAS HOBBS AND POLITICAL THOUGHT
IN IRELAND, C.1660-C.1730
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2024. \$115.

“Ireland,” though, is perhaps a misleadingly abstract term to describe the book’s focus. What Ward really examines is the presence of Hobbes in the work of a trio of Protestant philosophers and clergymen—William Petty (16-23-1687), John Vesey (1638-1716), and Edward Synge (1659-1741)—who lived in Ireland but were preoccupied with how that country could be subdued and its established Church defended. The most famous of these is undoubtedly Petty who conducted land surveys for Cromwell and had innovative ideas about taxation. The considerable space that Ward devotes to Petty reflects the influence he wielded over English colonial and economic policy. Three chapters of the book are about Petty; Vesey gets two, and Synge only one.

Although the cast of main characters is small, this book nevertheless represents reception history at its finest. What makes it so compelling is that Ward does not limit his evidence base to moments where an author cites Hobbes approvingly as the basis for their argument. Rather, he goes deeper to show how Hobbesian ideas infused the waters in which these men swam, conditioning how they thought about the world in ways that they themselves barely recognized.

The key term Ward uses to describe this indirect form of appropriation is “thinking with” (14). Political theorists writing today frequently invoke this phrase to justify borrowing a concept or a style of thinking from a canonical philosopher in a way that the original philosopher would probably object to (consider, for example, the left Heideggerians or those who propose thinking *with* Hannah Arendt *against* Hannah Arendt). The subjects of Ward’s book were essentially doing the same; they thought *with* Hobbes in ways that often went beyond, around, or against what Hobbes thought himself.

Ward has essentially done for Ireland what Jon Parkin achieved for England in his *Taming Leviathan*, which showed how Hobbes became both a punching bag and a resource for English political thinkers. In some respects, extending Parkin’s project to Ireland is a bold move. After all, Hobbes will have barely registered in the political consciousness of many in Ireland, and his philosophy seemed to speak more readily to political debates in the English metropole than to the Irish colony. In other respects, however, the relevance of Hobbes to an Anglo-Irish audience in the seventeenth century is so clear that it is curious that no scholar has attempted this before. Hobbes’s philosophy comes into its own in societies where sovereignty is contested and where no single political, religious, or cultural tradition is available to settle the issue of who to obey and why. Ireland in the seventeenth century was a textbook example of such a society. Furthermore, *Leviathan*’s cold, geometrical style of political argument (which owed much to the fact that it was written in France) and its grounding in natural law, meant that its ideas could easily be detached from one cultural environment and transposed to another. Hobbes’s theory held out the prospect of peace to anyone willing to embrace its absolutist logic, regardless of their national or religious background. This made it remarkably useful for making a case for obedience to a common sovereign in a society scarred by religious and political division.

Part of its special appeal in an Irish context lay in the fact that Hobbes’s political theory pre-supposed an *equality* of subjection. Any kind of preferential treatment by the sovereign towards English colonists in Ireland or their descendants—even in matters of trade—was antithetical to it. This made Hobbesian thought a surprisingly useful resource for anyone aggrieved at the English Crown’s prejudice against Ireland. Petty, for example, thought along Hobbesian lines when criticising English prohibitions on Irish cattle exports. Petty regarded the “empire as

a whole as a single unit of analysis,” a perspective that invalidated the pursuit of mercantilist policies by one imperial territory (England) against another (Ireland) (56). As Ward summarizes, “if sovereignty was to be absolute it had to be exercised impartially” (250).

Hobbes became both a punching bag and a resource for English political thinkers.

Even Hobbes’s controversial views on how sovereignty could be established by conquest could be enlisted to plead the Irish case. Hobbes famously argued that a conqueror enjoyed an unimpeachable right of sovereignty over those they subjected. This hardly stands out as an argument ripe for use in championing the rights of the conquered Irish. But, again, Petty saw a different angle. In treating conquest as the foundation of absolute sovereignty, Hobbes also “established the equality of conquered and non-conquered subjects” (78). In other words, the very distinction between conquerors and conquered dissolved as soon as sovereign authority was established. This carried enormous implications for Ireland, where so many of the country’s constitutional, political, and religious arrangements were premised on a divide between the descendants of the English conqueror and the Irish conquered. As Ward notes, Hobbes in *Leviathan* expressed his approval for the Roman Emperor Caracalla’s decision to extend the status of citizen to all of peoples of the empire, thereby erasing the distinction between conqueror and conquered. As Petty and others saw, an equivalent policy in Ireland could have done much to quell confessional and political conflict.

Another element of Hobbes’s political thought that proved surprisingly applicable to the Irish context was his view on corporations. Hobbes went out his way to diminish the status of corporations (such as cities with their chartered rights and privileges) within his political theory, viewing them as threats to sovereign authority. Petty drew on this argument to challenge the corporate privileges enjoyed by Irish port towns. Similarly, Vesey deployed it to dispute the authority of urban corporations such as Athenry, Tuam, and Galway whose chartered rights clashed with the rights of the Church. Vesey was particularly exercised by the fact that the Galway corporation appointed wardens to the Collegiate Church of St. Nicholas, a right that Vesey insisted was reserved to the Church. In this case, the logic of Vesey’s Hobbesian

argument came back to bite him. Under Hobbes’s logic, the Church of Ireland was also a corporate body of sorts and so “depended for its status upon the revocable rights it was granted by the crown” (196). The Church thus had no independent standing from which to challenge the crown’s corporation policy.

To pull off a reception history of this caliber, it pays to master Hobbes’s own works inside and out. Ward has not only achieved this, but even tries his hand at Hobbes interpretation. He queries the Erastian reading of Hobbes’s church politics, and downplays Hobbes’s commitment to toleration, a subject of which Hobbes “spoke remarkably little” (103). This might help explain why Synge was able to pull Hobbes’s thought in an anti-tolerationist direction (ironically in a text entitled *The Case for Toleration*). Synge seized on the Hobbesian argument that the sovereign may limit religious freedom in the name of peace and presented it as a baseline justification for the notorious anti-Catholic penal laws. Synge knew that this “Hobbesian” argument “conflicted with the Christian principle of liberty of conscience” but this was an incoherence he was prepared to live with (243).

Because this is very much an intellectual history concerned with religious debates and high politics, we lose something of the wider social and cultural context in which these figures operated. Ward does, however, occasionally hint at how life in Ireland at this time may have impinged upon the thought of those he writes about. We learn that “life in provincial Ireland,” for example, “seems to have shaken Vesey’s belief in a natural moral order” (167). Vesey had been serving as archbishop of Tuam and we can only speculate as to how Galway shaped his moral and theological outlook (it “may be,” Ward wryly adds, “that Vesey considered the fearful conditions of life in Galway to be conducive to ethical scepticism”) (169). But whatever about his struggles there, rural Ireland also afforded Vesey the freedom to toy with Hobbesian ideas that would have earned him censure elsewhere. Vesey’s congregations were “isolated by distance and illiteracy” from the theological controversies raging back in England, which meant that Vesey could flirt with Hobbesian voluntarism (the theory that moral distinctions are determined by the will of God) without ruffling too many feathers (168). Indeed, although Ward makes a good case for how Hobbes loomed over everything these men wrote, in some cases it was the *lack* of familiarity with Hobbes among their Anglo-Irish audiences that made their dabbling with Hobbesian ideas possible.

—Dublin City University

“Normalizing” Irish Politics

BY JUSTIN DOLAN STOVER

DEMOCRACY AND DISSENT in the Irish Free State stands as a penetrating analysis of majority rule politics in the Irish Free State, and explores contemporary understandings of democracy, political participation, and minority rights in independent Ireland. The book challenges conventional literature on the establishment of Irish democracy which has often depicted the Anglo-Irish Treaty, Irish Free State Constitution, and suppression of civil war opposition as evidence that a functioning democracy had been established by the early 1920s. Instead, Knirck argues that democracy in Ireland was a longer process, one that proceeded from nineteenth-century Irish political traditions of doubt, dissent, and disruption of British parliamentary procedure. “The colonised did not experience British democracy in the same ways as the colonisers,” Knirck explains, “and Irish politics inherited a healthy suspicion of state institutions and an awareness that political processes can be used to augment the power of a minority.” (8) Dissent and opposition were viewed as abnormal remnants of colonial politics; conversely, revolutionary-era Sinn Féin politics had represented “a broad ideological consensus” (25) within a single-party chamber from 1919—a foundation myth, Knirck notes, that would come to delay Irish political development after 1922.

JASON KNIRCK.

DEMOCRACY AND DISSENT IN THE IRISH FREE STATE: OPPOSITION, DECOLONISATION, AND MAJORITY RIGHTS
MANCHESTER UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2022. £85.00

While revolutionaries had envisioned democracy as operating in one form or another after independence, there was little consensus on the arrangement and functioning of that democracy after the formation of the Irish Free State. Efforts to “normalize” the Irish Free State’s political processes included attempts to diffuse a Sinn Féin monopoly over revolutionary politics and instill more democratic representation of Ireland’s varied political and economic interests. Dissent was not prohibited, but its pursuit as political strategy was often curtailed. Moving from a broadly oppositional and nominally unified nationalist politics during the revolutionary period to a multi-party democracy was made more difficult by remnants of Sinn Féin personality politics and enduring civil war divisions. Knirck confronts the narrative that the Irish Civil War was the definitive event from which Irish democracy emerged (or triumphed). He instead explores the decades after 1923 as an evolutionary path toward societal consensus on democratic processes. The ascent of the pro-Treaty “Cosgrave party”—Cumann na nGaedheal—was met with uncertainty and mistrust from various quarters throughout much of the 1920s, which contributed to a belief amongst many political actors and groups that minority rights and opinions should nevertheless influence national policy.

Beyond political contention, issues of gender, race, and empire shaped the development of opposition politics in the Irish Free State. Knirck writes that women were per-

ceived as politically passive in the decades following independence despite their obvious revolutionary credentials. They received little electoral attention—neglect which reinforced male domination in the halls of government.

A perceived aptitude for self-government seemed to elevate the Irish above other colonized peoples, an interpretation that framed

ernment’s nationalist outlook toward nation-building.

The weight of minority opinion, the right of majority mandate, and space afforded dissent all represented larger concerns about establishing Irish political norms distinct from Westminster politics. Toward this end, chapter three focuses on how the Irish state

The colonized did not experience British democracy in the same ways as the colonizers. Irish politics inherited a healthy suspicion of state institutions and an awareness that political processes can be used to augment the power of a minority. Dissent and opposition were viewed as abnormal remnants of colonial politics.



political opposition as threatening the integrity of Irish democracy. However, as Knirck presents, the nature and role of opposition—parties, doctrines, movements—guided the growth, maturation, and integration of Irish political culture in an environment that had traditionally viewed internal dissent as anti-Irish in contrast to a broad nationalist consensus.

These themes populate six well-structured and engaging chapters. Moving beyond an initial chapter that provides an overview of the book’s key arguments, chapter two explores the breakdown of Sinn Féin revolutionary consensus politics during the Anglo-Irish Treaty debates. The emergence of pro- and anti-Treaty factions accentuated existing fissures in the “monolithic, harmonious nation” (43) that would come to divide Irish politics and society for decades. It also contributed to the idea that, in certain circumstances, minority rights (“an honorable vanguard”) carried equal or greater moral weight than simple majority rule. (56) This division solidified in the immediate years after independence, during which time pro-Treaty TDs emphasized broad political unity aligned to government prerogatives. In simpler terms, Knirck observes that the Treaty debates exposed the inability of Irish politicians to constructively disagree: “Neither side knew how to normalise a difference of opinion” (50).

Political integration proved even more difficult as minority voices vied for space in post-independence Ireland. While it cooperated with Sinn Féin throughout the revolution, Labour emerged on its own terms in the 1920s to offer an agreeable opposition. Very much “cloaked in green” (36), Labour’s platform demonstrated an overall adherence to the nationalist program while offering an alternative vision for Ireland’s social and political future. Farmers’ interests emerged in their own right as well, centering on the economic interests and influence of large farmers. Both alternatives interests contributed to the creation of a loyal opposition, thus representing interests complementary to the gov-

pursued political decolonization. In this sense, “politics” was viewed as inherently divisive—a tool of the colonizer used to divide a people. Many TDs in fact shunned the label of “politician” seeking instead to serve as a representative voice within a broader national consensus. This outlook expanded to encompass the entire political enterprise. Preserving space for alternative political interests and minority voices, specifically Unionist or Protestant ones, provided the government credibility and made it appear integrated and tolerant. Ironically, the longer the government functioned as a one-party state the more irrelevant smaller parties and minority interests appeared (81). Despite its apparent mandate, the pro-Treaty Irish government nevertheless struggled to distill a purely Gaelic state from the blend of Irish political flavor. Republicans viewed the Irish Free State to be illegitimate, a placeholder for British rule and a system they refused to participate in; for Labour, disentanglement from the socioeconomic system of capitalism would distinguish Ireland from its colonial past; and farmers sought an agrarian-focused politics that would advance Ireland’s largest industry. As Knirck argues, the very existence of minority opposition—viewed alongside republican abstention—served to challenge the legitimacy of single-party rule.

Knirck identifies the years between the conclusion of the civil war (1923) to the crisis following the assassination of Kevin O’Higgins (1927) as largely overlooked by historians yet important to understanding the development of democracy in the Irish Free State. He addresses this gap in chapter four, which explores Cumann na nGaedheal’s consolidation of government in the face of economic downturn, national crisis (1924 Army Mutiny), and the maturation of opposition parties. The pursuit of “normal” politics continued during this time in several ways. In 1926, for instance, The National League emerged as a successor to the Irish Parliamentary Party. It invoked the legacy of political figures such as Charles Stewart Parnell

and John Redmond to ground consensus around experience and practical government. Cumann na nGaedheal politics promoted technocracy in an attempt to consolidate decision-making in the hands of experts and position itself as the party of experience. “This discourse of expertise was something that had evolved since the revolution,” Knirck points out, “an attempt by Cumann na nGaedheal to define what they hoped would be normal politics.” (127).

Chapter five continues to investigate the nature of political opposition in the Irish Free State, this time focusing on the emergence of Fianna Fáil and the challenge it presented to Cumann na nGaedheal’s political hegemony. Fianna Fáil’s entry into the Dáil and its broad nationalist appeal (in opposition to the Treaty) helped to solidify a two-party system in Ireland along a recognizable political spectrum—a moment Knirck identifies as a watershed in the normalizing of Irish politics and one that permitted both a peaceful transfer of power but which also allowed for the Blue-shirt organization to emerge (187). Fianna Fáil’s growth in the years that followed ultimately drew voters from the ranks of Labour and the Farmers’ Party; at the same time, Fianna Fáil used its time in opposition to align itself with minority interests, positioning the party as broadly national but a safeguard against an overreaching government executive.

In the final chapter, Cumann na nGaedheal embodies the opposition; unable to halt Fianna Fáil’s ascent, the pro-Treaty party turned back to personality politics in an effort to emphasize W.T. Cosgrave’s experience in government. When this failed, pro-Treaty elements merged with the Blueshirts to form Fine Gael, whose criticisms of Fianna Fáil echoed previous observations that “politics” spoiled Irish national unity. Knirck explains that Irish politics entered “a new normal” by the mid-1930s, one that aligned to broader international practice while maintaining native desires for broad national representation.

Democracy and Dissent in the Irish Free State examines the “normalization” of Irish politics in the decades after the revolution. Central to this process was the integration of minority interests and the development of multi-party contestants. The book expertly navigates the process of political decolonization in an atmosphere that viewed establishment politics as antithetical to Irish political tradition and in many regards sought to maintain the facade of revolutionary-era, single-party adherence. One particular critique of the book is that similar topics and patterns of analysis are repeated between the chapters rather than given their own dedicated space in individual chapters. In another sense, this organizational choice appears appropriate as different methodological lenses are applied to the revisited subjects. Overall, Knirck presents a multifaceted analysis that challenges existing literature on the formation and development of democracy in the Irish Free State that argues for a longer view toward its establishment and functioning. •

—Idaho State University

The State of the Question

BY WILLIAM H. MULLIGAN, JR.

THE ROUTLEDGE HISTORY of *Irish America* is the latest in a variety of volumes offering thematic essays to present the “state of the question” or provide a broad overview of their topic. Some are styled “Guides,” others as “Handbooks” but the format and approach are similar. *The Routledge History of Irish America* is a very worthy addition to this genre and to Irish-American Studies. It should be in every library where there are courses in Irish history or Irish literature. Scholars doing research and those teaching the above-mentioned courses will find it extremely useful. Cian McMahon of the University of Nevada-Las Vegas and Kathleen Costello-Sullivan of Le Moyne College have assembled a formidable cadre of contributors who each provide solid essays on a wide array of topics in both Irish-American history and literature. Each of these is defined inclusively, so the volume includes other disciplines than history and literature, such as film studies, and folklore to name just two. This, of course, is reflective of Irish Studies itself. The volume is also quite inclusive and covers the field quite well. I am sure, if I searched thoroughly, I might find something not included that really should have been, but this review will focus on the volume that has been assembled. Although some lacunae will be noted. What is presented here is a formidable accomplishment of which all involved can be justly proud. The editors should also be commended for managing to bring so many scholars together for this project. We are all busy and this was done, at least in part, during the pandemic when all of us in academia were scrambling to adapt to new teaching formats and maintain contact with students and colleagues. So, bringing this all together during that disruptive time must have been a Herculean effort, if not seeming to be the labor of Sisyphus at times. This project must have had its moments. I am sure stories will be told at many a conference.

**CIAN MCMAHON AND
KATHLEEN COSTELLO-SULLIVAN,
EDITORS**

THE ROUTLEDGE HISTORY OF IRISH AMERICA
NEW YORK: ROUTLEDGE, 2024. \$210.

The scope of the topics included, and the number of contributions precludes giving each separate essay attention. Some are familiar scholars offering their latest insights and discoveries in the areas they work; in others new topics are taken on. Across the board the quality of the essays is very high, and they are well written and can be read by undergraduates starting a research project or

for a course. That leads me to the notes and bibliographies, which are extensive and thorough. They will provide an excellent reference for further reading or research on the various topics covered. That of course is one of the prime purposes of this genre—to bring current scholarship together in the essay and provide the resources for further investigation. On both scores McMahon and Costello-Sullivan have succeeded. Kudos also to the many authors who executed their assignment so well.

While commenting on all the essays is impractical and mentioning some might slight others, I do want to call attention to parts of the book that might be overlooked. Marion R. Casey, in the Preface, provides a brief, but highly useful, overview of the development of Irish-American Studies since David Doyle’s seminal essay assessing the state of the field published in *Irish Historical Studies* in 1999.¹ While those who have been laboring in the vineyards will know most of the works she cites, it is very helpful to see them connected with one another in the meaningful context she develops. Her preface also reviews and puts into context most of the major contributions to the literature in the two decades since Doyle’s essay. It accomplishes quite a lot that will be useful in a few pages.

Similarly, the Editors’ Introduction is more than a cursory overview of the essays included. They begin with a succinct overview of the historiography of Irish America with specific attention to Kirby Miller’s seminal *Emigrants and Exiles* and the call by Donald Akenson, Patrick Griffin, David Doyle, and others to bring the Irish Protestant experience in America into the discussion of Irish American history in a serious way. They conclude that section linking the points raised to various “cultural artifacts” discussed in the essays that follow. This provides a useful road map to overall plan for the volume. The brief introductions they provide to each of the articles will be useful for those looking for more description than an essay’s title as the plan their reading. They also identify broad themes in Irish American studies, each of which operated in different ways at different times. Sometimes more dramatically different than at others. The essays are organized into seven parts, broadly chronological. The dynamic of the book is largely driven by the interaction between the various themes and the historical development of Irish America. Rather than discussing the individual essays, I think discussing the broad themes and how they are presented offers a more useful structure for this review. To do justice to each of these essays would require a much longer review and I am hesitant to focus on a few. There is something, in fact many things of substance, for all those interested in the

history, broadly defined, of Irish America. Substantial essays deal with the various forms that literature can take, journalism, film studies, folklore, the Irish language, and archaeology to name a broad sampling. The volume is not just a celebration but essays deal with controversies such as the sexual abuse scandal in the Catholic Church, LGBTQ issues, and disability as well as the current political divide in Irish America. The editors have cast a very broad net, as they should have, and I suspect the absence of a topic has more to do with difficulties in finding an author than a desire to ignore or downplay anything. Hence, I will not list topics I think were not covered as much as they should have been.

Mentioned first, and one of the most persistent themes throughout the collection, is work. The search for economic opportunities was a driving force in emigration from the earliest settlements through recent years. The factors that drove it changed over time, as did the regions in Ireland that were most affected but the desire to find work or economic security to phrase it differently was a constant. Not surprisingly many of the essays discuss with problems with the Irish economy, especially agriculture, that led countless people to seek opportunity in the United States and elsewhere in the Diaspora. Others deal with the work Irish immigrants found in the United States and their prominent role in the labor movement and later in labor unions. This blends neatly with the second broad theme, politics. Irish involvement in electoral politics began early and continues. It is closely allied with the role the Irish played in politics. Several essays address this, and others address how politics in Ireland created many of the conditions that drove emigration to the United States. Also, the Irish remained connected to the politics they had left behind and became engaged in the politics of their new homes. Both had significant impact on the development of identity and community in the United States. Religion is a third. Just as with work and politics it was both a motivating force in emigration and central to how the various waves of emigrants were received and the communities they developed. International networks also played a role as the Irish remained connected to Ireland in ways that varied over time and were also part of a global Irish community. Various essays address these broad themes across the full chronology of United States history because the Irish have been part of that history from the beginning. That continuity is well covered throughout the volume. The editors also have drawn on more recent scholarship that seeks to move away from a male-dominated image of Irish America to include the important role of women and the idea that identity is a social

construct and capable of being deconstructed to be better understood. Women’s role in the unfolding of Irish American history, receives significant coverage in a number of the essays. This is a serious history seeking to probe and analyze not simply to celebrate. The range of topics and the disciplinary backgrounds of the many contributors testify to the complexity of Irish American history and the array of perspectives that are necessary to do it justice.

The volume is organized on a broadly chronological framework rather than a topical one. This works well in my opinion because the essays in each section share the common context of that time period and the challenges and opportunities it presented in Ireland and in the United States. Each essay adds to what the previous ones offered and, unintentionally, they create a richer understanding of that time period. Topical organization can unintentionally be confusing as the reader is jumping back and forth in time and in and out of various contexts. The seven chronological periods are: Part I From Colonial Era to Early Republic; Part II The Great Famine; Part III After the Famine; Part IV Turn of the Twentieth Century; Part V After World War II; Part VI Irish America in the Third Millennium and Part VII The Twenty-First Century and Beyond. This is a logical and effective chronology as it fits well with the changing issues and opportunities that faced Irish America as it developed. Within each section the essays reinforce one another. No one essay tries to cover all of the topics but rather focuses on a specific aspect. They deftly combine a review of the literature with the author’s own research. They are well-written and could be assigned to undergraduates. The editors chose wisely here and the result strengthens the volume.

Daniel Mulhall offers an Afterword: “The Remarkable Persistence of Irish America” that offers a unifying conclusion to a volume that covers a great deal both in terms of time and in the richness of the Irish-American experience. This will be an essential book for libraries at universities that have Irish Studies programs. It will also serve researchers and teachers well as a source for a quick overview of the literature on a wide range of topics.

In summary, *The Routledge History of Irish America* is a welcome and valuable addition to the literature that will be useful for advance scholars as well as beginning students. Kudos to Cian McMahon and Kathleen Costello-Sullivan for giving us this great work.

—Murray State University, emeritus

1. David N. Doyle, “Cohesion and Diversity in the Irish Diaspora,” *Irish Historical Studies* 31, no. 123 (May 1999): 411-434.

The Rise and Fall of Irish Mass Movements in the Irish Revolution

BY BRIAN HUGHES

PUBLISHED TOWARDS THE END of Ireland’s “Decade of Centenaries,” a state-sponsored program to mark key events in the period commonly known as the Irish Revolution (c. 1912–1923), this book arrived into a busy field. Inspired by a Decade of Centenaries conference on “Labour, Gender and Class in the Struggle for Irish Independence,” held at the University of Galway in

2019, the volume aims to highlight previously ignored mass movements from below that rose (and almost invariably fell again) across the island between 1917 and 1923. The editors suggest that even with significant expansion of an already substantive historiography the literature on the period remains “two dimensional at best” (15), focussed on small scale military engagements and high politics in the pursuit of national independence. This is not entirely fair, but the collection of thir-

teen essays gathered here, from a welcome mix of scholars, successfully point to the pervasive “spirit of revolution” of the book’s title.

The local and regional case studies that make up the volume are not organized in any immediately obvious way, and a division into thematic sections would have been welcome, but provide a pleasing range of complementary and overlapping perspectives. The county has remained a dominant unit of analysis in

scholarship on this period, and remains a useful if limited means of engaging with source material and accounting for local conditions. This volume, however, helpfully highlights the ways in which inherently local activity could be contained within smaller communities, such as in Anne Boran’s study of miners and carters and their adversaries in the Castlecomer coalfield in Co. Kilkenny; and Moira Leydon’s chapter on agricultural laborers in Maugherow, Co. Sligo. Leydon,

indeed, considers events in Maugherow a “microcosm” of the revolution; the decline in militancy thereafter the zenith of a three-week strike at Lissadell in 1920 is certainly replicated elsewhere. In other cases, action could transcend county boundaries, as in Terry Dunne’s examination of the mobilization of farm workers in what he describes as the “east central lowland” of Counties Dublin, Meath, and Kildare. Brian Hanley brings a transnational perspective in an impressive study of the previously neglected Q Company of the Irish Republican Army’s Dublin Brigade, involved in the smuggling of arms, and maritime workers who participated in republican activity and strikes connected to the movement. Focussing on two ports of particular importance to the Irish diaspora, Liverpool and New York, Hanley makes a valuable contribution in pointing to the ports themselves as distinctive sites of revolution: rough, cosmopolitan, and working class and in contrast to the “republican movement’s efforts to present a respectable image in Ireland” (118).

Consecutive essays by Kieran McNulty and Theresa Moriarty add to the now substantive literature on women’s activism in this period in their respective examinations of Kerry activists and women at the Irish Trade Union Congress. In just these two case studies we can see the range and dynamism of women’s engagement with politics, militarism, and trade unionism, as well as the limits and frustrations that contemporary societal norms could bring.

If some case studies stretch the definition of “mass participation” as far as it might reasonably go, we are introduced here to a range of individuals and organizations that are not well-known, if at all, outside of local history and memory and fought their own revolutions over work, land, and resources. McNulty and Moriarty offer recognition to less familiar women, while Mary Forrest highlights the little-known United Irish Plot-holders’ Union. Established in Dublin in 1917, fixity of tenure and an allotment act were central demands—with the latter eventually achieved in the form of the Acquisition of Land (Allotments) Act, 1926. The union had some prominent supporters, such as MPs

William Field and Alfie Byrne, and councillor Sarah Cecilia Harrison, and not insignificant press interest, and is ultimately a positive story as Forrest describes it, with the (overwhelmingly male) plot holders obtaining better conditions for those looking to grow vegetables to sustain their families. Jim Larkin and the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union do not lack for attention from historians, but with Gerry Watts’s essay, we get a fresh perspective as the author moves the focus away from Larkin as a “determining agent” in events and probes “other impulses” that influenced the split in the trade union movement that followed Larkin’s return to Dublin in 1923.

**JOHN CUNNINGHAM
AND TERRY DUNNE, EDITORS.**

*SPIRIT OF REVOLUTION: IRELAND FROM BELOW,
1917-1923*
FOUR COURTS PRESS, 2024. €22.45

The perennial challenge with an edited collection—and not least one made up of a relatively large number of short chapters—is to make it more than the sum of its parts. A next step in studying Ireland’s “revolution from below,” would take some of the overarching themes and ideas raised in what remain very locally-focussed studies and to think a little more about what they say about the revolution nationally (and internationally). As the editors note, the organization and individuals that appear in the volume ended the period “defeated and demoralized” (9), and the failures—or limited or short-term successes—that ultimately emerge from the volume are striking, if not especially surprising. In his chapter on the Workers’ Union and Belfast Labour Party, Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh describes how in the period between the closing stages of the Great War and the onset of a postwar economic slump, “a wave of working-class militancy washed over Ulster, raising the temporary, tantalizing hope of an anti-sectarian, egalitarian and democratic future, before crashing on the jagged reality of loyalist counter-revolution and economic depression” (197). In this case, the Ulster Unionist Labour Association played a decisive part in loyalist terror that

ultimately shattered the Belfast Labour Party, which had drawn Protestant working-class support in 1920 municipal elections. There are variations of this evident throughout the volume.

The conservative “counter-revolution,” the domineering influence of the Catholic Church in the twenty-six counties, and its long and often destructive legacy is firmly acknowledged in the historiography of post-partition Ireland. Liam Alex Heffron draws on a wide range of sources well-known to historians of the period, as well as the more recently available and vast Military Service Pensions Collection (as well as his own interviews with locally-connected individuals with family memories), in his study of the Irish Republican Army and Cumann na mBan in Moygownagh, Co. Mayo. His work ultimately points to an “innate conservatism” (177) in the republicans he has profiled. Boran concludes that independence did little to materially improve the lives of miners and farm laborers of Castlecomer, her own father included. Work, however, remains to be done to fully understand who exactly did benefit, and how and why, with case studies like these providing an important starting point.

As with Forrest, Johnny Burke notes some success emanating from agrarian agitation in Co. Galway in spring 1920, pointing out that it contributed to land redistribution and fear of its spread in the longer term “acted as an expedient to effective land legislation in the Irish Free State” (44). Importantly, across the volume contributors assess demands beyond agricultural holdings and the quality and the availability of housing for both rural and urban workers is revealed as a common (depressingly familiar) source of discontent. The goal of town tenant agitators in Galway city in 1922 was simple enough: “the provision of houses for “everyone in need of them” (62). Housing is similarly an issue in Dunne’s essay. While Labourers Acts had earlier attempted to deal with rural housing, and urban housing was much more likely to be wholly substandard, accommodation remained an issue for some rural laborers. As Dunne outlines, improvements in housing conditions were a focus of the Irish Transport and General Workers’ Union in Co. Dublin in

1913. Six years later, in Athy, Co. Kildare, workers were making a comparable demand that all laborers supplied with council housing would also be allocated a four-acre plot, enough to grow some vegetables, keep poultry, and also a cow for a “sup of milk.” This, for Dunne, was not about “harkening after an idealized peasant past” (86) but a way of expanding the “social wage” and the standard of living for workers. Local studies like these are particularly valuable in probing the motivations of agitators and complicating simple explanations. Burke demonstrates that agitation in Co. Galway was not simply about land confiscation, as workers were locals to purchase land they believed they were entitled to.

Cunningham considers the “four-day-wonder” in Galway in May 1922, where followers of the Town Tenants’ League marched on the town hall, in the context of the series of soviets that rose and fell in Ireland after 1917. Both its organizers and its detractors embraced the term, which is perhaps most famously connected in an Irish context with the April 1919 Limerick soviet. Dominic Haugh also moves beyond the Limerick example in his analysis of the “Munster soviets” that followed, comprising the seizure by workers of a series of premises owned by the Cleeve family in April 1922 (an earlier soviet at Bruree was also in a Cleeve property). Haugh argues that these soviets had “serious revolutionary intent” (152), and his conclusion that the action was ultimately too fragmented to be effective is relevant elsewhere in the cases covered in the book.

That this reader was left seeking a little more than might tie all of the above together a little more meaningfully ultimately speaks to the importance of the content and individual perspectives brought to the fore by the contributors. This is a stimulating and very welcome addition to the literature and deserves a wide readership long after the end of the Decade of Centenaries. It is also handsomely produced—with a wonderful Harry Kernoff watercolor on the front cover—as a very affordable paperback by Four Courts Press.

—Mary Immaculate College

Administration and Management of Nineteenth-Century Ireland

BY PAULINE COLLOMBIER

AS ITS INTRIGUING title suggests, *Power and Powerlessness in Union Ireland. Life in a Palliative State* is an original and multifaceted study offering fresh insight into questions that have long preoccupied historians of Ireland—notably how Ireland was governed, administered and managed in the nineteenth century; how the Irish people fared during the same period; not to forget the history of the Irish diaspora. However, this is not another book about British and Irish politicians and their views about Ireland and Irish issues; nor is it a survey of policies implemented in Ireland. The metaphor of “palliative care” is introduced first to show that British policy oscillated between containing and controlling a people regarded as potentially dangerous and ungovernable and attempting remedies so as to mitigate rather than solve Irish difficulties. But it serves also to present Anglo-Irish relations as ones which involved caregivers and patients—in other

words, people in charge of government and representing the state, and people who were governed and were impacted by policies, decisions as well as cultural and racial prejudice. The book’s ambition is therefore to examine three questions tied together: how Ireland was governed between 1801 and 1922, who governed it, and what it meant for the people below.

CIARAN O’NEILL.
*POWER AND POWERLESSNESS IN UNION
IRELAND. LIFE IN A PALLIATIVE STATE.*
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2024. \$130.

These interlocking topics are examined in eight successive chapters. The first three chapters explore how the state functioned, who incarnated it and where. Chapter 1 highlights that, while state formation in Ireland resulted from colonial subjugation, transformations such as the creation of Poor Law unions, electoral reforms and, finally, local

government reform, allowed for greater democracy as they reduced the power wielded by the landed class. However, Ireland was mostly administered from London and few Irish people had access to high office so the island’s inferior and unequal status remained. Chapter 2 delves deeper into the state apparatus both in London and Dublin and reviews the different roles played by the Lord Lieutenant, the Chief Secretary, the Under Secretary and by the different sites where Irish issues were managed: the Irish Office in London, Dublin Castle, and the Custom House in Dublin (which housed the Revenue Commissioners, the Board of Public Works, the Poor Law Commission and the Local Government Board). Thanks to his clear and precise descriptions of the various functions assumed by the different local courts and various local figures of power (Lord Lieutenant of the county, High Sheriff, Deputy Lieutenant, Justice of the Peace, etc.) and his minute overview of the upper levels of power, O’Neill provides lecturers and students with

pages that are most useful to gain an understanding of the complex institutional structure that oversaw Irish matters on both sides of the Irish Channel.

Chapter 3 focuses on architecture as well as infrastructures, showing how governing Ireland also meant controlling and taming it which, in turn, involved not only the imposition of coercion but also the building of military barracks and outposts, roads, canals, railways and the implementation of communication systems. A fourth chapter shifts to the issue of stereotypes and shows that scientific surveys and ethnographic enquiries dealing with Ireland and the Irish (such as the Ordnance Survey and the studies conducted by the Dublin Statistical Society and the Dublin Anthropometric Laboratory) helped the state assert its power and justify its choice of merely palliative policies since they served to confirm that the Irish were utterly different and inferior. A particularly thought-provoking point made here concerns the involvement of Irish academic and scientists in these

ethnological surveys: O'Neill interestingly argues that the Irish were "complicit in their own racialization and compartmentalization" (127) and contributed to exoticize other indigenous populations so as to justify their subjugation.

Chapters 5 to 8 examine different categories of Irish people, whose connection to power was not quite the same. With its focus on the prison system and its governance, chapter 5 discusses Irish convicts and prisoners and demonstrates that the penal system used in Ireland was "utterly colonial" (160) and transformed convicts and inmates into "productive prisoners" (151-59) through the use of prison labor. Chapter 6 broaches the subject of the Irish landed elites: it first investigates their absence from Ireland and its perception from the point of view of the tenants to move on rather cleverly to the subject of their presence and visibility outside of Ireland—in London but also in the European spa resorts and coastal towns that became popular in the nineteenth century (Baden-Baden, Biarritz, Pau). Chapter 7 returns to the subject of stereotypes to debate the issue of Irish disloyalty and rebelliousness. It interestingly shows that the Irish themselves projected these stereotypes onto minority groups within Ireland—the Irish travelers and the Irish suffragists—thereby creating a "spectrum of ungovernability" and a "hierarchy of power" (200). Chapter 8 broadens the scope of the study to include the Irish diaspora and revisits how this diaspora was perceived: the Fenian threat from abroad and the myth of the Irish "social bandit" (214-18) are first examined, followed by the question of how emigration facilitated access to land and wealth for both male and female immigrants, with some of that wealth trickling back to Ireland thanks to remittances. A recurrent point is that the Irish may have been marginalized in host countries (and Irish female migrants even more so than their male counterparts), but that they also quite significantly contributed to colonization (202, 218,

228).

While it is based on a wide-ranging knowledge of recent and less recent Irish historiography (the bibliography from pages

Governing Ireland meant controlling and taming infrastructure, which, in turn, involved not only the imposition of coercion but also the building of military barracks and outposts, roads, canals, railways and the implementation of communication systems.

239-258 is substantial), the book aims at pushing current historical research even further and offers many new avenues of thought and work. Topics, which one rarely reads about with regards to nineteenth century Ireland, are explored—such as the perceptions of the Irish travellers or *mincéirí* and their traditions (188-96); the studies in racial science and salvage ethnography conducted by the Dublin Anthropometric Laboratory (1891-99) or by Irish woman Daisy Bates in Australia (124-31); or the presence of Irish absentees in spa and seaside resorts in France and all across Europe (172-79). The current reviewer, who grew up in Pau, the "*ville anglaise*," discovered with great interest and delight how it used to attract many Irish landlords and aristocrats!

O'Neill further invites us to read Irish history through a new lens by adopting as much as possible a transnational approach: Anglo-Irish relations are not studied in isolation; the system of government is compared to other European models (notably the Habsburg Empire, pages 29, 31, 116); the presence of the Irish people abroad and their impact, especially in the settler colonies, is also examined (172-79; 201-28). This allows to stress that the Irish case was not neces-

sarily unique and it helps to reappraise the situation of Ireland in the nineteenth century. This use of a broad scale to look at the Irish case is coherent with O'Neill's persistent

effort to situate his work in relation to other recent developments in Irish history and studies. An example illustrating this welcome approach is the way the case of women is regularly evoked; yet, while the struggle of Irish suffragists shows that women were part of several groups whose claims to power were dismissed as illegitimate because going against the accepted social norms, the roles played by other women (the First Lady of Ireland pages 59-60; Daisy Bates pages 129-31; Irish female migrants pages 222-27) are also invoked to emphasize female agency and women's participation in the assertion of power and control

The fact that O'Neill chose to frame his work within a period which he identifies as "Union Ireland" stems from a desire to go against old myths of Irish subjugation, resistance and resilience that have pervaded public as well as historical discourse, and to acknowledge the "complicity or responsibility" that the Irish themselves had for "[their] own governance between 1801 and 1922" (9). Always careful to unravel the complexities of Ireland's position within the Union and the British empire, O'Neill fully acknowledges that Ireland was a colony and that the Irish people were stereotyped as prone to treach-

ery, poverty and violent crime. Yet he also examines how a number of Irish people "collaborated, enabled and in many cases operationalized government in Ireland" to the point that, in his view, "all government in Ireland was [not] an imposition from Britain or by British people, [...] rather something that was co-created, used, and managed by Irish statesmen, civil servants, and subjects." (9) This is made clearer when he examines the important use of petitions by the Irish, as well as the people and institutions in charge of local power and the various Irish sites of government and their staff (chapters 1 & 2).

O'Neill also attempts to go beyond the idea that Irish emigration led to the formation of a diaspora that was either perceived as a threat (by the British) or as a source of economic and political support (by the Irish at home). Instead of being satisfied with such a dichotomy, he invites us to also consider the Irish as active participants in settler colonialism, since they were as involved as other British and European people in land-grabbing, and therefore contributed as much as anyone else to marginalize the local indigenous populations. This undeniably challenges established paradigms, as it shows that the Irish were not simply victims of oppression and colonial power, who resisted against British misrule, but also active perpetrators of strategies of control and dispossession, which allowed for the domination of others. Thus, while O'Neill aptly borrows, in his first chapter, the concept of coloniality coined by Aníbal Quijano to demonstrate that Ireland was governed from London through a system that remained colonial in its essence, he also highlights the existence of a complex "hierarchy or matrix of power" (200), whereby the Irish treated other outgroups as outcasts, either within Ireland or in the context of the British colonies.

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Layers and Perspectives of Religious Faith in Ireland

BY SOPHIE COOPER

IN THIS IMPRESSIVE BODY of work, Gladys Ganiel and Andrew Holmes bring together thirty-six contributors to help us better understand the layers and perspectives of religious faith, and lack thereof, in Ireland from 1800 to the present. Reflecting the reality that most religious institutions in Ireland are organized on an all-island basis, while operating in differing contexts, this edited collection is securely based in both political jurisdictions. The 32 chapters are organized into three sections focussing on religion, politics, and society in (I) 1800-1922, (II) 1922-1968, and (III) 1968-2023. While acknowledging early on that secularization is on the rise in Ireland, north and south, the editors make the argument that, despite the changes in how it looks, "religion remains significant in society, politics, and everyday life" (1).

There are number of themes which emerge across this handbook. The editors highlight cross-cutting themes of division and violence; processes of secularization; increased emphasis on everyday religious practices; the contributions of women to religious life; issues relating to gender and sexuality; the island's long-standing but often unnoticed

religious diversity; and similarities and differences between north and south. At the start of each section, authors explore more general trends across politics, society, and religion, particularly important as partition changed the contexts within which religion in Ireland and Northern Ireland operated, are remembered, and still influence society, education, and the law. Similarly, some of the more contentious terms and ideas that imbue the discussion of religion and/or Irish society are given the space to be debated. Duncan Morrow and Gladys Ganiel (chapters 19 and 24), for example, dig into the scholarly debates surrounding the term "sectarianism" and "secularization." Sarah Roddy (chapter 3) addresses one of the biggest historiographical interventions in Irish religious and social history with her consideration of Emmet Larkin's "devotional revolution," while Juliana Adelman and Stuart Mathieson (chapter 6) consider some of the ways that Irish religious belief was framed in relation, and often in opposition, to science and rationalism before and after Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859). These debates surrounding religious faith and perceived objectivity still color many discussions in society, politics, and universities.

GLADYS GANIEL AND
ANDREW R. HOLMES, EDITORS.

THE OXFORD HANDBOOK OF RELIGION IN
MODERN IRELAND
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2024. £130.

This is another of the major themes of this handbook: the enduring legacies of widespread religious faith and adherence in our societies and institutional structures. Authors also tangle with the far-reaching impacts of religious development in Ireland. Adelman and Mathieson note that many discussions regarding science and faith took place within the context of colonialism, while Roddy highlights the huge amount of missionary activity which came out of Ireland from the nineteenth century. John Wolffe (chapter 4) similarly explores the missionary activities of Protestants of different denominations, sometimes as distinct denominations and at other times as early ecumenical activity. This focus on missionary activity is taken up in later chapters, particularly in Ian D'Alton's chapter (13) on Protestant identity in the South, Andrew Holmes's chapter (14) on Protestant religion in Northern Ireland to 1980, which often had a strong missionary and evangelizing strand, and Robert Savage's chapter

(18) on religion and broadcasting in the two Irelands. Savage, for example, highlights the ways that television became an instrument of ecumenism with the Catholic Communications Centre (opened in Dublin in 1967) developing training for Catholic and Protestant clerics and missionaries on how television could enhance their work outside of Ireland.

Reverend J.S. Sheehy's 1922 assertion that "a nation was what women made of it" (Lindsey Earner-Byrne, chapter 17) can be seen throughout a number of chapters: the ways that women supported and subverted the will of politicians and religious leaders are explored by, for example, Sarah Roddy (chapter 3), Andrew Sneddon (chapter 5), Myrtle Hill (chapter 8), Patricia Kiernan and L. Philip Barnes (chapters 15 & 16), Tom Inglis (chapter 21), Margaret Scull (chapter 26), Maria Power (chapter 27). This democratizing of who shapes religious activity reflects an important shift in how scholars approach questions of religion, especially in historically patriarchal societies. I was particularly gladdened to see women religious named and acknowledged across multiple chapters—situating them not just as participants in abuse scandals and carceral institutions, but also agents of change and progress,

particularly in terms of peace building in the North. Margaret Scull and Maria Power both highlight the important ways that “Christian realism” encouraged peacebuilders from across religious denominations to engage with each other and with congregates, paramilitaries and government representatives.

In addition to the themes noted by the editors, there are others which stood out. The materiality of religion presents important opportunities to consider alternative sources and broaden the understanding of how people engage, and show adherence, to their faith. Sarah Roddy puts the material shift at the forefront of her chapter on the devotional revolution, noting persuasively that “We cannot simply take the word of those charged with doing the transforming (i.e. the clergy and other religious) that [religious change] happened” (43). Instead, we can look to, for example, church building and devotional objects. Norman Vance (chapter 7) draws out the literary legacy of religion during the nineteenth century, again moving the focus of how religion was understood and experienced into the hands of the laity. Louise Fuller (chapter 11) continues some of these themes in her exploration of Irish Catholic culture before and after Vatican II.

Just as Roddy highlights the importance of moving our gaze from “priests and people” to “people and priests” (43)—a theme also explored by Andrew Sneddon in his consideration of witchcraft—Fuller focuses on how the Catholic Church responded to the shift in emphasis from bishops and priests as rulers

over their flock to “servants of their brethren,” the laity. The experiences of “being Catholic” in Ireland and Northern Ireland from the twentieth century, at a political and individual level, are further explored by Marianne Elliott and Tom Inglis (chapters 12 and 21). The shift during the 1960s, examined by Fuller, was accompanied by new routes for the laity to critique and, at times, ridicule those who had formerly been understood as their betters (chapter 18). The chips in the Catholic hierarchy’s armour which began in the 1960s and escalated with the arrival of television were almost irrevocably broken with the uncovering of multiple institutional abuses. James Gallen (chapter 22) explores the abuse crises in the Irish Christian churches. While these, inevitably, focus on those enacted by the Catholic Church—north and south—Gallen also notes the culpability of those in Protestant settings. The long-term impact of these crises on adherence to organized religion are explored in Malcolm Macourt and Hugh Turpin’s chapters (20 and 32) on the rise of “No Religion.”

Throughout this handbook, my attention was drawn to the ways that the spatial enabled different, and often—by design—unseen, interactions between religious actors. As Morrow and Ganiel note, for those living through the so-called “Troubles,” churches were “at the core of collective experiences of anxiety, grief, and conflict” (422). Whether it be the role of Clonard Monastery, Quaker House, or even a semi-detached house on a

peace line in facilitating private discussions between paramilitaries and governments, or representatives of different faith groups (highlighted by Scull and Power in chapters 26 and 27); or the nation building and boundary laying of a “Catholic” Irish State (chapter 9), a “Protestant state” of Northern Ireland (chapter 10), or the fundamentalism of Paisleyism (chapter 25); or even the decoration of church interiors in the nineteenth century, the ways that space are bordered, boundaried, or made porous by those who use them are made a little more visible throughout this handbook. This also highlights one of the main interventions of this book in our understanding of religion in modern Ireland: that those who were loudest and given the biggest platform in a religion—be it the cardinals, bishops, faith leaders, or politicians—were not necessarily the ones who were doing the most important work. This handbook emphasizes the importance of moving to look at the radicals, the laity, and the ones on the front lines who facilitated everyday interactions with religion and religious spaces. These were people, often flawed and by no means perfect, who have had long lasting influences on the lives of others within and outwith the official limits of organized religion.

The focus of this book is primarily on Christian religion and religious activity. While this is unsurprising based on Ireland’s history and present, it is noticeable that there are two chapters dedicated to paganism (witchcraft in Andrew Sneddon’s chapter and

paganism in Jenny Butler’s), and one to New Religious Movements (Peter Mulholland and Carles Salazar). Minority religions are only the subject of one. Vladimir Kmec is given the mammoth job of summarizing all minority religions into chapter 30 and does this primarily through migration into Ireland since the 1990s. While important, this does leave quite a gap in the histories of non-Christian religious activity in Ireland, particularly in relation to Judaism, while tying non-Christian activity inherently with migrant communities.

Reviewing a survey handbook with such a wide variety of chapters and subjects is a difficult task—but also presents opportunities. These chapters are designed to be read in tandem *or* separately. Individually, they would make for excellent teaching aids and, particularly useful for this, each chapter has a bibliography *and* a short, suggested reading list for those new to the subject to take as a starting point for future research. There are valuable tables of figures included across the chapters, allowing a vast range of quantitative and qualitative information to be accessed in one book. Read as a coherent collection, this handbook does an excellent job in drawing out similarities across distinct jurisdictions, religions, hierarchies, and laities while allowing space to delve into specific contexts and the diversity of thoughts and actions which exist within Christian religions so often falsely binaried as “Catholic” and “Protestant.” •

—Queen’s University Belfast

Mining the Three-County Loyalists

BY CONNAL PARR

BOOKS ON ULSTER LOYALISM are not fashionable in Irish and Irish-American academia. Most scholars ignore the subject completely, while the group that addresses them tend to be newly-minted PhDs from Queen’s University Belfast and the University of Ulster, who finish their postgraduate work and usually abandon academia completely; as if aware the subject, and their work on it, holds no future. Studies of Irish Protestantism, meanwhile, are monopolized by a few names who are decidedly sure that we only ever see the crumbling Big House, and that Protestants have essentially got a pretty brilliant deal in the south of Ireland since 1921. Sensationalist journalism makes up these rather sad numbers and completes the public’s perception of Ulster Loyalism, which emerges by the end on the same imaginary level as the gangsterism of the northside of Dublin (minus the drug-trafficked internationalism).

EDWARD BURKE.

ULSTER’S LOST COUNTIES: LOYALISM AND PARAMILITARISM SINCE 1920

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2024. \$130.

This makes *Ulster’s Lost Counties* all the richer and more important. Edward Burke’s critical argument is that “Three County Loyalists” of Donegal, Cavan, and Monaghan were to play a significant role in the militant politics of Ireland after Partition. On this he succeeds handsomely. Perhaps more controversially, though no less inaccurately, Burke argues that Loyalist violence (“or terrorism”) enjoyed “considerable success” (4)—as in,

the base aims and aspirations of Loyalists were furthered by the violence they were willing to inflict. This rather shatters old canards from scholars such as Steve Bruce, who some years ago wrote that Loyalists were drawn from the “least competent sections of their population” (*The Red Hand*, 1992, 272). While the Ulster Volunteer Force has been known for its particular viciousness, the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) emerges here, prior to the later pressure it enacted on the Republican movement in the early-1990s, as brutally proficient in its targeting of IRA volunteers active in the border counties. Such deadly exploits had the desired effect of the Irish state securing its border. Nonetheless, as is known, this led not only to a bitter sectarian animosity between many Catholics and Protestants in border areas; it also crystallized in irreversible contempt for British security forces who had little willingness to clamp down on Loyalist militants in the same territories.

This book is one of the first to explore, in an authentic historical way, themes of generational trauma hitherto left to academics of Psychology. One of Burke’s central theses is that the violence of the 1910s and 1920s rears around again in the 1970s and 1980s, kept alive by the memories passed on by—and through—families who experienced physical force in those early decades of the twentieth century: “memories of the violence experienced by one generation of Protestants in the three counties entrenched a sense of separation from the new Irish state on the part of subsequent generations. Intergenerational grievance and inter-communal distance kept loyalism alive and set the conditions for militancy and revenge in the future” (2). This was to be felt and enacted on a profound,

often deadly, level from 1969 onwards.

For obvious reasons, Protestants in contested border areas faced a bitterness and level of brutality and fear unmatched by anywhere in Ireland, save for parts of Belfast. However, even here, there are important connections, for this was where the families of many Three County Loyalists upped and left to. In much the same way as areas such as the Shankill diffused Labour politics to the new estates of Rathcoole, springing up round the outskirts of Belfast in the 1960s, so Three County Loyalists gave militant Loyalists in Northern Ireland’s capital their own inimitable taste of the border frontier. One of Burke’s most acute observations is that areas like the Shankill, in west Belfast, often received those “migrant loyalists” (199) who had struggled and fought in Ulster’s Lost Counties—or at least been profoundly connected to them by family and blood.

The portraits of Unionist representatives of this background lend credibility to Burke’s case. Take Jim Kilfedder (1928–1995), best known as MP for West Belfast (1964–66) and later North Antrim (1970–95). Kilfedder was born in Kinlough with family hailing this part of North Leitrim, where they were established. Kilfedder was equally if not more proud of his mother’s Donegal Loyalist connections, while his subsequent upbringing in Fermanagh added further border salt. He is proof of Burke’s case because Kilfedder would go on to impact on the political culture of both Northern Ireland and the U.K. in striking ways. He was not one of the faceless Unionist MPs happy to sit idly in the old Stormont parliament while anti-Catholic discrimination mounted and segregation solidified. His contested background clearly shaped his politics and interactions, with fierce elec-

toral skullduggery, class-consciousness, and militancy accompanying his charismatic profile (which occasionally resonated with representatives across the political spectrum—more than one Irish republican built up a good rapport with him).

This Border County spirit is not limited to mavericks like Kilfedder. Burke shows how for nearly four decades Unionist voters in West Belfast “persistently selected candidates with strong link to the three counties, men who were close to loyalist labour and critical of the vested interests of ‘big house’ unionism” (199): men such as John Nixon, who represented Belfast Woodvale as an Independent Unionist MP in the Northern Ireland parliament from 1929 until his passing in 1949. (Burke has, incidentally, rather debunked a persistent historical narrative that Nixon was personally behind the McMahon family murders of March 1922 in a separate book released in the last year, the evocative *Ghosts of a Family*, Merrion Press).

Such Three County Loyalists-turned-Belfast representatives also include barrister and law lecturer Thomas Teevan (1927–1954), whose Unionist family came from Butlersbridge, Co. Cavan. Teevan was elected as the Ulster Unionist MP for West Belfast in 1951, having himself replaced the Reverend J.G. MacManaway, a former Monaghan clergyman (and proud Three County Loyalist), as the Unionist candidate. Even the father of Northern Ireland parliament MP for Belfast Shankill Tommy Henderson, a colorful legend in Belfast’s folk memory, hailed from County Monaghan. Henderson Sr., John, was well-known in Orange circles, for his drum-making, and amid the clatter of the shipyards, while the Henderson family took in boarders from Monaghan who had made

their way to Belfast; exactly as they had done. In the summer of 1931, Henderson referred to the treatment of Three County Loyalists as the “greatest betrayal” of all (197). At least they could take solidaric comfort in Belfast-based Orange lodges such as the Loyal Sons of Donegal LOL 1301 and the County Monaghan True Blues LOL 1302, along with the County Cavan Defenders LOL 1327, based off no less than the heart of East Belfast on the Newtownards Road. There is certainly, most certainly, something in all of this.

Eras are usually compartmentalized by Irish historians as the “revolutionary” or later “Troubles.” Few scholars have thought or attempted to connect these eras, preferring to silo into a single decade frame of reference; as if Irish history exists in one minor epoch,

unconnected to what precedes or follows. Yet, Burke does give the Troubles specialists what they want too. By the time we get to the fifth chapter’s focus on the Vanguard movement, rather neglected (once more) by historians, we are entering the grim killing fields of the Troubles conflict. Exceptionally detailed new accounts of the killing of Monaghan Senator (and former TD) Billy Fox (270–84)—this time carried out by the IRA—are accompanied by well-crafted overviews of lesser-known militants like Andy Robinson, active in West Ulster, who ended up in Scotland.

One later profile of note was Ernest “Ernie” Baird (1930–2003). Baird lacked Kilfedder’s populist snap and adaptability, but he too played his part in helping down

political developments in Northern Ireland via his role in the Ulster Workers’ Council Strike of May 1974. Born in the village of Malin, County Donegal, on the Inishowen, the Bairds moved to Dundonald in East Belfast where his Ulster Loyalist convictions marinated. Vanguard proved a political home, though Burke reveals that Baird was actually related to Bertie Boggs, a Fine Gael candidate in Donegal in the Irish general election of 1969. Another political ally to Baird was Cavan-born businessman S.D. Kells (who beady-eyed enthusiasts of dapper clothing will know has an excellent men’s tailors to this day in Bedford Street, bang in the center of Belfast).

Baird drew emotively on his Donegal connections to warn Unionists of the united

Ireland bogeyman that apparently awaited them. Though he tried, like many Unionists, to harness the power of the UWC Strike, he typically overplayed his hand—alongside Ian Paisley—by trying to repeat the 1974 stoppage three years later. He never quite recovered from the failure of the 1977 action and left politics the following decade, always retaining the Lost/Three County predicament of feeling caught between feelings of abandonment by London and encroaching political influence from Dublin.

This enormously impressive and bold book, from one of Ireland’s finest historians, will be mined by scholars and readers for years to come.

—Northumbria University

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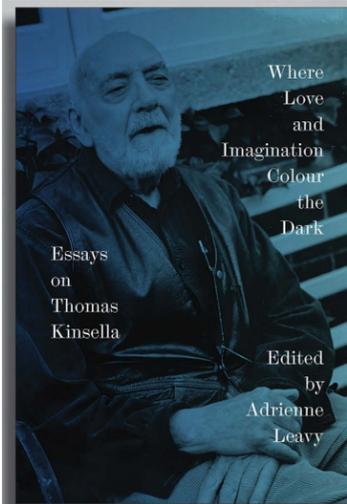
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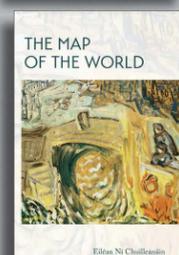
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