

TIMES CHANGE

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Aosdána - Haughey's Conceit

Creating an Egalitarian Society • Racism and the Media • Third Way or No Way

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email: fringe@eircom.ie
www.fringefest.com

2 - 14 October

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www.corkfilmfest.org

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www.tcd.ie/OWC/writing/writing.html

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Former taoiseach Charles Haughey p23

Editor

Paddy Gillan

Committee

Triona Dooney
Alexandra Klemm
Deirdre O'Connell
Emer O'Sullivan
Lucy Pugh

Design

Kieran Doyle O'Brien

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Curbing currency speculation

Speculation in stock markets has reached spectacular levels. The abandonment in 1971 of the Bretton Woods pegged currency exchange system precipitated a considerable increase in the cross-border exchanges of currencies. 1,500 billion dollars are exchanged daily compared to only 70 billion thirty years ago. Most of these transactions involve no real exchange of goods but are driven only by the desire for immediate and often massive profits.

This evolution is particularly harmful to humanity because it is a major cause of the instability of the currency system which leads to serious and contagious economic crises. These crises, like those in Mexico (1994), Southeast Asia (1997), Russia (1998), and Brazil (1999), destroy years of productive labour almost overnight. Nations are forced to buy investors' confidence by granting concessions to attract capital, often at the expense of workers, citizens and the environment.

Consequently, freely circulating and unregulated capital destabilises democracy. This is why regulatory mechanisms are necessary. One such mechanism is the Tobin Tax, named after the American Nobel prize winner. James Tobin proposed in 1978 to tax, at a low rate, all the transactions on the currency markets in order to discourage speculation and, at the same time, provide the international community with resources. With a rate of 0.05 per cent the Tobin Tax is estimated to bring in more than 100 billion dollars per year, which could be utilised for currency stabilisation, economic development, emergency, or other national and international crises.

Throughout the world, numerous civil society and non-governmental organisations, linked with trade unions, social, ecumenical and environmental movements are joining forces to request that their governments support multilateral co-operation in the enactment of Tobin-style (currency transaction) taxes.

The Finnish government took the initiative in April when it stated in its government declaration: 'Transparency in international organisations must be increased and their ability to respond to the instability arising from free movement of capital and the challenges of globalisation must be strengthened. In this connection, the introduction of comprehensive international systems aimed at countering disturbances caused, for example, by short-term speculative capital movements must be addressed and clarified.' The Canadian Parliament has voted in favour of a Tobin-type tax; in the United Kingdom a House of Commons Early Day Motion on the Tobin Tax attracted over 100 signatures from members of six parties; and in the European Parliament a motion to study concrete conditions for its introduction was lost by a margin of only four votes (229 to 225).

A comprehensive Tobin Tax resolution was introduced to the United States Congress and, also in the US, a number of campaigning groups, trade unions, and lobbying organisations have formed the Tax Speculation Action Network. In Brazil a Parliamentary Front for the Tobin Tax has been launched and, in German-speaking countries, 100 groups have come together

to call for the implementation of an international Tobin Tax and the abolition of off-shore banking centres. Attac, an organisation that promotes the Tobin Tax, is organised across Europe (including Ireland) and is particularly strong in France where it has 40,000 members. In June the first Interparliamentary Meeting on the Tobin Tax was held in the European Parliament.

Why then, if the Tobin Tax is such a good idea, has it not been put into practice? Is it because it is simply pie in the sky? It is usually dismissed on the grounds of either technical/administrative difficulties or the lack of universal support. These arguments were echoed in the reply by the Minister for Foreign Affairs to a Dáil question on 15 June when he said: 'To become a reality, a Tobin tax would require close cooperation on a global scale. It would, for example, have to be introduced simultaneously in all major economies to avoid the flight of capital to a jurisdiction which did not enforce the tax. A unilateral application of the tax would carry obvious risks for the economy of the country in question. In Ireland's case the attitude of our Community partners, particularly those committed to EMU, would be crucial. At a minimum, for any such tax to operate effectively, all EU members would have to agree. I am not aware of such a consensus at present in the Community.' The Tobin Tax merits more serious consideration than that indicated by Mr Cowen. Unfortunately, very little research has been carried out on its practicalities - at any rate, very little that is in the public domain. Authoritative and impartial analysis of the proposal is warranted so that the public can judge it on its merits.

Apart from the Tobin Tax other means for achieving more stability in the international financial markets need to be developed and applied. In this context, the experiences of countries such as Chile and Malaysia in the use of unilateral measures to effect currency controls while remaining within the framework of the multilateral trade and payments regime should also be taken account of, as should the possibilities of the cross-border capital tax.

Powerful interests will seek to maintain the international financial status quo. But the public interest should have primacy over private profits and the needs of development should take precedence over international speculation. Ireland's interests were not particularly well served in the Cayman Islands and the recent agreement by EU Member States on the need to eliminate tax havens is to be welcomed. Equal taxation is now an EU objective and banking secrecy should not be permitted to stand in its way. Other measures along similar lines would enjoy wide popular support and enhance the prospects for economic justice.

Likewise, the adoption of the Tobin Tax would underline the need for international public regulation to tackle the instability of capital markets. It would send out a powerful message on the need to control financial markets. And it would prompt the international community to co-operate in devising a democratic and stable financial monetary system.

Creating an Egalitarian Society: Issues of (Re)distribution, Recognition and Representation

Ireland is faced with a unique and exciting set of opportunities. Our affluence has afforded us political options which were unthinkable 20 years ago; the unfolding peace process in Northern Ireland has created a climate of hope and political stability which is unprecedented historically. We have the opportunity to create a new inclusive society, to realise a vision should we have the political will to do so. And it is my view that the best type of society to live in is an egalitarian one, a society which is characterised not only by formal equality before the law, but one in which there is substantive economic, social, cultural and political equality.

The realisation of an effectively inclusive society is not a simple project; it is a multifaceted and politically challenging one. Not only are the challenges internal within a given state, they are also external.¹ In this short paper, it is not possible to deal with the host of issues posed by globalisation. I will focus on some of the major challenges that have to be addressed if we are to create an egalitarian society in Ireland.

The terms of the debate: time for a change

To date, the debates about equality and social justice has been divided between those who define the problem primarily as a civil and political project and those who see it as an economic project. The former group have focused much of their political attention on attaining recognition for civil and political liberties for various groups and persons (disabled people, gays and lesbians, ethnic minorities etc.) while the latter have focused on economic issues and class politics. Yet, in the realisation of an egalitarian society, the equality agenda has to be promoted across all spheres of social action; it is not simply a civil and political project, nor is it exclusively an economic project. While class politics are still highly salient and class inequalities are pressing concerns (although they are now sanitised by languages of consensualism and consumerism, Lynch, 1999), they are not

always the only, nor the most vital political consideration for various groups. Class cannot operate as an exclusive organising symbol for the diverse political concerns which characterise marginalised (or mainstream) groups in our society today (Phillips, 1995: 42).

A second feature of the equality and social justice debates in Ireland is that they have been dominated by neo-liberal rather than radical thinking. (This is not to deny the existence of socialist, feminist or Marxist traditions, merely to note their lack of influence) Within the neo-liberal tradition, equality is generally defined in terms of the

We have already seen evidence of how the political backlash against women has taken hold in public debate

provision of equal rights to participate in economic, social, political and cultural life, where such rights are construed as the absence of legal and institutionalised barriers to entry and participation in a given institution or system. This view is linked to the idea of *formal equality of opportunity*, that is to say the idea that no one should be prevented from entering education, employment, politics, the law etc., or from advancing from one level of participation to another on the grounds of gender, race, religion, ethnic identity, disability, sexual orientation or any other irrelevant characteristic. The belief is that advancement within such institutions and systems should be based on merit. The liberal view of equality also adheres to the principle of non-discrimination in relation to access to, and participation in, public and private ser-

vices.

While the promotion of equal formal rights and opportunities through legislation and the removal of legal and quasi-legal barriers to access and advancement in various institutions do guarantee basic rights and eliminates forms of discrimination against particular target groups and individuals, it is but a first step in the promotion of equality in society. Such legal provisions cannot, by their very nature, promote more substantive and robust forms of equality, as they do not address deep structural and institutional inequalities across cultural, economic and political spheres. Thus, while non-discrimination provisions are the legal floors without which equality housing cannot be built; there are serious limits to what such provisions can achieve. At best they can prohibit the grosser forms of discrimination. Indeed all too often gross discriminations can continue until a given party takes a case through the courts, and here one is again dependent on the actions of a given individual. Many of those against whom discrimination continues to be practised have neither the emotional nor the financial resources to vindicate their rights.²

Even when the equality debate in Ireland moves beyond non-discrimination, much of the concern is about distributing inequalities fairly across social groups not eliminating the hierarchies of wealth, income, power and privilege which stratify our society in the first instance. It is about remedial rather than radical measures, or what Fraser (1995, 1997) has termed affirmative as opposed to transformative strategies. That is to say, at best there is an argument for equality of participation or outcome for various target groups where equal outcomes are measured in terms of a *proportionality test*. Equality is deemed to have been attained when the proportion of a given marginalised group attaining privileges (such as the proportion of working class students in higher education, or the proportion of disabled

people in employment, or women attaining senior management positions) rises relative to their prior rate of participation or success. Inequality is seen to be reduced if the relativities change. This model of equality poses a number of problems. To begin with it actually reinforces deep forms of inequality by accepting institutionalised structural inequalities in terms of wealth, income, privilege and power. The hierarchies remain so inequalities have to be constantly re-addressed from year to year and generation to generation. Low pay, poor housing, inadequate health and education services remain a problem; all that happens is that proportionately speaking, the gender, marital status or social class background of those in elite or subordinate positions may change. Inequalities are distributed differently but the structural injustices persist. The political implications of such a neo-liberal remedial approach to inequality are also significant. They require ongoing re-allocations of wealth, re-affirmations of identity and re-negotiation of power. Every new generation faces the same problem as its predecessor as there is no major structural adjustment undertaken.

In addition, because the focus of policy attention is on the groups that are marginalised, the focus of political attention is also on these groups. The problem of inequality becomes synonymous with the groups themselves; it does not centre on the unequal relations of power, wealth and privilege which demand realignment in the first instance. Thus groups such as lone parents, or Travellers are seen to benefit from the surface allocations and redefinitions which are made in welfare or legislative provisions. This creates the mistaken impression that such groups are major beneficiaries of budgetary measures or protective legislation thereby exaggerating public hostilities against them. It leads to negative labelling and increased prejudice against the groups in question thereby making further equality gains more difficult to achieve.

We have already seen evidence of how the political backlash against women has taken hold in public debate, although the empirical evidence shows that women in Ireland have not been the primary beneficiaries of economic

and social development in recent years (Nolan and Watson, 1999). A further implication of such remedial policies is that the focus of political attention is diverted from other far more significant reallocations to those in positions of privilege. Thus, in the economic sphere, the fact that huge sums of money are transferred through *enterprise welfare*

There is no recognition of the serious problems posed by a politics of ideas divorced from a politics of presence

(tax incentive, tax breaks etc. for the capital rich) is ignored. In terms of the politics of recognition, a focus on developing tolerance towards ethnic minorities, gays and lesbians, or refugees also means that the focus is not on institutionalised racism, sexism. The relations of cultural domination are unchallenged; the gatekeepers of cultural value and social worth remain in control, while systems for respecting diversity are not institutionalised.

Economic, Political and Sociocultural Equality

Developing a radical approach to equality requires a holistic approach, not only in terms of the groups to be covered by various equality provisions, but also in terms of the forms of equality which are to be pursued.

There are three core equality issues which must be addressed in the pursuit of a socially just society. The first of these is the issue of economic equality (fundamentally an issue of the distribution -including ownership and control - and the redistribution of primary goods); the second is sociocultural and symbolic equality (fundamentally an issue of the recognition and respect for differences); and the third is political equality (fundamentally an issue of parity in the representation of interests). These equality issues have their origins in distinct forms of injustice which exist

in society, namely economic injustices, political and civil injustices and sociocultural and symbolic injustices.

Economic injustice is rooted in the political-economic structures of our society. It includes various forms of exploitation and deprivation of a material kind. It can take the form of exclusion from employment and wealth ownership, inadequate welfare or income provision, or exploitative pay. Political or representational injustice occurs when and where ever power is enacted - for example, in the realms of decision-making, including policy-making, and in political life generally. It may take the form of political exclusion, political marginalisation, political trivialisation or political misrepresentation. Sociocultural and symbolic injustices are rooted in patterns of representation, interpretation and communication. They take the form of cultural domination, symbolic misrepresentation or non-recognition all leading to a lack of respect.

All of these forms of equality are closely inter-related. If one dimension of equality is ignored this can and does have the effect of undermining other equality objectives. The pursuit of a truly inclusive society has to a) take account of all three dimensions of the equality project and b) pursue a radical transformative rather than a liberal remedial approach to inequality. What is required is the deconstruction of the current economic, sociocultural and political structures of our society leading to a radical transformation

In the *socio-cultural* sphere this demands a shift from the politics of tolerance³ to a politics of recognition which respects and celebrates diversity. It requires an end to cultural imperialism whereby dominant groups in society project their own values and mores as representative of humanity as such. It requires a change from a situation in which ethnic, religious, linguistic or other minorities find their lifestyles and values are either made invisible in public discourse, or if visible are represented stereotypically or even denigrated (Young, 1990: 58-60). All the major cultural institutions of society have to be reviewed and challenged if this is to happen. While it is clearly necessary to review the ways in which differences are addressed in culture-specific institutions such as the

media and education, the issue arises for most service and goods providers in the public and private sectors.

In the political sphere, it demands more accountable, more diverse and more truly representative systems of political representation. Representative democracy has been shown increasingly to have serious limitations, not only in terms of how it can be seriously undermined by the alliances which develop between political and economic elites, but also in terms of how truly representative and accountable it is in highly diverse, mobile complex societies (Phillips, 1995). In our own society, for example, political constituencies are drawn up on the basis of regional interests (fundamentally along geographical lines), yet many of the major social and political divisions in our society today are not regionally-based, gender and social class differences being the clearest examples. There is no mechanism within the present political structures to take account of the representation of diversity *within* regions. Moreover, there is no recognition of the serious problems posed by a politics of ideas (although it is now arguable whether we have such a system in Ireland any more) divorced from a politics of presence. It is assumed that through the party system, men can effectively represent women, middle class people can represent the interests of working class people, settled people can represent Travellers etc. Yet representatives have considerable autonomy at the point of decision-making and that is why it matters both who they are and how they are held accountable. As Phillips (1995: 44) points out: 'when there is a significant under-representation of disadvantaged groups at the point of final decision, this can and does have serious consequences'. Their interests can be easily ignored in the privacy of the Cabinet table. It is only when people are consistently present in the process of working out alternatives that they have much chance of challenging dominant discourses and conventions (Phillips, 1995: 45).

At the very least therefore, we need to develop new institutions and procedures for making our democracy more accountable and more truly representative. A move towards a politics of presence would help effect such a change.

The Importance of Economic Equality

While it is necessary to pursue all three major equality agendas simultaneously, for many groups, radical economic equality is the major equality project in Ireland at this time. This is not to deny the importance of cultural recognition and respect for many groups, or the needs for new and more effective systems of political representation, rather it is to show how difficult it is to pursue either of these objectives without deep economic equality.

Economic inequalities are dysfunctional both socially and economically (Fischer, et al., 1995; Phillips, 1999). They result in real human misery and suffering, as those who are economically marginalised also tend to be socially and culturally marginalised. These compounding marginalisations fuel a sense of alienation and detachment from society,

Deepening economic equality greatly compounds civil, cultural and political inequalities

leading to a breakdown in social solidarity and political cohesion. In addition, they lead to the inefficient use of talents and resources, as many people cannot deploy their abilities to maximum effect, while also creating extra costs to the state via welfare, housing and health expenditures arising from economic impoverishment.

At a more practical day-to-day level, without economic equality, it is frequently impossible for people to vindicate other civil and political rights which may be granted to them constitutionally, or to be effective in the representation of their interests. Our system of legal representation, for example, operates along private market principles for the most part. (This is something that surely needs to be challenged. If we can have a public health service and a public education service, why not a proper public legal service?). Public service provision for free legal aid is neither

adequately funded nor resourced. It is not in a position therefore to offer a full legal aid service to those who may need it to vindicate their rights. The net effect of this is that those with most resources are those who can best afford to have their rights protected; indeed recent evidence from tribunals indicates that not only can they have their interests protected via the courts, they can have their interests enshrined in law and in constitutional principles. This fact in itself makes a mockery of the whole system of justice.

Viewed relationally, deepening economic inequality greatly compounds civil, cultural and political inequalities. It creates a society in which the rights of those without power and money are secondary to those with sufficient wealth to vindicate their rights through the courts *ad infinitum*; a system in which the political interests of the relatively powerless (albeit the majority of the electorate) are over-ruled by the interests of a minority who are rich and influential; and a social order where gaining cultural recognition is made effectively impossible for those without the resources to force their cultural agenda on to the political map.

One does not have to be a Marxist to realise that we live in a capitalist society within a capitalist-dominated global order. It is also obvious that capitalism produces huge economic and power inequalities, not only within national states but also between them. Within Ireland there is ample empirical evidence documenting the extent and nature of such economic inequalities. While the grosser form of poverty are on the decline, economic inequalities, as measured in terms of growing wealth and income differentials, continue to grow (Nolan and Maitre, 2000). That the interests of capital exercise powerful control over economic policy, and thereby contribute to such inequalities, is in little doubt. Proof has been provided not only through the various tribunals of recent years, but also by the policy initiatives involving substantial reductions in corporation profit taxation and in capital gains tax. Data provided by the Revenue Commissioners (1998) also shows how the taxation system is not at all as effective as it could be in offsetting the worst excesses of income inequality. A sizeable

minority (one fifth) of very high-income earners (incomes over £250,000) had an average (effective) tax rate of 25 per cent or less in 1994/5. Less than one quarter of those with very high incomes faced an effective tax rate of 40 per cent or more, despite the fact that their nominal (marginal) tax rate was 48 per cent.

Even though there is no evident political will in Ireland to challenge the dominance of the capitalist model, capitalism is neither an economic nor a political inevitable. Moreover, capitalist systems can be managed and challenged in a way that would greatly reduce economic inequalities. This is already evident from the ways in which capitalist states vary in their levels of inequality - Sweden, Germany or Japan have far lower economic inequality than the US for example. The levels of economic inequality in our society can be greatly reduced should the political will exist to do so. Although it is not possible to present a blueprint for change in a short paper of this kind, it is possible to pose some questions. A most obvious case is the growing income differentials that are developing within the waged/salaried sectors of the economy itself. Why is this allowed to happen? Should there not be some concept of a maximum-minimum income ratio between workers' wage³, as has existed in Japan for example? Surely one does not need to earn a salary which is ten or even 30 times that of the average worker as an incentive? In terms of wealth, why do we know so little about wealth ownership and incomes accruing from unearned wealth? Why are systems of taxation on wealth so ineffective? Whose interests are being served by the lack of information and by ineffectual systems of taxation? Why do our political leaders so often hide behind the private property clauses of the constitution when questions of radical economic equality are raised? In whose interests is it to maintain the supremacy of private property in the constitution?

Conclusion

A strong focus on purely anti-discriminatory or formal equality provisions can be a distraction from the more substantive economic, political and other inequalities that persist in society. It can create a public perception that much has been gained by particular groups in

terms of rights and privileges which, in turn, leads to negative labelling and increased prejudice against the groups in question thereby making further equality gains more difficult to achieve. The issue here is the effectiveness of liberal/remedial as opposed to transformative/radical remedies to inequality in society (Fraser, 1995). Remedial policies focus on rectifying inequitable outcomes for particular individuals or groups without altering the underlying framework which generates these inequalities in the first instance. Transformative/radical remedies, on the other hand, set out to

Why do our political leaders so often hide behind the private property clauses of the constitution when questions of radical economic equality are raised?

restructure the underlying generative source of the inequality rather than the symptoms. Given the evidence we have in recent years of systematic political corruption, collusion between elected representatives and capitalist interests, growing economic inequality and cultural resistance to diversity, it is time to adopt a radical agenda. To have equality included as a denominated core norm of our constitution would be a good place to start.

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1. To focus on the creation of an inclusive society in Ireland without due regard for how the realisation of such a project impacts on, and relates to, our international obligations to oppressed peoples throughout the world, is to engage in an act of profound political hypocrisy; at the end of the day, the only way in which we can have a truly inclusive society is when we have an inclusive global order.

2. This is not to deny that changes in the law based on the liberal assumption of non-discrimination at the point of access (to a given set of opportunities, institutions or positions) undoubtedly reinforce equality principles in a public and statutory context: they grant non-discrimination principles new authority and status thereby inspiring changes in social behaviour and attitudes. However, attitudinal and institutional changes are realised very slowly by these mechanisms.

3. Tolerance by its very nature is an hierarchical concept as it implies that there is a person or group tolerating (the powerful and important) and a group or person being tolerated (the powerless and of lesser importance). Indeed, 'There is something distinctly odd about a democracy that accepts a responsibility for redressing disadvantage, but never sees the disadvantaged as the appropriate people to carry this through.' (Phillips, 1995:43-44)

Green, black and newsprint

In 1990 the only black people shown in the Irish media were starving African babies - preferably being tended to by an Irish nun - interspersed with the occasional soft focus piece on Paul McGrath. The starving black babies were safely ensconced in Africa, and Paul McGrath was playing the role unwittingly pioneered by Phil Lynott before him, underpinning the fantasy of Irish inclusiveness and tolerance.

Ten years on, the black babies are here, along with their parents, and Paul McGrath could well find himself beaten to a pulp if he chanced to take an evening stroll along Parnell or Pearse streets.

During the past decade, the media has observed, occasionally criticised and frequently directed Irish reactions to increasing cultural and racial diversity - issues encapsulated by the 'refugee problem'.

A certain section of the Irish media - primarily the Independent stable and the Star, although the Irish Times, RTE and TV3 have had their own moments of glory - has seized on the asylum issue as a sure-fire filler and seller on slow news days.

Stories are permeated by what might be termed 'soft' and 'hard' racism (I use the 'R' word advisedly: those asylum seekers most objected to are, inevitably, black).

Soft racism tends to be two-pronged. Firstly, writers intentionally or unintentionally confuse the terms 'asylum seeker', 'refugee' and 'illegal immigrant', with the result that a large section of the public now believes that asylum seekers are, ipso facto, illegal immigrants. And, once one uses the term 'illegal', can 'criminal' be far behind? Given that Justice Minister John O'Donoghue himself scatters the three terms around with indiscriminating abandon, perhaps the media is not solely at fault here.

For the record:

- An asylum seeker is any person claiming asylum, regardless of how they arrived in the State.
- A refugee is a person who has been granted asylum.
- And an illegal immigrant is a person who arrived in, or is staying in, the State illegally and has not made a claim for asylum (since claiming asylum, of itself, renders a person legal). An asylum seeker only becomes an illegal immigrant once his or her final appeal

Crackdown on crime gangs trafficking in bogus refugees

By TOM BRADY, Security Editor

FRONTIER policing is to be stepped up by the French at the request of the Irish bid to curb the influx of bogus refugees from France en route from Calais to Dover has undermined the possibility of a similar human catastrophe taking place at Rosslare on a ferry.

Irish Independent, 18 July 2000

has been turned down, and once he or she has evaded legal deportation proceedings.

Thus, the *Irish Independent's* headline on 18 July - **Crackdown on crime gangs trafficking in bogus refugees** - is itself totally bogus since refugees, by definition, cannot be bogus. 'Bogus', of course, has itself become part of a compound word in combination with 'refugee' or 'asylum seeker'. The former, due to its brevity, is generally the term favoured by sub-editors.

Thus, a new word - 'bogus-refugee' - has entered the lexicon of public and political discourse.

The second element of 'soft racism' in media reporting involves running headlines identifying individuals - such as those accused of a crime - as 'refugees' in a context where the local equivalent (e.g. Dubliner) would scarcely be used. 'Refugee accused of prostitution' is news. 'Dubliner accused of prostitution' is unlikely to merit three lines on page 16.

In the communication age, the media does not simply record the news: it shapes the news. As a senior *Evening Herald* journalist stated when challenged earlier this year to defend the paper's coverage of the asylum issue on the Vincent Browne Show, the job of a newspaper is to give the people what they want.

And it's not a taxing job. First outline people's fears. Then run (or distort) a story illustrating those fears. Finally, run a story on the public reaction to the previous story. One can easily squeeze a couple of week's worth of coverage from one real or half-imagined incident.

Let's examine a case study from the *Herald's* stablemate, the *Irish Independent*:

Asylum seekers with Hepatitis B shun follow-up treatment plan. That headline

ran in the *Irish Independent* on 27 April. Scary stuff, especially in view of the fact that health fears were being cited at the time by many communities resisting Government plans to disperse asylum seekers around the country.

But all was not as it seemed. On reading the article in question one learned that, of the 1,411 asylum seekers screened for Hepatitis B, 94 had tested positive. Eighteen per cent of these - or just 17 individuals according to my calculations - did not respond to letters calling them back for treatment.

That is a tiny number by any standards, and is probably explained by

the fact that recipients of the letter may have changed address. It certainly did not justify the sensational headline, which would have led any reader scanning the paper (which is how most of us read newspapers) to conclude that asylum seekers were evading health testing en masse, thus posing a threat to the

ries in just one newspaper.

What weapons do ethnic minorities have in their fight for unbiased media representation? At present, none. But proper anti-hate legislation, combined with the establishment of a Press Council, might be a good starting point.

that they might be, abusive or insulting'.

That, of course, is the ultimate get-out clause. If it were amended to include a 'reasonable person' test, the Act could be transformed into a powerful weapon against irresponsibility on the part of both the media and politicians. Minister O'Donoghue has recently

...ally rally, the party's assembly member for North Belfast,

claiming early release under the

Continued on page 2 | captain has received treatment for stress at the Priory clinic sparked a bitter row last night. Si Alex Ferguson. Keane's manager, denied the claims made in the News of the World. Sport, page

Refugees rob names from children's graves

A LEITRIM man is being investigated by gardai in what they believe is the latest case of a macabre scam to procure passports for illegal immigrants. The man is suspected of courting local graveyards for the names of dead children whose identities he can sell to bogus asylum seekers. He is thought to collect the

down on the lucrative racket, which is believed to be organised by eastern European criminals, after it was discovered to be operating in Dublin. A Dundrum man realised that papers belonging to his daughter, who died more than 30 years ago, had been used by a gang. The birth certificates can be sold on the black market for

Jan Battles

black market trade in false passports, immigration papers, birth certificates and social welfare papers.

Last week 10 immigrants were checked by the garda national immigration bureau as they arrived in the week-end by

Forsyth in his bestselling novel, *The Day of the Jackal*. In the book, a hitman takes the identity of a dead child whose name he discovers on a gravestone.

Earlier this year a British businessman wanted by police for faking his suicide 10 years ago was discovered in Florida. Carl

unit, which will cost an estimated £5m in its first year was established to stem the flow of illegal refugees into the country. An estimated 1,000 foreigners enter Ireland each month and Department of Justice officials estimate that at least 70% of those seeking asylum are bogus.

Sunday Times, 13 August 2000

health of communities up and down the country.

But perhaps that was an isolated incident? Perhaps the *Independent* has since mended its ways and seen the ethnically diverse light?

The story cited above ran before the dispersal policy got underway. The following story, run by the *Independent* on 14 July, is certainly not designed to reassure communities currently hosting asylum seekers: Gardai and refugees in stand-off as children taken away. The term 'stand-off' conjures up images of pistols drawn at high noon, while 'children taken away' is redolent of that other media favourite, child sex abuse. Paedophile refugees? Now that really would make a hungry editor's day.

Unfortunately, this again was a case of all headlines and no news. Far from being victims of abuse, the children in question were unaccompanied minors being cared for by an African asylum seeker at a hostel in Tralee. And the 'stand-off' seems to have been a pretty tame affair. To quote the actual report: 'Some of those staying at the hostel became upset and objected to the removal of the children'. The health board 'said none of its staff had been attacked' These stories just represent the tip of the iceberg - a random cull of sto-

Press freedom is, of course, central to democracy. But freedom proverbially stops at the right to cry 'Fire!' in a crowded cinema.

This was implicitly recognised by the Dáil when the 1989 Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act was adopted just over 10 years ago, prohibiting the dissemination of material:

'If the written material, words, behaviour, visual images or sounds, as the case may be, are threatening, abusive or insulting and are intended or, having regard to all the circumstances, are likely to stir up hatred.'

The *Independent's* hepatitis story cited above, given the climate in which it was printed, was quite likely to stir up hatred. There is no doubt that Kerry TD Jackie-Healy Ray's 'civil rumpus' remarks on RTE Radio earlier this year were likely to stir up hatred (or rumpus) 'having regard to all the circumstances'.

Yet, in the eleven years since the Act was passed, not one case has been successfully prosecuted, despite several attempts. The reason is simple: according to Section 2 (2) (b) (ii) of the Act, it shall be a defence for the accused person 'if he is not shown to have intended to stir up hatred, to prove that he did not intend the words, behaviour or material concerned to be, and was not aware

promised to revisit the legislation, and it is now up to the Opposition to ensure that this issue is not allowed to languish on the legislative back burner.

The idea of a Press Council has been around for years - almost as long as that legislative paper tiger, the Prohibition of Incitement to Hatred Act. Its opponents believe that it would represent an unwarranted curtailment of press freedom, and it is only in recent years that the concept has gained acceptance not only from the public, but even from some sections of the media.

An independent Press Council, including representatives from the media, the NUJ and various social groups, should ideally be mandated to keep a watching brief on the way ethnic and other minorities are depicted in the media, as well as having a procedure to deal with complaints. There is no doubt that such an institution would curtail press freedom. But there is also no doubt that certain sections of the media are currently 'crying fire in a crowded cinema'.

Unless both the Dáil and the media themselves act to prevent sensationalist reporting of race-related issues, the fire may turn out to be an arson attack on an asylum seekers' hostel. And the headline writers may just find that they have blocked the exits.

Social Democracy Today: Third Way or No Way

Despite the revival of the electoral fortunes of European socialism, many on the left believe (probably due to an innate Gramscian pessimism of the intellect combined with a sense of unfortunate historical timing) that it makes no difference. The European left holds more political power now than at any other time in its history, yet it is suffering a major crisis of confidence. Since at least the 1970s there has been a widespread belief that the electoral base of social democracy is in terminal decline, largely due to the near disappearance of the traditional working class. For a long time it looked as if social democrats would be reduced to serving as the representatives of the displaced persons and regions of economic globalisation and be out of power forever.

This disaster has been averted but relief is mixed with a sense of resignation that the political project of social democracy is now little more than neo-liberalism with a human face. One of the principal reasons for this is said to be the irreversible shift towards economic globalisation and the emergence of a post-industrial landscape in the heartlands of advanced capitalism. It is assumed that the declining salience of class-based identities and collectivist values works against traditional labourist or christian democratic mass parties, and instead rewards small niche parties with very specific support bases, e.g., the Greens. More significantly it encourages the traditional mass parties to broaden their appeal by jettisoning ideological baggage and developing a catch-all populism.

It is in the context of these broad economic, political and cultural changes that we might usefully consider some of the positions taken up by the protagonists in the debate surrounding the Third Way. While the framework containing the ideas, analyses and political positions known as the Third Way is a loose enough structure, it is sufficiently coherent to allow us to examine some issues that are of crucial significance to the broad European left. It is important

also that we look at the exchange of ideas at both the practitioner and academic level.

The term Third Way has been employed in the past by a variety of groups but its recent manifestation emerged in Britain and the USA as part of the process of renewal of the Democratic Party and the Labour Party. Bill Clinton and Tony Blair are the two leaders most identified with the term and more recently Gerhard Schröder of Germany, Massimo D'Alema of Italy and Wim Kok of the Netherlands have joined them. These and other leaders have gathered at conferences to forge a common political approach. A key con-

All of Europe's social democratic parties have undergone a process of political and ideological recasting but not all have embraced the Third Way with the zeal of the British Labour Party

cern of left of centre politicians has been to reposition their parties electorally so as to maximise the vote of the new middle strata now deemed to be an essential part of any winning political formula. This means fully embracing the reality of the global market and assuring everyone that social democrats are now pro business and thoroughly supportive of the entrepreneurial culture. In addition they are now fully geared towards implementing policies that will foster competitiveness. Third Way leaders make it

very clear that the old statist ways are long gone and that there is to be a thorough reform of the welfare state. Social democrats are still committed to social provision but only in a way that complements rather than cuts across the workings of the labour market.

All of Europe's social democratic parties have undergone a process of political and ideological recasting but not all have embraced the Third Way with the zeal of the British Labour Party. The French socialists have adopted a critical line on the Third Way by stressing more traditional themes in the name of 'French exceptionalism'. In this brief survey I want to focus on just two reasons that may account for the differing attitudes that parties have towards the notion of the Third Way; variations in nationally specific forms of political discourse and electoral self-interest are the principal explanatory factors involved. Changes in the structure, organisation and function of political parties must also be factored in, but this will be the subject of a future article. I also suggest that the most recent account of the Third Way by Anthony Giddens¹ offers a more insightful contribution to the debate about the future of European social democracy than many of the arguments made at practitioner level.

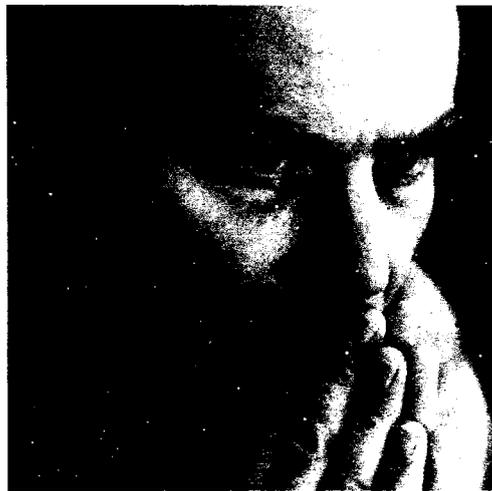
It is notable that the parties which were most keen on a programmatic reorientation were those that spent most of the 1980s and 1990s in opposition. The most strikingly revisionist of all is Tony Blair's New Labour. In the economic sphere the Labour government strives for credibility in terms of how the financial markets and international capital judge its performance. Accompanying this economic neo-liberalism and pro-business ethos is a rather novel emphasis on what might be termed the moral dimension. New Labour has been anxious to emphasise that individuals have duties as well as rights, and much emphasis has been placed on effort and personal responsibility. Social justice can no longer be measured by ever rising lev-

els of expenditure regardless of its economic impact. Instead, public services must now be structured in such a way as to enable people to help themselves. This is to be done through maximising work opportunities-hence the emphasis on education, reskilling and investing in what is termed human capital. New Labour also started to compete with the Conservatives on social and moral issues, notably law and order. Even before Blair became leader he coined one of the memorable political sound-bites of the 1990s by pledging his party to be 'tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime'.

So why has the record of the Blair government has been less than inspiring? New Labour's political economy is guided by the theme of globalisation and the conditions that this requires, especially the perception that the government is seen to be *competent* and *credible*. An open economy thus requires a twin-track strategic approach where credibility is promoted by new institutional mechanisms for the conduct of monetary policy (e.g. independence for the Bank of England) and where competitiveness is fostered by a determined policy of labour market and welfare reform. It is apparent that the Labour government is anxious to make welfare spending answerable to economic criteria rather than to relieving poverty, let alone any sense of distributive justice. A supply side approach to social policy now prevails, where the watchwords are 'labour market flexibility' and 'welfare to work'. There is a clear lack of any enthusiasm for provision of greater levels of social protection and the suspicion is that the UK will persist with a 'cheap labour' growth strategy. Recently announced closures in the car industry show just how flexible the British labour market has become. New Labour ministers constantly talk about investing in human capital and it is distinctly possible that their enthusiasm reflects the fact that so many other items are now off the policy agenda.

It is these elements of what we might term the 'British Way' that take us to the heart of the debate about the future of European social democracy. There seems little doubt, to this author at any rate, that the British Labour Party remains an outlier of the European

socialist family. The French Socialists for instance have been at pains to distance themselves from Blairism and, to a certain extent, have persisted with seemingly more traditional or leftist positions. That's not to say that we can take them at their word - the French may be critical of neo-liberal policies but they have gone out of their way to implement them in government at various times since the abrupt U-turn in 1982. By and large the governments of Lionel Jospin and Tony Blair are not pursuing radically different paths of social democracy. The differences that exist between the British and the French, and all other members of the social democratic family, can be partly accounted for at the level of discourse and rhetoric.



Prime Minister Tony Blair

For all the talk about globalisation and the relentless march of Europeanisation, many political differences are generated by specifically *national* conditions. Donald Sassoon, the leading historian of modern European socialism, has insisted that image-making, a necessary part of politics, remains one of the most 'national' forms of communication. It is all 'about signalling policies and identities using words and symbols which do not have the same resonance from country to country'.² Sassoon uses France as an example where both the left and the Gaullist right commonly employ a radical language of republican values. Racism is condemned not only for moral reasons but because it breaks with the universalism of the French Revolution. Thus Le Pen's *Front Nationale* is seen as both racist and anti-French. It is also the case that anti-

Americanism is not exclusively associated with the left as it is seen as a defence of shared cultural values. By contrast, the British have been fiercely protective of an imaginary 'special relationship' with the USA and this prevents them from developing a leading role in Europe. This is why it is rather unlikely that the UK Labour government will mount a vigorous defence of the virtues of the European social model, however loosely we define it.

No matter how often the process of globalisation is invoked the 'national effect' will remain very significant in shaping particular policy (party-political and electoral) and outcomes. Protagonists of the Third Way are correct in 'taking globalisation seriously' since we do actually happen to live in a world of open markets and fast-moving capital flows. But it is all too easy to latch on to globalisation as a reason for ditching traditional left policies that supposedly discourage inward investment and undermine competitiveness. In this view there is little option but to cut taxes on capital and cut back on social protection. This, as we have already noted, is exactly what Blair's government has done. However, the evidence that social democratic strategies automatically incur the wrath of financial markets and cause capital flight is not backed up by empirical support. It is far from obvious why well-regulated social market economies with good infrastructure, high skill levels and low crime rates will automatically repel investors. Recent work on the relationship between globalisation, labour markets and welfare state reform in the countries of western Europe show that the steering capacity of the national state is indeed more constrained by developments beyond national borders, but this does not mean that all states are converging in the neo-liberal direction. Instead there are signs of a re-casting of the continental model to accommodate market pressures and the need for flexibility while preserving social protection and social consensus.³

So why does the globalisation thesis have such a strong hold on many of the left despite all the convincing reasons for taking a more sceptical line? One explanation is that what really matters is that key political figures believe in it. A research group at the University of

Birmingham has argued that it is possible that the left's behaviour in power might provide empirical support for the globalisation thesis; a left government which adopts a policy of welfare retrenchment and tax cuts is acting in a manner consistent with the globalisation thesis even if investors are not. As one commentator puts it: 'global investors do not need to go to the trouble of shifting their capital around the world to punish European welfare states if the proponents of neo-liberalism can win the ideological contest'.⁴ The clear implication of this view is that a concerted effort must be made to falsify the globalisation thesis to prevent European politics degenerating into a US-style conservative consensus.

Third Way advocates like Giddens can make a valuable contribution to the renewal and remaking of the social democratic tradition. He makes many sound points about the importance of global economic governance, the need to tackle corporate power and to get to grips with inequality through redistributive measures. Giddens may be considered Tony Blair's intellectual guru, but his version of the Third Way is unapologetically social democratic whereas New Labour seems anxious to concoct some vaguely progressive liberalism along the lines of Clinton's Democrats.

European social democrats will have a major problem with Third Way terminology if it continues to be linked to the Clinton Administration or the American Democratic Party. For all its clever re-packaging, the record of the Clinton administration is abysmal. There has been no trickle down effect in America's so-called miracle economy. The lowest paid workers are paid less than they were during the Reagan-Bush years and wage inequality has increased under Clinton. The administration's welfare reform of 1996 removed millions from welfare by removing any obligation for any state to assist anyone.⁵ The suspicion remains that Third Way rhetoric is attractive to some as a means of showing how far they have travelled from political and ideological positions that came to be regarded as disadvantageous.

This leads us to consider the question of electoral self-interest. We have already noted the numerical decline of traditional working class voters. It

seems to be the case that Third Way discourse holds most appeal to parties who need to overcome their dependence on, and identification with, traditional manual labour and construct a new electoral coalition that attracts sectors of the prosperous middle classes. The British Labour Party is the obvious example here. The presumption is that 'middle England' will only support policies that keep taxes and public spending low and that are seen to be tough on welfare

European and local election results in Britain, Germany and Italy suggest that there is a price to be paid for political fudging

claimants. This is the 'big tent' approach that tries not to make any enemies. Clearly the electoral success of this strategy inspired the SPD in Germany to borrow heavily from it. Blair's third way and Schröder's *Neue Mitte* confirmed their common approach when they put their names to a joint policy document. Schröder has since distanced himself from the Third Way, as it did not go down well with many party members. There are two significant factors which militate against its long-term success; it is likely to alienate core supporters at some stage and it will only work in bipolar party systems where there is no significant competition further to the left. Recent European and local election results in Britain, Germany and Italy tend to suggest that there is a price to be paid for political fudging. In most cases in continental Europe social democrats face competition for votes on the left, typically from Greens and/or the post-communist 'new left' parties.

Again, the contrast between Britain and France is instructive.⁶ Both the *Parti Socialiste* and the Labour Party embarked on noticeable modernisation drives. In the French case the PS had to work hard to persuade the voters that

the modernisation process did not mean abandoning the party's core socialist values. The Labour Party strove to present the opposite impression by trying to forget its history. Notwithstanding the commitment to implementing a thirty-five-hour week, Lionel Jospin cannot quite find the policies to match his rhetoric. Blair on the other hand tends to tone down the radicalism so as not to offend the *Daily Mail*.

Some social democratic parties have been willing to adopt centrist policies that differ little from their conservative and liberal opponents. This has been done for reasons of electoral self-interest in an effort to construct new cross-class electoral coalitions. There has been a willingness to embrace the globalisation thesis at least partly as an excuse to ditch a range of traditional policies that are now seen as vote losers. Third Way language has been used to contextualise or rationalise these new approaches. Other parties have been more reluctant to adopt the Third Way, seeing it as an essentially Anglo-American phenomenon and of little relevance to the social market traditions of the continent. Despite this, it seems to me that the Third Way as presented by Anthony Giddens is much more challenging than the Clinton-Blair version. Will Tony Blair have another look at his guru's writings?

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Letter from Edinburgh

The first anniversary of the new Scottish Parliament was marked less by the fireworks and celebrations that accompanied its opening, and more by a sober determination among legislators to get on with the job.

The Parliament is making a real difference to Scotland. Compared to being run by remote control from London, Scotland's Parliament is delivering a huge improvement in governance.

Perhaps that change is seen most in the city which is home to the Parliament. One economic commentator who had not visited Edinburgh for several years, writing in the *Independent on Sunday*, remarked on the city's vibrancy since the Parliament was set up. The writer noted the capital's thriving financial quarter, new property developments, increasing house prices and also the kind of traffic chaos that Dubliners have become sadly familiar with! He wrote: 'Who knows what's next? Maybe a pro-European Scotland could follow Ireland's example and become a second Celtic Tiger.'

Certainly, the Scottish National Party wants the devolved Scottish Parliament to become fully independent, so that Scotland can take her place as a Member State of the European Union. For nationalists, an extremely encouraging finding on the anniversary of the Parliament was a BBC poll showing that nearly 70 per cent of Scots want increased powers of the Parliament. Interestingly, the desire to move the powers of the Parliament forward was shared by those who thought that the Parliament had done a good job, and those who said that it was failing to deliver.

That said, while most people in both groups wanted more powers, the majority was greatest among those who thought that the Parliament had done well, which confirms an important conclusion for the SNP.

People in Scotland will be most likely to want to move towards independence on the basis of a successful experience of Home Rule, rather than in a cli-

mate of disappointment with the Parliament. As the Official Opposition, the SNP is determined to make the Parliament a success.

A key example of the Parliament's success was the controversy over the repeal of Section 28 (or Section 2A as it is known in Scotland). Section 28/2A was introduced by the Tories in the late 1980s, ostensibly to stop the 'promotion' of homosexuality in



The Scottish Parliament

schools. But in reality it stopped teachers from discussing difficult matters of sexuality with children who needed help and advice, hampered them in dealing with homophobic bullying, stigmatised homosexual people, and helped to create an unpleasant homophobic environment.

To their credit Scottish Government Ministers sought to repeal Section 2A, but the manner in which they did so was a model of how not to handle sensitive policy issues. Instead of being announced properly and publicly, Section 2A repeal was leaked to the 'Labour friendly' tabloid, the *Daily Record*, which ran the story on the basis that 'gay sex lessons' would be taught in schools once the clause was abolished.

A 'Keep the Clause' campaign was bankrolled by prominent Scottish businessman, Brian Souter, and carried the support of most of the tabloid press (particularly the *Record*).

Many people, particularly par-

ents, who were totally opposed to discriminating against gay people (just as those in favour of repeal had no desire to 'promote' homosexuality) were nonetheless concerned about repealing Section 2A, on the basis of all that they read and heard.

And for months, Government Ministers did precisely nothing to alleviate that concern.

Instead, it was left to the SNP Opposition to back repeal, but also to propose teaching guidance in place of Section 2A, that recognised the value of marriage (a key concern of those worried about repeal) without devaluing other forms of relationship, and also stressed the importance of not stigmatising children on the basis of their family background.

A further safeguard proposed by the SNP was to make this package of non-discriminatory guidance meaningful by underpinning it in law.

After a series of U-turns, the Government finally adopted the SNP position, and an honourable settlement of the debate on repealing Section 2A was arrived at which carried the support of both sides. The tragedy was that it hadn't happened six months earlier, before positions had become so apparently entrenched.

However, the most important point about this difficult debate is that a piece of unacceptable and discriminatory legislation has been struck from the Statute Book in Scotland. Section 28/2A was imposed by London, but has not yet been repealed in the rest of Britain and may not be until after the next election at least, due to opposition from the non-elected House of Lords.

The significance of the Section 2A debate is that the Scottish Parliament has proved that it is both a progressive and responsive institution. From a Scottish perspective, Westminster remains neither of these things.

That's why the Edinburgh Parliament is the driving force in developing Scottish democracy, as the people of Scotland leave Westminster behind.

Time was: When Kilkenny debated partition

Edward Said might well have been thinking of the essayist, Hubert Butler, when he delineated for the intellectual the role of 'heightening consciousness, becoming aware of tension, complexities and taking on oneself the responsibility for one's community. This is a non-specialist role, it has to do with issues which cut way over professional discipline.'¹

Hubert Butler's work as an essayist and as a founder member of a number of societies in his native County Kilkenny are complementary and many of his best essays arise directly from his organisational involvement.² In 1945 he had revived the Kilkenny Archaeological Society, but by 1952 he felt obliged to resign his membership following what was alleged by the Society's president to have been an insult by Butler to the Papal Nuncio and thus to the Pope himself. This referred to a meeting of the International Affairs Association of Ireland at which Butler referred in the Nuncio's presence to the forced conversion during World War II of 240,000 Orthodox Serbs to Catholicism.³ These conversions had been carried out by the Croatian 'Quisling', Ante Pavelitch, with the collusion of Archbishop Stepinac, then the subject of heroic admiration in Ireland because of his imprisonment by Marshal Tito.

Butler 'felt that the honour of the small Protestant community in Southern Ireland would be compromised if those of us who had investigated the fact, remained silent about what we had discovered' and he was prepared to endure popular ignominy and denunciation by all of Kilkenny's local authority bodies as a result.⁴

Those members of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society sympathetic to Butler became the core of the Kilkenny Arts Society and its sub-committee, the Kilkenny Debating Society. 'It was started a year ago by old Lady Bellew and a local farmer's wife ... except for Lady Bellew the entire committee is Roman Catholic ... I was asked to join

the committee ... but I was credited with rather extreme views on freedom of speech ... and I thought the committee would be in stronger position without me.' wrote Butler in a private letter in March 1954. Although not formally identifiable, Butler was the most influential member of the Debating Society, a discreet and effective backroom organiser. The gap between the Arts Society and culture as popularly practised in Kilkenny was notable. A letter published in local papers from its secretary, 'S. McGrath Bourke, B.Arch., M.R.I.A.I., A.R.I.B.A.' announced its annual Art Exhibition, which would include work by Henry Moore, as 'no provincial "arty" show'.⁵

Those seeking drama rather than Art in Kilkenny at this time were confined to productions by a variety of Catholic schools and organisations: *Kevin Barry*, and *The Dawning of the Day* at the Boy's Hall; *Eire, Handmaid of the Eucharist* in nearby Callan, and in the city's theatre, with a cast of nearly two hundred, *The Message of Lourdes*, a play in three acts.

Butler's experiences during the Nuncio controversy had left him with an enduring sense of the extent to which 'parochially minded people neglect their parishes to pronounce ignorantly about the universe, while the universalists are so conscious of the world-wide struggles of opposing philosophies that the rights and wrongs of any regional conflict dwindle to insignificance against a cosmic panorama.'⁶ Thus when he came to arrange a debate in 1954 under the auspices of the Kilkenny Debating Society, between Ulster unionists and southern anti-partitionists, he wrote to Colonel W.W.B. Topping, the principal unionist speaker suggesting the lines on which he wished to see the debate proceed, 'I believe that a clear, friendly statement of the Protestant standpoint re clerical interference - after all we don't allow our own clergy to interfere - would be valuable here too and would not be resented. That is the core of the matter for us

Southern Protestants, our right to judge for ourselves. It is more important than political allegiance and the economic aspect.'⁷

Reactions to the proposed debate - the first of its kind since partition - was swift. The Ulster Loyalist and Democratic Unionist Association, a predecessor of the Democratic Unionist Party,⁸ passed a resolution deploring 'the action of the government and the Prime Minister in particular, in permitting Mr Topping, MP, the Unionist Chief Whip and Mr W Douglas, Secretary of the Ulster Unionist Council to attend, as representing Ulster Loyalists, the debate organised by Kilkenny Debating Society ... We maintain that no useful purpose can be served in debating partition with men holding extreme views for the destruction of the British Empire ... The appeasement policy, the sale and betrayal of Ulster must stop.' A protest meeting was called for the Ulster Hall and telegrams of protest were sent to Lord Brookeborough, the Grand Master of the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland and to the chairman of the Ulster Unionist Council. The matter was raised in the Northern Ireland Senate, where the visit was defended by Senator Bradley, while the leader of the house, Col Gordon refused to be drawn.

In Kilkenny opinion was divided. The liberal *Kilkenny Journal*, edited by the husband of one of the debating society secretaries, reported the proposed debate factually and without emotion. (The connection between the Journal and the society resulted in its remaining silent throughout the controversy). The rival *Kilkenny People*, which had led the attacks on Butler during the Nuncio affair, felt no similar need for restraint. An article entitled 'Dramatis Personae', giving details of the careers of the speakers, was hedged between two patriotic ballads, while editorials and anonymous correspondence, much of it suspiciously close to the editorial line, became more and more virulent as the weeks passed:

'Frankly we believe the debate will serve no useful purpose. It will, of course, provide entertainment, which seems to be its primary object, but those people outside the society who hope to be present will pay 5/- for the extravaganza. One thing is certain, there has already been so much controversy over the matter in the six counties and so much abuse has been poured by the Unionist speakers that it seems impossible that the more bigoted section of the Orange Order will be in any way convinced by what is said in Kilkenny...'⁹

An IRA veteran living in Cheltenham wrote to the *Kilkenny People*, to say 'surely the people of Kilkenny are not forgetting Michael Collins, James Connolly and the other Irish patriots who did so much to keep this kind of thing out of the country.' One 'Bearna Baoghail' wrote saying that 'the holding in Easter Week of an event as that advertised by the Kilkenny Debating Society is tantamount to an insult to our Patriot Dead. It is to be hoped that the "show" will not go on.'¹⁰ In less serious vein, the *Irish Times* of 4 April printed a cartoon showing one of two men passing a poster advertising the debate remarking: 'The rumour has it that as soon as they get across the Border, they're going to throw themselves on our mercy and seek political asylum ...'

The travel writer, Richard Hayward, and Eoin 'the Pope' O'Mahony, vice-chairman of the Anti-Partition Association, were asked to make contact with unionist and nationalist leaders. Also to speak were the president of the Irish Association, Joseph Johnston, Mary O'Malley, a nationalist councillor in Belfast who was also a member of the Irish Association and Arnold Marsh, a Protestant nationalist who was principal of Drogheda Grammar School. Hayward was to be a principal speaker but was anxious to speak without taking one side of the other!

As the unionists were not prepared to debate on a Sunday,¹¹ the

debate was fixed for Friday, 23 April, in the City Technical School, with the Chief Executive Officer of the Kilkenny Vocational Education Committee, Dr Richard Walsh, acting as host. A number of motions were proposed and such was the interest in the debate that a change at unionist insistence from the motion 'That Ireland's best interests are with the United Kingdom' to 'That partition



ought to be abolished' was front page news in the *Irish Times*.¹² In fact neither was debated, the final motion being 'That Ulster's best interests lie with the United Kingdom'.

Finding a suitable chairman proved even more difficult. W.B. Stanford refused lest it affect his chances of winning the Seanad seat for Trinity College.¹³ Finally, Professor Myles Dillon of the Institute for Advanced Studies, a brother of James Dillon who was to be a minister in the new government, agreed. It was to be a task requiring diplomacy. For example, Col Topping requested that his twenty minutes be exclusive of time lost due to boo-

ing and cat-calling.¹⁴ Security arrangements were extensive and an armed Special Branch presence was provided.¹⁵ Robert Jacobs of Waterford humourously speculated that 'the gunmen may move in and dynamite the Henry Moore after they have purged the debate of its principal speakers and promoters.'¹⁶

A major difficulty became the huge demand for tickets and arrangements were made to accommodate part of the overflow on the windowsills outside.

MacBride and Topping were both experienced members of the Bar, but Topping threw MacBride by concentrating on the inadequacies of the South rather than addressing the motion proper. Having referred to the former's 'attractive though non-Gaelic accent', he went on to relate how 'on the way down, having lunch and a cup of tea here and there,' he had enquired as to the meaning of 'An Tóstal' an off-season tourism festival then in progress, but could find no one to explain the word. 'We in Ulster would not accept what was virtually a dead language in substitution for a language which was their official language.'

He wished to make one thing clear 'he yielded to no one in his claim to be a good Irishman and was as good an Irishman as anyone in Kilkenny or elsewhere.' While English or Scottish identity was not incompatible with being British 'over here the choice had to be between being Irish or being British and they said in the North of Ireland that the price of being divorced from being British was infinitely too high.' Dublin 'was known to be subservient to the authoritarian precepts emanating from the Roman Catholic Hierarchy.' The 1951 Mother and Child Scheme had adequately justified Loyalists fears, as did film, book, and radio censorship. The South had seceded from the United

Kingdom and it was this and 'not, as is sometimes fantastically suggested, a mixture of gerrymandering and a British army of occupation' which determined the attitude of 'the Ulsterman.' Catholics in the North had 'the same rights that we demand for ourselves as Protestants ... but we cannot help seeing what is happening down here.'

MacBride defended the rights of the Catholic hierarchy to make representations to government and stated that 'the second last King of England was deposed as result of the views of the leaders of the Church of England ... I wonder did it not occur to him that the government of the Six Counties was run by the Orange Lodges.' With regard to the Mother and Child Scheme, 'if Colonel Topping had the same experience as I had of Noel Browne, he might not have regarded him as such a good argument.' On the question of national identity, MacBride argued in terms of natural loyalties. 'If Colonel Topping was an Irishman, and he was quite certain that he was, why then should he choose to give his allegiance to another country. That seemed to run completely contrary to the usual course of human nature. A multi-lingual society was common all over the world - most notably in Switzerland, the best run country in Europe. Britain's real reason for enforcing and maintaining partition was that she required the industrial and ship-building potential in time of war - Britain was largely responsible for the imposition of partition. Britain maintained it by financial, political and military power.'

Hubert Butler, who anonymously reported the debate for the *Manchester Guardian*, described William Douglas as having endeared himself to the audience 'by his easy geniality and strong Ulster personality,' and not least by losing his notes! In a statement which was to be strongly contested by Cahir Healy, he quoted the nationalist M.P. as having praised the fairness of housing allocation in Belfast. Apart from that 'all they wished the people of the Free State was "Good luck, god bless you and leave us alone!"'

Eoin O'Mahony and Arnold Marsh made a number of economic arguments and O'Mahony went on to refer to what he termed 'the new planta-

tion of Ulster' - the domination of higher education opportunities in Northern Ireland by English people. Joseph Johnston detailed the work of the Irish Association, while Mary O'Malley in a brief but balanced and thoughtful contribution, described the existence of 'two types of working classes in the Six Counties, the privileged and non-privileged.' As a member of Belfast City Council she had experienced 'clearly defined acts of discrimination' against her co-religionists 'but it would not be fair at all to compare it with fascist and totalitarian regimes.' Richard Hayward concluded the contributions from the platform with a generalised call for mutual respect.

None of the anticipated trouble materialised and Dillon was able to conclude the meeting by citing the debate as an example of free speech. As an Irish scholar, he was anxious to disassociate himself from any desire to impose the Irish language on an unwilling Northern Ireland, 'since I have never yet met any Gaelic scholar of eminence who supported the present campaign'.¹⁷

There was widespread coverage of the debate. Eoin 'the Pope' O'Mahony described the *Irish News* as having 'sulked' and the *Ulster Herald* as 'venomous'.¹⁸ The *Belfast Telegraph* reported the debate on its front page, while the *Northern Whig* and the *Belfast Newsletter* also carried reports. Southern papers, including the *Irish Times* and the *Catholic Standard*, also gave it coverage. There was disappointment at the *Irish Times* reporting, of which O'Mahony commented that it 'does not like MacBride or me and this may explain their attitude. Symillie [the editor] would not do anything unless he were asked to speak or at least advise.'¹⁹ Due to MacBride's participation, the debate could not be broadcast by Radio Eireann until after the general election then in progress - although it was subsequently broadcast on two occasions. Butler was disappointed at the complete absence of Kilkenny Protestants from the debate. All of his active supporters in the Archaeological Society were Catholics and in a letter to Topping he referred to the fact that 'all the local Prods (sic) while fighting themselves in the British forces and getting jobs for their children in England, accept the

Soldier's Song as the anthem of the country, stand up in the cinema etc, etc. In fact not many will be at the debate and I doubt if a single one will speak. They have given up any hope of influence, other than indirect, here and are resigned to disappearing genteelly.'²⁰ In a letter to O'Mahony, he referred to 'an extraordinary paradox, that in fact all the proper West Britons abstained completely and even refused to put up Topping and Douglas when asked. Have you ever reflected that a real imperialist won't even fight for his own cause in Ireland. His attitude is that of the Republican prisoner who 'won't recognise the court' and so keep a 'dignified' silence.' I wonder if the Northerners would abstain in a united Ireland?'²¹

The debate had cost the organisers money and not all the participants were like 'Don Quixote' O'Mahony who did all his extensive travelling hitch-hiking and walking, instead of in a smart car and sent in no expenses at all!²² More pressing was the controversy in the *Kilkenny People*, where Butler had Johnston and Marsh - who, like himself were intellectual southern Protestants of mildly nationalist disposition - write in the defence of the debates.²³ Cahir Healy wrote to say that partition was non-debatable and virulently denied the statement attributed to him by Douglas.²⁴ This debate continued until August when Healy declared the correspondence closed. The content of this argument may have had little impact in Kilkenny but the letters were reprinted in the Omagh newspaper, the *Ulster Herald*, where Healy's points based on a religious head count in Enniskillen meant more.

Butler entered the controversy with just one letter under the nom-de-plume, 'Protestant Anti-Partitionist', and criticised the incursion 'into local Kilkenny politics'²⁵ of William Douglas who, using information sent to him confidentially by a Catholic member of the Debating Society, had used his 12 July speech to attack the treatment of Protestants in the city. *The Kilkenny People* editorial counter-attacked Douglas, reporting him as saying 'while I was in Kilkenny I was informed that Protestants get one in five hundred Council or Corporation houses, that Protestants are not employed by the Corporation or County Council ... that

Protestant radiologists and nurses are not employed in the county hospitals, that Protestants librarians are not employed in the city and county libraries, and that there is not on Protestant member of the Civic Guards in Kilkenny.'

The editorial hinted threateningly that Protestant businesses in Kilkenny 'would find it difficult to exist without Catholic support' If they did not reject Douglas: 'We feel sure that the Protestant population of Kilkenny will be eager to refute Mr Douglas's charge.'

Kilkenny Corporation unanimously condemned Douglas, and various Protestant employees were cited to show how false his charge had been. More bizarrely it was claimed that the corporation in effect took the unionist view of housing allocation since they had as a tenant a single Protestant mother who had been selected ahead of a Catholic family of ten!²⁷ In August a Methodist former resident wrote to the local press praising the tolerance he had experienced in Kilkenny,²⁸ but Douglas in a follow-up letter asked if Protestants did not apply 'because they would not be considered for local authority positions and they knew it.'²⁹

Butler suffered public disapprobation on account of Douglas' accusations, and although he knew who Douglas's informant had been, he chose not to expose her in order to save her.

Sheila Leahy, Douglas's correspondent and the 'local farmer's wife' referred to by Butler as a founder of the Kilkenny Arts Society was a teacher and Irish language enthusiast. She wrote to the *Irish Times* (10 April 1954) in response to a letter from Alasdair MacCába, advocating North-South co-operation, citing the Kilkenny debate as an example of what MacCába was advocating: 'The great success of the debate proves that the educated majority of the Irish people want reconciliation ... Since [it] was successful every effort was made to belittle its importance and to suggest it was the effort of the handful of pro-British ex-Unionists. Yet the organisers were all Irish nationalist by birth and tradition.'

The *Kilkenny People's* attack on Leahy also served to cover an attack on Butler, always a popular target of the paper's editor: 'We are gravely suspicious

that somewhere behind the scenes somebody was conscious that a platform should be provided here for the expression of views antagonistic to the religious and national sentiments of our people'.³⁰

Leahy replied to this attack accusing the paper of 'reactionary



"Rumour has it that, as soon as they get across the Border, they're going to throw themselves on our mercy and seek political asylum . . ."

Irish Times cartoon, 14 April 1954

nationalism' and of forgetting the fact that in a united Ireland 'the Orangemen' would be twenty-five per cent of the population who would have to be accommodated.³¹

In fact popular interest in the controversy was on the wane and by September it had become a dead issue. Interest in partition in Kilkenny, in fact, was slight and at the end of 1954 its branch of the Anti-Partition Association was disbanded, the few remaining members (the most active of whom was Tyrone-born Owen O'Kelly, also secretary of the Archaeological Society) going on to form a branch of Liam Kelly's Fianna Uladh.³² Partition had not been an issue at the general election and afterward ceased to be an issue of primary consequence.

Ironically, it was the advent of television, rather than opposition from more local forms of culture or media, that led to the ending of the Kilkenny debates, which continued annually until 1960. However there was a brief revival in 1966 and 1971 - the latter held in the

context of the referendum on entry to the Common Market, which through its overwhelming vote in favour of entry, marked the terminal decline of the very irredentist nationalism of which the opposition to the Society's partition debate had been a notable instance.

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Writing against time

'At last' - some sighed with relief. 'Why only now?', asked others, who had anticipated the distinction for almost 20 years, only to be repeatedly disappointed. When, at the end of September 1999, word came through that Günter Grass had received the Nobel Prize for Literature, the German public greeted the news with mixed reactions.

Not a single critic doubted that Grass, a writer whose effect on German post-war literature and its reception abroad was unique, deserved the award.

Indeed, Grass's oeuvre is omnipresent in Germany. His books are read in schools, while his work is an integral part of every university literature curriculum. *The Tin Drum* and *The Rat* were adapted for the screen, the former directed by Volker Schlöndorff who received an Oscar for the story of Oskar Matzerath, the drummer. Ironically - and this also mirrors my own personal attitude to Grass's work - while his books have a firm place in world literature, they are not generally loved.

His work fills libraries, schools and universities, and they form the subject of doctoral theses, reviews and symposia. But, unlike the works of Hermann Hesse and Heinrich Böll, they don't lie on the bedside tables of school or university students. Grass is respected by the younger generation, as one would respect and value democracy and citizenship, while secretly paying court to anarchy and bohemianism. That may be due to the very fact that Grass has always been a public and political figure. Every schoolchild knows his moustachioed face and smoky, sensual voice. In the public perception, the image of the rational and committed intellectual has increasingly dominated that of the artist. No doubt Böll was also a political animal, but his politics manifested themselves in the realm of morality. He showed solidarity with the poor and the marginalised; was active in the extra-parliamentarian anti-nuclear movement, and was viewed as the figurehead of the peace movement.

Germans remember Böll as the personification of the little man, who lent his voice to the marginalised against 'those on top'.

Günter Grass on the other hand, spent years affiliated to a party. Even today, he remains close to the Social Democrats, years after leaving the party. Not long ago, together with other artists, he founded the WIN 2000 election initiative in support of the SPD candidate for Prime Minister of Schleswig Holstein. Grass thus continued a tradition dating back to 1969, when he appeared at 190 national election events for the SPD -

Grass is respected by the younger generation, as one would respect and value democracy and citizenship, while secretly paying court to anarchy and bohemianism

events which Grass also partially financed. He contributed massively to the success of Willy Brandt, whose commitment to *Daring more Democracy* did indeed transform the republic. Grass subsequently accompanied Brandt on his legendary trip to Poland to sign the Warsaw Agreement, and became a close friend and confidant of the country's first social democratic Chancellor. Even when Oskar Lafontaine resigned not only the chairmanship of the party but also his position as Finance Minister in Schröder's cabinet, Günter Grass made his views loudly known. Once again he shone in his favourite role of partisan and dogmatic accuser. When Lafontaine's book *The Heart Beats on The Left* appeared, Grass commented:

'Oscar, quaff your red wine and shut up.'

The following *bon-mot* which appeared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* is an indication of how much Grass, as the die-hard-Social Democrat, is still associated with every-day politics: 'The drum is there, but Oskar is gone.' The quotation refers to Oskar Matzerath, famous narrator of *The Tin Drum*, who stops growing at three as a protest against the world of grown-ups and then finds his true destiny as a drummer. The *FAZ* line points out that Grass has registered his views - drumming hard - with his comment about his longstanding (party) friend, while Lafontaine has quietly sunk into oblivion. Grass the political ringmaster.

The political posturing can quickly obscure Grass's literary work: the public sees and hears the drummer rather than the writer. Yet, loved or not, Grass's books are often best-sellers, with even more copies sold abroad than in Germany. But malicious tongues compare his books to the Bible: every home has at least one rarely opened copy.

Literary criticism has had a decisive hand in this paradoxical state of affairs. While the publication of the first novel *The Tin Drum* was greeted with euphoria, the jubilation diminished with each subsequent book.

Marcel Reich-Ranicki, one of the best known and most powerful German literary critics, seems to have disliked Grass from their first meeting, and never thought much of his work. He even failed to recognise the famous debut novel for what it was. In his memoirs, Reich-Ranicki writes about their first meeting in Warsaw in 1958, painting a very unflattering picture of the Nobel Prize winner: 'It was obvious that he was mainly occupied with himself and, if anything, quite unwilling to communicate. It seemed a good idea to change the conversation. I wanted to know his opinion about the literature that had been created in the Federal Republic. As he continued very monosyllabic and dour, I tried out a few names on him. Wolfgang

Köppen? Unrelenting silence. I don't think he knew a single line of Köppen. Heinrich Böll? A mocking yet definitely mild smile. Max Frisch? My guest found the goings on in his novels far too classy. As time wore on, I no longer felt like talking to this dismissive West German, and brought him to his hotel. There was a certain coolness in our goodbyes. We probably thought the same thing - what a boring and wasted afternoon it had been.'

Over 30 years later, the German news magazine *Der Spiegel* devoted a legendary cover story to Reich-Ranicki's merciless dissection of Grass's last great novel, *Ein Weites Feld*. The two had made a few discreet approaches in the preceding years, but now Reich-Ranicki became Grass's greatest enemy. From now on Grass only called him 'the jester'.

However, other critics also believe that the Nobel Prize winner has not written a good book since 1979, when *Das Treffen in Telgte* (The Meeting in Telgte) was published. And they may have a point, judging by *The Rat* (1986) or the short story *Unkenrufe* (1992).

But it's interesting that Horace Engdahl, secretary of the Stockholm Nobel Committee, took issue with this view in his laudatio. In contrast to Thomas Mann, awarded the Nobel Prize 70 years earlier, this time the prize was not given to Grass for his first international success *The Tin Drum*, but for his life's work. The jury seemed to like the fact that Grass had not spent his whole life trying to repeat his triumph, instead dazzling his public with experiments and risk-taking.

Only a few authors can look back on such a rich and creative life. Grass's entire work is impressive. The sensitive artist rises above the committed writer who, with Zola, never tires of shouting 'j'accuse'.

Few realise that the roots of Grass's writing, and therefore of his success, lie in his poetry. His first collection of poetry, *Die Vorzüge der Windhühner*, was published in 1956, a year after Grass had won third prize in a radio poetry competition to which his wife had secretly sent some of his poems. While critics continue to search for traces of those beginnings, terming Grass a poet who came to prose in a roundabout way,

nobody thought to look at it the other way round. Fritz J. Raddatz, literary critic of the weekly *Die Zeit*, noted that Grass's first book of poetry 'encompasses, in a hesitating and curious way, many of the elements of his subsequent burgeoning oeuvre.' Reich-Ranicki has always praised the poetic quality of Grass's prose, the one element which he does not dispute. At the same time, the style elements of the storyteller are apparent in Grass's verse.

*Malicious tongues
compare his books to
the Bible: every home
has at least one rarely
opened copy*

This is clear is one looks at the first verse of 'The Mosquito Plague', from *Die Vorzüge, der Windhühner*:

Things worsened year on year in our district,
We often invited guests, to share a little
with the swarm -
Yet, after praising the cheese,
The guests went on their way.

Grass's imagery and groundedness, his clarity and unassuming realism, can be compared to the Italian Cesare Pavese, who explicitly called his poems 'prose poems'. Grass was ahead of his time in terms of German poetry, launching a style which later, in the 1970s, became a paradigm for the *Alltagsgedicht*, or everyday poem.

His poetry was never to bring Grass commercial success: this only set in with publication of his first work of fiction, *The Tin Drum*. The book's first chapters were written in Paris, where Grass lived as an impoverished sculptor from 1956 to 1959, hungry and cold, heating himself by burning discarded manuscript pages in an iron stove.

At a meeting in Großholzleute in the Bavarian Allgäu of Group 47, a legendary gathering of writers made famous by Grass, he read from the manuscript of his novel. The work was

acclaimed by the writers and critics present, and he received the Group 47 prize, awarded annually at each meeting. In those days, the prize opened all literary doors. And this despite the fact that, in the 1950s, the novel contained enough dynamite to rip book and author apart.

The novel is the fictitious autobiography of Oskar Matzerath, whom we've already met. The hero is an anti-hero in every respect. Having fallen down the stairs at the age of three, Oskar remains a dwarf for the first 30 years of his life, later growing only slightly. He uses the fall as an excuse to arrest his development in protest at the world of his parents and adults in general. 'That's when I decided not to become a politician, let alone a corner grocer, but rather to stay as I was - and so I did, maintaining this height and appearance for many years.'

With his toy tin drum, Oskar drums up the necessary distance between himself and the adult world. However, his mental, intellectual and sexual development does not stand still. This allows him to view and reflect on his environment with the mentality of an adult in a child's body. In addition, Oskar can issue such shocking and vibrating screams that he shatters all glass in his vicinity - a weapon not to be underrated. And now, at the age of 30, as inmate of a nursing home, Oskar remembers his life and writes it down.

Obviously, it's difficult for readers to identify with this dwarf. He is not particularly likeable - in fact, he's a repellent figure. In the end Oskar kills his father Alfred, the grocer, Nazi sympathiser and passionate cook 'who can transform feelings into soup'. When the Russians occupy Danzig, setting of the first part of the novel, and break into the Matzerath's cellar, Oskar ensures that his father swallows his Nazi badge to avoid discovery. The badge chokes Alfred Matzerath. 'He wanted to get rid of it, but despite his oft-proven imagination as a cook and window dresser, he couldn't find anywhere to hide the badge except his own gob.' Like his country, Matzerath is suffocated by one-party dictatorship. In the final analysis, Oskar did not actually cause his father's death. He simply did nothing to save him. Indeed, he is relieved to be rid of his father whom he never respected and whose

actual paternity he doubted.

The anti-hero Oskar didn't even manage to make it into the title of the novel. It's his instrument - the drum - which has entered literary history. In this sense, the novel is really an anti-development novel, albeit one in the best German tradition - a tradition ranging from *Wilhelm Meister* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* via *Effi Briest* and the *Buddenbrooks* to Hesse's *Peter Camenzind*. Yet, in contrast to these works, Grass's novel relies on grotesque and absurd elements, and lacks a hero who can generate identification. Grass repeatedly emphasised the debt he owed to the concept of the 'picturesque novel', exemplified in Germany by Grimmelshausen's baroque tale of the adventures of *Simplicissimus*. If you add the picturesque element to the tradition of the German development novel, the result is pretty close to the literary and historical location of *The Tin Drum*.

While Grass is always at pains to emphasise that his first-person narrators are not to be confused with the author, and that in the case of *The Tin Drum* such an assumption would be malicious, it is nevertheless astonishing how many biographical moments can be found Grass's debut novel. A 'modern' writer seems to draw his material above all from his own life and experience.

For a start, the novel's scenes - Danzig, Düsseldorf and Paris - are the stations of Grass's own life. The milieu of the Kaschubian petit bourgeois and working class, of bargees, shopkeepers, market gardeners and postmen, corresponds to Grass's own childhood and youth in Danzig (today part of Poland and known as Gdansk). Hitler's last push to win the war saw Grass endure conscription and imprisonment - and opened his eyes to Germany's crimes. 'Now (...) I saw what mind-boggling crimes were committed in the name of my generation's future. As a nineteen-year old I started to sense the guilt which our people had knowingly and unknowingly amassed, the burden and responsibility which would rest on the shoulders of this and later generations.' From that time on, Grass used political commit-

ment and artistic endeavour as instruments with which to confront this collective responsibility and shoulder some part of the load.



Self-portrait from Kalkutta by Günter Grass

Like Oskar Matzerath, Grass left Danzig after the war to start a mason's apprenticeship in Düsseldorf. The road took Grass (unlike Oskar Matzerath), to the renowned Düsseldorf Academy of Art, where he studied sculpture. In his free time - once again converging with Oskar - Grass played the drums in a jazz band. The novel's initial chapters were written in Paris, the city to which Oskar finally fled in the wake of some obscure crime, was wrongfully arrested by the police, and then committed to a mental institution. Certainly from a geographical point of view, reality and fiction merge into one: the plot ends in the city where the novel was born. It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of Grass's experience as a sculptor to his writing. Grass carried the characteristics of his work as a sculptor - closeness to reality, precise description, and thorough research - over to his work as a writer. His texts stay on the surface in that they don't get lost in speculation, indirectness, supposition or suggestion. Decisions, viewpoints, coalitions and enmities are purely based on sensual per-

ceptions - touch, smell and taste. Maria, the great love of Oskar's life, seduces him with sherbet which he drizzles into her palm, spitting on it to cause it to foam up. Oskar's grandmother, Anna Bronski, sitting beside a campfire in a field, meets her future husband when she offers the fugitive refuge from the police under her four skirts - worn one on top of the other. Oskar's future grandfather, Joseph Koljaiczek, cannot resist the aroma under the skirts and impregnates Anna in the field even while the police are searching for him.

Grass himself has talked of his 'passion for things', explaining that 'I am always suspicious of everything that I cannot touch, smell, or taste, all that's wrapped up in ideas.' This credo corresponds to the way in which his characters speak. 'You won't find a single sentence in my books starting thus: "He thought this and that", or: "He played with the hope" - nothing like that. My characters are observed from the outside from the perspective of their actions - how they act and how they don't act. Like a stone that is worked on from the outside and only shows what's chiselled into it, without *trompe l'oeil* effects, without the lie of foreshortening.'

To achieve this effect, for example in *The Tin Drum*, Grass uses a simple but subtle trick. He lets other characters in the story describe their fellow characters as they appear. Oskar's family is introduced neither by the author, nor by the first-person narrator addressing his readers. The central characters are introduced by Oskar, looking at a photo album and describing the people and his memories of them, as if to himself: I lose myself amongst all these snapshots (...) I'd better flip a few pages quickly and get to myself, my first photographic image.'

It is even more important not to confuse author with narrator, or biography with fiction (except for coincidences of material). And one must not equate the characters' style, habits or intelligence with the attributes of the author. The petty and petit bourgeois milieu of *The Tin Drum*, the view of the world 'from below' (a world without

intellectuals, dandies or aesthetes) should not lead to assumptions about the author. Too often Grass is primarily seen as a dynamic and virile muscle man, hammering his texts into shape with rough stonemason's hands. Which makes it all the more important to focus on a different aspect of his work.

With his book *Das Treffen in Telgte* (The Meeting in Telgte) - my personal favourite - he proved two things. As a real *poeta ductus*, Grass is not only firmly rooted in the European literary tradition, enjoying an intimate familiarity with German baroque literature - he is also a master of the fine filigree miniature form as much as of the grand, flamboyant stroke.

With utmost sensitivity (which probably owes more to his experience as a draftsman and etcher, and less to his experience as a sculptor), Grass used the book to erect a monument to Group 47 and their spiritual father, Hans Werner Richter.

In 1647, 20 German baroque poets meet in Telgte where they read and discuss their work. At the same time, in neighbouring Münster, the Peace of Westphalia is being finalised, putting an end to the Thirty Years War. Such a meeting never happened; it is simply a loving parable of an actual meeting of poets. That meeting took place after the

twentieth century's great war, in 1947 - thus giving Group 47 its name. Grass wanted to thank his colleagues, who had discovered him at their annual meeting in 1958. In Telgte figures like Grimmelshausen, Gryphius, Logau, Hoffmannswaldau and the pious Paul

It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of Grass's experience as a sculptor to his writing

Gerhard appear. Each of them, in fact, symbolises - more or less obviously - a modern equivalent. Böll, Walser, Hans Mayer - there's no need to precisely identify each modern with each baroque author. The atmosphere is captured beautifully. Someone asks what the point of the meeting is - what do these poets, some of them competitors, have in common? The answer applies both to the fictitious past and present reality: 'It was not tedious business or exciting love that bound them together. They were simply driven to one another. Moreover, search-

ing and restlessness increased generally as peace was being negotiated. No-one wanted to be alone.' The gathering commemorates dead colleagues; the pragmatists try to keep theorising at a minimum, while the sensualists skip the readings to tumble the peasant girls in the hay. As in real life, no doubt. Even the end seems amazingly modern and real: 'In the end it was worth all the trouble. In future each of them would feel less alone.' Simon Dach, alias Hans Werner Richter, the meeting's organiser, sums it all up. Togetherness generates self-confidence, and thus the meeting at Telgte becomes a plea for the strength of literature: 'No prince can equal them. Their fortune cannot be bought. And if they were to be stoned, and smothered in hatred, the hand with the pen would still rise from the rubble.'

The triumph of literature over crisis and war, together with the preservation of memory, are the two most important tasks authors can set themselves: *Das Treffen in Telgte* postulates both. The story is an artistic metaphor for the phrase 'Writing against Time'. And it was not least for this Sisyphean work that Grass was awarded the Nobel Prize.

Translated from the German by Charlotte O'Connell

Contributors to this issue

Kathleen Lynch

is director of the Equality Studies Centre at University College Dublin

Alexandra Klemm

is a researcher and translator

Gerard O'Quigley

writes on politics and works in local government

Kevin Pringle

is communications manager of the Scottish National Party Parliamentary Group

Falk Schornstheimer

studied German and Italian in Cologne and Italy and works as a trade journalist for a legal publisher in Cologne

Hugh Maxton

was twice elected as *Toscaireacht of Aosdána*; his latest collection of poems, *Gubú Roi*, was published by Lagan Press of Belfast in May 2000

Greta Jones

is Professor of History at the University of Ulster at Jordanstown

George O'Brien

is a writer, academic and literary critic

Dara Robinson

is a partner in a Dublin firm of solicitors

Michael Hinds

teaches at Trinity College, Dublin, and at Mater Dei Institute of Education, Dublin City University.

Trahsion des clerics; or The Republicanism of Letters



While the oil-slick of Charles Haughey's financial corruption continues to spread, there remains one curiously undisturbed expanse of clear water. I refer to the feeding ground of many native and exotic odd fish - poets, painters, musicians, novelists, sculptors and other beneficiaries of his celebrated cultural policy. In the early stages of his career, public acclaim focused on the tax exemption scheme of his 1969 Finance Act. In the words of his semi-critical biographer, T. Ryle Dwyer, 'this measure secured international publicity for Haughey as a patron of the arts.' Aptly enough, thriller-writers like Richard Condon and Frederick Forsythe were among the first to benefit. Few Irish artists earned enough to do so.

In retrospect, this famous provision leads swiftly into the establishment of the Provisionals. At the time, of course, we experienced a strange slow-motion, flying-through-clouds sensation of unreality. In October 1970, the internationally celebrated patron of the arts stood in the dock accused, by the Irish State he had served as a minister, of

conspiring to import arms illegally. The charge of conspiracy did not stick, and the matter of importation fell as a consequence. Money held in secret bank accounts - the theme will recur - was never recovered. Yet money reached IRA elements in Belfast who were keen to arm themselves, not only to resist loyalist aggression (which cannot be denied) but also to deal with new political sophisticates who had long argued that violence was no way forward. The 'decommissioning' of 2000 comes thirty years and three thousand lives later, with radical politics a collateral victim. Arts patronage has stood in its stead. Indeed arms and arts constitute the mantling and supporters of Haughey's heraldic devices.

Late 1970 found the former minister in disgrace except among those who were tried with him (Assemblyman John Kelly of Sinn Féin, for example) and those who carried him shoulder high from the Four Courts. The arts beckoned. Thus on 12 July [sic] 1972, he addressed a summer school at Harvard University on the role of the arts in a democracy. The speech - or an edited version of it - appeared promptly in the

Irish Times next day. In the same issue, journalists reported the shambles of Protestant Ulster's great marching day. Also on 13 July, a Dáil committee struggling to investigate what had become of public funds published its inconclusive report, inconclusive largely because Haughey's brother refused to answer questions. On 21 July, twenty-six Provo bombs exploded in Belfast, killing eleven people and injuring more than a hundred and twenty. The refusal and the blitz might be regarded as twinned reflections on that democracy Charles Haughey spoke of at Harvard.

Out of the Harvard speech was born Aosdána, a unique academy-like body to which artists, musicians and writers may be elected and through which some can derive financial support. This at least is what we are told in a brochure published to mark its tenth anniversary in 1990. But Aosdána's historian, who was also Haughey's special adviser on cultural matters, dates the Harvard speech to 1973, not 1972 as the newspaper evidence would suggest. While it might be desirable to distance Aosdána's origins from Bloody Friday by

an additional twelve months, it would also seem difficult retrospectively to shift a Summer School.

Harvard's annual Institute in Arts Administration ran a programme between 2 and 28 July in 1972. Its fourth and final module was 'Public Policy and the Arts Administrator'. The approach was essentially that of working seminars. 'Class room and study materials will extensively employ the Harvard Business School approach', the handbook said. Haughey's contribution took the form of a lunch-time talk, though it has not yet proved possible to recover a list of those present. The text appeared a year later as 'Art and the Majority' in Stephen A. Greyser (ed.) *Cultural Policy and Arts Administration* [Cambridge, Mass:] Harvard Summer School Institute in Arts Administration, [1973], pp. 57-79. Among the precursors whom Haughey cited was Michael Davitt, and his *Leaves from a Prison Diary*. (How close Haughey came to having an opportunity to write out of the same experience!) With equal insouciance, he concluded with a phrase of Oliver Cromwell's 'Take courage. It is well worth fighting for.' Mr Kelly may have taken note.

All of this is rather less grand than the image of a Gaelic Maenas addressing (by invitation) the dons of puritan Harvard. In retrospect of course, the *Irish Times* report and the later trumpetings were simply part of the Great Enchantment woven by Haughey with the help of Dunne, Goodman, Desmond, Fingleton and Brian Lenihan's liver. The Enchantment was gradually dispelled in Dublin Castle, when Haughey finally admitted to receiving large sums of money and (by unavoidable inference) failing to pay tax on this income. We also learnt of Allied Irish Banks' uncommon decent attitude to his overdraft. Pace Judge Kevin Haugh, Haughey is a proven liar and a swindler. A court room verdict may add to this record. Invocations of *folie de grandeur* - as attempted by Anthony Cronin in the *Sunday Independent* of 13 July 1997 - are merely insulting to the victims of Haughey's dishonesty.

I suppose some dimwit could argue that this has nothing to do with the arts Haughey patronised so ostentatiously. The pictures which hang in

Kinsealy - who paid for those? The taxpayer, AIB, or Larry Goodman? If painting and sculpture are distinctive among the arts in that they are uniquely embodied in physical objects, writers and musicians may still have reason to feel embarrassment. What about the ludicrous (and wrinkled?) Great Book of Ireland, promoted to convert writing into a com-

Throughout the long Haughey era, few members of Aosdána publicly questioned the wisdom of the Boss

modity? What about the reputations of Eilís Dillon, Máire de Paor, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh, and Colm Ó Briain whose contribution to the evolving idea of Aosdána had to be suppressed in deference to the only begetter? Did the 1991 shredding of Brian Kennedy's book, *Dreams and Responsibilities*, usefully generate more smoke than gunfire?

Throughout the long Haughey era, few members of Aosdána publicly questioned the wisdom of the Boss. A composer was among the courageous ones. For his pains, he was rewarded in September 1990 by Mr Cronin in a review of Kennedy's book. 'I have long ago forgiven Dr Brian Boydell the comparison with Stalin's henchman Zhdanov.' (*Irish Times*, 1/9/1990: Weekend p. 9.) But not, evidently, forgotten. The triumph of memory over charity has characterised many exchanges about Aosdána. After one protracted exchange late in 1991 or early 1992, I found it advisable to swear an affidavit in front of a Dublin solicitor. When, in 1996 I suggested that the organisation should issue a statement in the wake of Veronica Guerin's murder because 'the right to write is a vital part of our civil code, and clearly needs defence,' I was told that 'too much time had elapsed' - nine days to be precise. Caution ruled; had not Guerin once worked for Haughey in Dublin's North-Central constituency; had he not appointed her to the governing body of what is now

Dublin City University at the tender age of twenty-four?

Those who have worked for Haughey are legion, and include many ordinary decent members of Fianna Fáil. In the context of arts policy, he was notable for appointing a Special Adviser. Anthony Cronin has acted in that capacity in relation to Aosdána, while simultaneously sitting as a member of Aosdána's administrative committee (the *Toscairí*) and playing go-between for both Taoiseach and Aosdána. There was a certain economy in these arrangements but they would hardly pass muster today, given the greater attention to protocol which has resulted from inquiries into - among other things - Haughey's way with Fianna Fáil's money. Mr Cronin recently found occasion (*Sunday Independent*, 28 May 2000) to describe himself as having been 'in Government Service' in the same sense that Conor Cruise O'Brien was during his days in External Affairs. Unlike Mr Cronin, Cruise O'Brien found this employment through public competition.

And the Boss has continued to loom over Aosdána. Haughey's political battle with Cruise O'Brien in Dublin North-Central formed the backdrop to the ill-conducted and ill-informed attempt by Máire Mac an tSaoi to have Francis Stuart expelled from Aosdána just a few years ago. While Cruise O'Brien assisted his wife in destroying her case, by interrupting from the public arena, Mr Cronin spoke at inordinate length from the chair to ensure that Stuart survived by virtue of *that* defence and not simply the common sense of Aosdána members as a whole.

George Colley is dead, Jim Gibbons is dead, Robin Fogarty is dead, though PJ Connolly (sacrificed when Haughey outrageously compromised the trial of Malcolm McArthur) has successfully rebuilt his career. Now that the Haughey era is over, what Aosdána (his alibi) needs is a clean break, a break from the unsatisfactory accounts of its past which were peddled in numerous Haughey interviews and other publications. His loyalists might act upon the 'acute self-doubt' Mr Cronin diagnoses in himself (*Sunday Independent*, 23 April 2000). He is, he tells us, 'crippled by an ability to see the other person's point of view.' That bodes well.

Article in Review

Conventional nationalist history fails to reflect an understanding of the dynamics of scientific culture in Ireland, writes GRETA JONES

Nationalism, religion and science



Queen's University, Belfast

Nicholas Whyte* provides a series of useful and sometime excellent narratives on episodes in Irish scientific history over the last two hundred years but whether it brings us close to understanding the dynamics of scientific culture in Ireland is another matter.

Primarily this is because the author is still operating within a paradigm mainstream political history has gradually been abandoning in recent decades; that is of seeing Ireland's history as largely encompassed by the terms 'colonial' and 'ascendancy'. Whyte frankly admits the connection is weak in many instances but he has not shaken off the project.

The result is that aspects of Irish science which do not lend themselves to these concepts become invisible, pushed into the background. There is an indigenous tradition of science in Ireland, networked with other scientific cultures in London Oxford, Cambridge, in the case of the North East, with Glasgow and Edinburgh. To cite one instance, Sir Robert Hane and W.K. Sullivan reputedly went to Germany for their scientific education as did John Tyndall. Charles Cameron, Dublin's

first public health superintendent, trained in Germany and regularly scanned the German scientific periodical press noting Koch's discovery of the tuberculosis bacillus by reading it in the Berliner *Klinische Wochenschrift* of 10 April 1882. E.J. McWeeney, a graduate of the Catholic Medical School, and the first microbiologist appointed by the Irish Local Government Board, also learned his discipline in Germany, then the leading country in the field.

These are not insignificant facts when talking about the relationship between Irish science and European culture. Nor was Irish science excluded from other important nineteenth century developments. The Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) was a test case for significant government investment in science and technology. It was set up at the moment when scientists elsewhere in the British Isles were bemoaning the lack of government support. The role played by the Trinity physicist Fitzgerald in its creation was a tribute to the powerful hold of Huxleyite ideology over that generation of scientists.¹ This makes DATI interesting in itself, as the outcome of the

belief in the role of science as a means to revive the national economy and of government's duty to promote it. But Whyte sees its significance primarily as a test case for whether nationalists could have run Irish science better after 1922 if they had been fortunate enough to have had the money the British government put at DATI's disposal.

Irish science is not just a pull and push affair between nationalism and the Imperial parliament. Nor can it be accommodated, except with injury to its history, to the traditional villains and heroes of conventional Irish nationalist history. It is in pursuit of the latter that Whyte produces some of his most disputable theses. The first is the reason for the small numbers of Irish Catholic scientists. Figures for the mid-nineteenth century which count only those teaching science or in scientific institutions like museums or employed by the geological survey are misleading. The figures would certainly be skewed in favour of Protestants who, in the South, were

*Nicholas Whyte, *Science, Colonialism and Ireland*, Cork University Press, hbk, IR£40.00

largely middle and upper class. But I believe it is necessary to justify the exclusion of engineering and medicine from discussion of the extent and nature of scientific activity in Ireland as it would be elsewhere in the nineteenth century and for this reason: The concept of pure science or scientific research as the function of a university only slowly developed in the nineteenth century. It might have been dominant by 1900 but this could not be said of the middle of the nineteenth century. According to Gerald Geison's biography of the Cambridge physiologist Michael Foster, there were only fourteen undergraduates in Cambridge pursuing pure science course in 1864.² Scientists, as they told successive Royal Commissions on University Education, earned their living by teaching zoology to future colonial civil servants, anatomy to medical students and physics and mathematics and geology to engineers. This was because, as nineteenth century scientists knew, there were limited professional opportunities for the practice of pure science and for scientific research. The Catholic middle class sent their sons - and later their daughters - to university to pursue vocational courses and who is to say there were wrong. Pure science classes struggled unless they were a requirement for entrance to professional training and the Royal College of Science in Dublin - like its English counterpart - worried, until the turn of the century, about its low student enrolment.

What is true is that mid-nineteenth century scientists, until the changes brought about by Huxley and like minded scientists, conform to the model of the pursuit of science as a cultural rather than a professional capacity. Popular science classes, unlike pure science courses for undergraduates, were very well attended. Thus, until the end of the century, scientific research was still very much the preserve of the parsonage and the country house and in Ireland this meant the gentry and a gentry which was still largely Protestant. But this did not hold true in the North East where many of the most famous scientists of the nineteenth century were of middle class and even plebeian origins. As the tradition of science as a 'cultural activity' declined to be replaced with the idea and possibility of science as a career

so the social composition of the scientific class changed, in England as well as in Ireland. This means that the regional and social class divisions in Irish science cannot be subsumed into merely a nationalist or anti-nationalist account.

Whyte's explanation of the conflicts over scientific education also suffer from failure to see it in a broader context. To say that the problem of producing Catholic scientists rested with the government's refusal to fund Catholic controlled education - it seems to be accepted by Whyte that the non-denominational Queen's Colleges were unsatisfactory even though in 1903 around 34 per cent of Galway students and 57 per cent of Cork were Catholic - is to write out of history a central issue for the scientific reform movement of the nineteenth century.³ Whyte should know that a major objective for many reform minded scientists was to *detach* the university system from its clerical roots, again not just in Ireland but in England. Their opposition was not to 'Catholic

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rights', though it was presented by apologists for Catholic education as such, but to any sort of denominationalism in higher education.

Anything in the opposite direction, such as the creation of a clerically-controlled Catholic University, was seen as retrograde. Yes this did mean anti-Catholicism, as witnessed by Whyte's quote from Fitzgerald about the horror of the worship of dead saints. But it also meant anti-clericalism in general: witness Fitzgerald's intervention against Professor Japp's address to the British Association on the evidences of 'Design' in nature.⁴ A further consideration for many Irish scientists was that a denominational state-supported university effectively partitioned Ireland's cultural and scientific life on a sectarian basis. Joly told the physicist Larmor in 1919 that

'The result of the election leaves one with the feeling that a life's work for scientific reform and non-denominational education is swept away'.⁵

In this book all these considerations take second place, perhaps because Whyte does not think that there was any practical consequence for scientific inquiry. For example, he dismisses the view that the Catholic Church intervened to censor or prevent the teaching of Darwinism or at least that it can be proved that they were successful in doing so. The fact is that in 1906 they claimed that they had done precisely this and fifty years later, Alfred O'Rahilly, celebrating the first half century of the foundation of the National University of Ireland, was still proclaiming it.⁶

Of course conflicts in history are often about something rather different from the claims of the protagonists. What was at stake was not just Darwinism as a scientific theory but whose writ was to run in education - the church or the scientists.⁷ Darwinism came to assume importance because it was *the* 'issue' encapsulating the challenge to clerical authority in higher education in the late nineteenth century. In principle the attitude of the Catholic Church to Darwin was no different from many other religious denominations at the time but other denominations were not in a position to make a bid for their own state-supported university. Catholics in England, for example, were also worried about secularisation and Darwinism but eventually accepted the overtures made by Cambridge and other universities to engage them more fully in mainstream higher education. In Ireland it was different. The Catholic Church, allied with popular nationalist democracy, had every hope that its claims might be satisfied and this accounts for the ferocity of the quarrel. Though the Catholic Church was disappointed in its ultimate aim, effectively it had a prime position in the National University of Ireland and in the state founded after 1922. This outcome had a considerable impact on other areas of intellectual life and science cannot be excluded.

Whether this jeopardised science in the new state of Ireland after 1922 is a moot point. Ambitious memoranda appealing for greater science-led economic development funded by the

government appear in the 1920s and 1930s and this shows that Catholic nationalist scientists had themselves absorbed what had become by the turn of century, a dominant ideology in the scientific community. Whyte is correct that parsimony played a significant part in the disappointing response of the government. Most recent histories of the Irish Free State have also concluded that unwillingness to spend money hindered imaginative reconstruction in other spheres.

This was not constructive. At the very least, it was discouraging to a tradition of scientific rationality which, although looking increasing old fashioned in the twentieth century, had made an important contribution to the construction of the scientific project in Ireland. Whyte spends time trying to prove that the geologist WB Wright did not leave because of the political and intellectual atmosphere. This might be so but a trawl around the Rockefeller Archives on the state of intellectual life in Ireland in the inter-war years would leave no one in doubt that his sanguine views were not shared by those who

looked at Ireland from the outside. Sadly these were the very people who were willing to make up much of the financial deficit in education for in education for the new government.⁸

Notes and references

1. See Greta Jones, 'Scientists Against Home Rule', in D.G. Bonce and A. O'Day (eds), *Defenders of the Union*, Routledge, forthcoming.
2. Gerald L. Geison, *Michael Forster and the Cambridge School of Physiology: The Scientific Enterprise in Late Victorian Society* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978).
3. Calculated from the *Royal Commission on University Education* (Ireland) Final Report PP. Cd.1483-4, vol. 32, 1903, pp. 11-16.
4. On the subject of whether the crystalline forms found in nature proved design. Japp's father was a minister the Catholic Apostolic Church, a Scottish sect similar to the Pentecostals.
5. Larmor Papers at the Royal Society, Ms. 406, letter 1061. Joly to Larmor, 1 June 1919.
6. 'It will be for the historian of the

future to tell that the two decades of years that followed the foundation of the Queen's Colleges coincided with the period of militant Darwinism in European Universities. Who can say what has been saved to Irish Catholicism by its resolution to battle against Godless education at that time?' See 'The Catholic University School of Medicine', *Freeman's Journal*, 12 May

7. 'In thus asserting our right to reject alien ideology we do not of course claim that there is such a thing as Catholic chemistry or Catholic biology. We fully accept and promote scholarship and science; we do not even wish them to be adorned with pious frills. But we reject the current scientism which speciously invades philosophy and religion, as was shown by the recent centenary celebration of Darwin's *Origins of the Species*.' J. Anthony Gaughan *Alfred O'Rahilly, 1 Academic* (Dublin: Kingdom Books, 1986), p. 246.

8. See Greta Jones, 'The Rockefeller Foundation and medical education in Ireland in the 1920s', *Irish Historical Studies*, vol. XXX, no. 120 (November 1997) pp. 1-17.

BOOK REVIEWS

Who fears to speak

W.J. Mc Cormack Fool of the Family: A Life of J.M. Synge Weidenfeld and Nicholson; hbk £25 Stg

George O'Brien

Another way of describing the times that are in it, in addition to the Age of Greed, the Age of Nostalgia, the Age of the Refugee (all of which have something to do with each other, inevitably), is the Age of Biography. Just about everyone who ever wrote, toed or did (in both senses) a line is liable to have his or her life written, often twice or three times. Which reminds me of another applicable label: the Age of Excess. Biography's current vogue, and the consciousness industry of which it is a subsidiary, fetishises its material, like most industrial processes, refining, dove-

tailing, streamlining, painting, and uses such tools as notoriety, innuendo, hearsay and the ethos of outing to do so. In other words, the biographical subject is worthy of attention basically because of what he or she managed to get away with. Unwittingly, but unmistakably, the typical biography's structuring of sensation, together with its focus on amorality as spectacle, makes it less noteworthy as the story of somebody's life than as a political parable, since where else but in the current political life of the democracies have spectacle and sensation become such serious and integral constituents of reality (whether they take the form of war on television or cash-filled envelopes).

Not all biographies can be tarred with the same brush; obviously some good ones have come along. But like the lyric poem that's become a list, the novel that's become an exercise in kiss and tell, the memoir that's hardly more than an auction catalogue, biogra-

phies have become debased, losing in tact, sympathy and expertise at the cost of outrageousness. So, when something that's on a different level entirely appears, such as this life of Synge, it seems worthwhile not just to make the fact known but to have a go at saying what difference its difference makes.

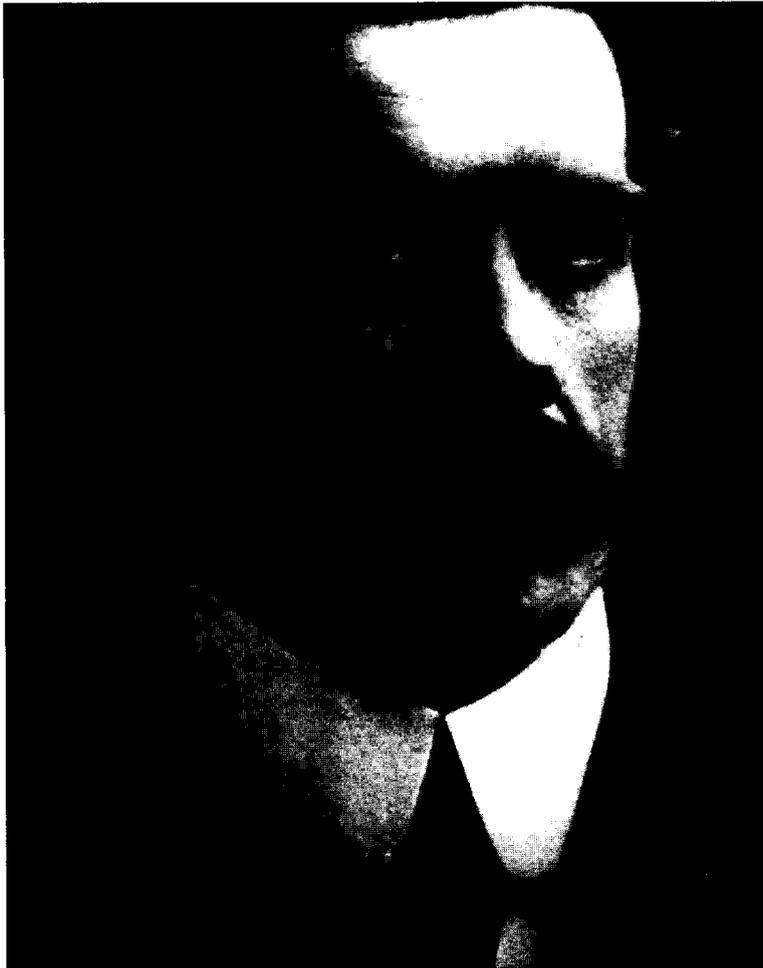
One way of approaching the issue is provided by Sartre in his preface to *L'Idiot de la Famille*, his biography of Flaubert (another fool of the family, evidently), where he makes the point that, 'a man is never an individual; it would be more fitting to call him a *universal singular*. Summed up and for this reason universalised by his epoch, he in turn resumes it by reproducing himself in it as singularity. Universal by the singular universality of human history, singular by the universalising singularity of his projects, he requires simultaneous examination from both ends.' Something of the same appreciation of the complex ways in which temperament and the times

combine and recombine to produce the distinctive strip of cultural DNA commonly, and rather complacently, referred to as 'the individual' underlies *Fool of the Family*.

On this foundation rests a further, concomitant view. This is that the artist is a test case of individuality, since through his heightened sensitivities, his integrity, his commitment to his awareness of his own difference - what in an Irish context might be called his Protestantism, assuming it were possible to secularise and make common that proper noun - he undertakes to contemplate and cultivate the clash of the psycho- and the socio-. Able to do no other, he attempts to make something of his scars and inklings. (Apologies for the 'his', by the way; it's meant generically.) This critical clash is reproduced in the form of a crisis which has been brought to terms, and which may, as a result, receive collective understanding from an audience, though often audiences are not immediately up to the challenge. The formal crisis is evident in taking whatever the artistic medium is to the limit of the particular artist's range, whether that entails unusual perspectives or pigmentation or materials, tonalities or sonorities, or as is typical in Irish arts, in not only what is said and how. Enter Synge. For one.

From which it may appear that *Fool of the Family* is more an essay in biographical method or, even less appetising, French Existentialism. All that's been suggested, however, is a way of appreciating the degree of thoughtfulness that makes this life such an instructive and rewarding read. If something similar to Sartre's 'simultaneous examination' is to be carried out, it can only be

done problematically, in a manner that is sympathetic to Synge's own painful misgivings on the one hand and resolution on the other. Nothing here is taken for granted, neither the life or the writing of it. Both of these, in fact, are shown to be



J. M. Synge

constituted by difficult and even troubling acts of perception and interpretation - by, in effect, complicated acts of reading. And the ways in which the different levels of Synge's consciousness and experience communicate with each other in order to produce an account of the whole personality is frequently a matter of outlining a 'buried stream of continuity' rather than an exhibition of omniscience or the sense of proprietorship which typically accompanies it.

The reader, therefore, is in the presence of Synge being read - in itself an act of homage, of course, and as befits the genuine article, is not uncritical. The

basic reading occasion, obviously enough, is the remarkable and illuminating density of detail in which the biography is grounded. To describe as comprehensive and resourceful the handling of not only Synge's letters, diaries, manuscripts and similar manifestations of his will and testament (in a word, his history, objectively speaking), but those of his immediate family, must inevitably seem condescending, particularly as the use of the archive is only what one might expect of a scholar-critic of McCormack's calibre. Related readings include the scrutiny of legal, medical and other documentation of an institutional character, scrutiny of which not only gives an insider's view of important professional codes and procedures in late Victorian Ireland but consolidate the realities of class, property and material cultural generally in the world of the playwright. (How the plays wrestle with these realities. And how attentively McCormack notes the inefaceable status of things in the plays - whether white coffin

boards or Pegeen Mike's shopping list.) Such considerations obviously substantiate the hidden (middle-class Protestant) Ireland of Synge's background and, by subjecting it to a critical reading, presents the political, economic and spiritual threats to which it was increasingly prone. (Synge's plays are very alive to promise and threat.)

Of this literal or documentary type of reading in *Fool of the Family*, one area that's especially valuable gives a much fuller and insightful idea of the playwright's commitment to the life of the mind and his pursuit of it in the works of Nietzsche, Marx and Darwin,

among others (his reading of Darwin, in particular, is thought to have been a decisive psychological, as well as intellectual, influence). Synge didn't balk at theory, clearly. It's interesting to think of how many of the greatest writers are alike in this way, not only sharing an interest in theory (philosophy, theology, and the like, if you prefer), it too being a realm of the outspoken and a spur to the originality of their own artistic intelligences.

There is, however, another level of readings which, while based on archival resources, are more than expository and chronological. A number of examples will convey what's meant here. There is, for instance, a thorough account of the cultural life of the Protestant middle-class 'laager' at Greystones, where Synge spent his boyhood holidays. Associated with that, there are extensive surveys of the Wicklow interior and the Synge family's lost home ground in Glanmore and vicinity, the playwright's imaginative inhabitation of which being rather more successful than his brother Robert's efforts to re-establish the family's interests there. An additional dimension of this powerful Wicklow nexus is made up of episodes from the spiritual life and social history of the Plymouth Brethren, crucial to seeing Cherie Matheson, to whom Synge proposed marriage, for whom she was. And a fourth reading details Synge's sojourns in Paris, which throw light on his political thinking, stimulated not only by his reading but by his acquaintance with elements in the Irish emigré community there. The presentation of this material has the additional interest of teaming Synge with Joyce, described as 'the ... heresiarch', a label which can also be applied to Synge very well. also. This alliance has further value in serving as the basis of a critique of Yeats's expropriating treatment of Synge's significance for the Abbey.

The emphases arising out of these readings are no doubt pretty obvious, but they bear repeating. In the first place, while there is no attempt to diminish the effect of the West of Ireland on Synge and the development of his

work, his visits there are not seen as some type of conversion experience, thanks to which Synge perceived Irish reality for the first time. On the contrary, the emphases demonstrate once more the elaborate character of Irish reality in Synge's time (and implicitly at any other). By giving each phase of Synge's formation, history, choices, experiences its due, the elaborateness establishes itself, becomes less a matter of interpre-

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tation than a matter of fact. And, as will be noted, a crucial function of this act of establishment is that sectarian inhibitions must be shed in order for it to work. It does no harm at all to spend a while at Greystones, or in understanding Synge's resistance to Maud Gonne, either, or to bear in mind the prolonged twilight of the Church of Ireland after Disestablishment. Reading is a special form of silence, just as writing is a privileged form of speech. There are silences here that are well worth the breaking.

Out of these various readings - or probings or investigations or 'examinations' (to go back to Sartre) - and out of W.J. McCormack's skill in locating 'the hidden dimension' which they implicitly and often conflictingly share, a palimpsest of Synge appears. Such a complicated and inscrutable scriptural and lexical presence is the biographer's analogue of the playwright's problematical subjective reality. It serves as a model of the subjective Synge's 'enigmatic', impassive, unsettled, unpromising, fool-of-the-family personality, while at the same time distinguishing his objective significance as a confluence of forces to whose attempts to define him he ultimately gave radical public witness through the subversive content of his plays.

Synge's typical scenarios, in which protagonists, couples, families, communities are found at the edge of a precipice, awaiting confirmation of, or awaiting to undergo, the impact of terminal circumstances, did not come from nowhere. They have their origins as clearly in the playwright's troubled negotiations of his own distinctive sexuality and spirituality, as well as in his awareness of the increasingly marginal status of his class and the institutional impasse of its relations with Church and State: 'The dramatist asked his defiant heroes - Martin Doull and Christy Mahon - to attempt nothing he did not have to undergo daily in his own self' - living (like Joyce, a life that was the opposite of the Freudian family romance). But, as *Fool of the Family* also points out, invoking T.S. Eliot's celebrated formulation, Synge was not only 'the man who suffers', he was 'the mind which creates' as well. To give form in the most public of literary forms of his complicated rejections, resiliencies and refusals, to at once become and overcome himself so comprehensively in his work, not to fear to speak, makes resonant the 'act of homage' which the author understandably describes his biographical undertaking to be. (It is in the light of Synge's innate courage, also, that the case made here for *The Well of the Saints* and not *The Playboy* being 'the great achievement' is persuasive.)

Purely in the interests of nit picking, and with the general reader rather than the Synge specialist in mind, perhaps too much is made of the playwright's first, unpublished opus, *When the Moon Has Set*. And although Synge's family's attitude to his artistic success and the controversies that accompanied is covered, it would have been interesting to have a more complete picture of that. But *Fool of the Family* is excellent value on every level. And it's not just a rich and compelling portrait of the artist, though that in itself would be plenty. In its scrupulous detail and dialectical suppleness it is also a challenge to the idea of the kinds of tasks literature might address - or should if it's to be taken seriously.

The case for penal reform

Paul O'Mahony Prison Policy in Ireland: Criminal Justice versus Social Justice Undercurrents/Cork University Press; pbk IR£5.95

Dara Robinson

This modest volume is the latest offering from the prolific Paul O'Mahony. For some years now, he has been the most consistent and vocal critic of the prisons regime. Indeed, as the bibliography shows, he himself is the only regularly published author of books on penal policy in Ireland.

To some extent, this book recycles his earlier works on Mountjoy prisoners, and the crises of the criminal justice system of the last decade. However, in itself, it is an excellent overview of what has passed for prison policy since the foundation of the State, and is a readable, well-researched introduction to the debate on the appalling condition of our prisons. It is packed with helpful figures and references to useful comparative studies, and yet avoids being dense or turgid.

O'Mahony is the only scholar presently publishing in Ireland to show an awareness of the prison system as microcosm of Irish society. While not always intellectually rigorous - he appears for example to have bought into the mythology of Veronica Guerin, her murder, and the subsequent emergence of the Criminal Assets Bureau as an essential force in the 'war' on crime - nevertheless, if academia is to mean anything, it means lots like him writing regularly about the many disgraceful aspects of recent criminal legislation, and the recent virtual abandonment of due process by the appellate Courts. Where are the others?

He is clearly incensed at the conditions in prisons, at once lamenting the state of long-established jails such as Mountjoy, and criticising (as does the European Committee for the Prevention

of Torture) the poor design, and hence wasted opportunity, of the new establishment at Cloverhill. At the same time, he rightly condemns the philosophy behind the current prison building programme, arguing cogently that we need resources diverted to non-custodial disposals by the Courts. The Probation and Welfare Services in Dublin 8, for example, are on the point of collapse. As O'Mahony points out, the Irish prison population is increasing, admittedly from a low base, faster than any country in Western Europe, and yet we are regarded by the Council of Europe as a low-crime country. Indeed outside Dublin, rates of indictable crime are extremely low by international standards.

Broadly, the first half of the book concentrates on orthodox criticisms of the penal system. Attention is drawn to the unnecessarily high use of imprisonment, its failure as a tool as measured by the rates of recidivism, the very poor conditions in which prisoners are obliged to live, the hopelessly inadequate educational facilities, and so on. However the latter part of the work broadens the discussion considerably.

Drawing on the historical thread of Foucault and Durkheim, O'Mahony refers to the alternative analysis of the penal system as a class-specific form of social control. As former US President Jimmy Carter memorably put it, 'it ain't just the poor who commit crime, but it sure is just the poor who go to jail.' O'Mahony draws support from the remarks made by Judge Robert Barr, one of the most senior and experienced of our present High Court bench, in April 1999, describing as 'an injustice' our collective social failure 'to rescue from crime those who are born to it'.

He develops this hypothesis with admirable clarity. It is no secret that 'almost the full weight of Ireland's highly punitive penal system is directed at the repression of people from disadvantaged backgrounds.' What is relatively new in mainstream contemporary Irish criminological thought is the notion of a clamp-down, with the full rigour of the law, on, among others, the many persons whose iniquities have been exposed by the vari-

ous tribunals of the last few years. In keeping with this intellectual tradition, he suggests that even and equal application of criminal sanctions would truly legitimise a system that cannot easily escape the criticism that it selectively targets the poorer classes.

O'Mahony concludes with a chapter on the future, and what it holds. With Drug Courts just over the horizon, an Independent Prisons Board, and increased EU funding to bridge the gap between prison and the community, among other things, he finds plenty to be hopeful about. He is surprisingly optimistic and upbeat, bearing in mind his obvious depth of knowledge on the abject failures of the system, even within the narrow limits it sets itself. Sensibly, he suggests that improvements are likely to be proportionate to increased resources, but this reviewer does not share his optimism either that they will be made available, or that there is any real commitment to a profound overhaul of the system. Time will tell.

All in the game

George O'Brien (editor) Playing the Field: Irish Writers on Sport New Island Books; pbk IR £7.99

Michael Hinds

In *Playing the Field*, George O'Brien has invited eleven Irish writers from a diversity of backgrounds to write on the sport of their choice. Significantly and unsurprisingly, the majority of the more interesting pieces are by writers based in the United States, a country that has always produced good fiction and superb journalism about sport.

In the States, sport has only taken second place to business as a cultural priority; the newfound appetite for writing about sport on this side of the Atlantic is evidence that similar priorities have emerged here. This may not be particularly good news for either literature or culture. Sport has become a fantasy discourse within which people express themselves evaluatively and with the

confidence of expertise; to Chomsky, sports is where people burn up the discursive energy that they used to devote to society and politics.

Nevertheless, some of the contributors to this volume work particularly well at comprehending the political complexity of the gesture they make with their chosen sport. This is particularly true of Conor O'Callaghan's 'Jolly Good Shot, Old Boy', which demonstrates the radical consequences for someone in Dundalk of pursuing a perceived imperialist game such as cricket. Likewise, Colum McCann's 'Through the Grey Diamonds' uses the handball alleys of New York to create a vividly carnivalesque picture of a unique community held together by a game.

In exact disproportion to its popularity, football is particularly ill-served by writers, excellence being represented by a select group of journalists such as Simon Kuper and the exquisite ex-Argentinian international Jorge Valdano. Joseph O'Connor's 'Is Football Better than Sex?' does nothing to challenge Baudrillard's analysis of football as being employed 'to stupefy the masses'.

The majority of the 'new sports writing' has taken its lead from Nick Hornby's *Fever Pitch*, moving increasingly towards autobiography and confessionalism. Narratives of fandom have become vehicles of refuge, self-assertion and self-justification for the supposedly embattled White European Male in identity politics. At its worst, such writing is characterised by pompous braggadocio, sentimentality or insinuating whimsy; fortunately, most of the contributors to *Playing the Field* avoid such banalities of the genre and produce compelling narratives about compulsion. Eamonn Wall (baseball), Anthony Glavin (basketball), Jim Lusby (dog racing), O'Callaghan and McCann are outstanding in this regard. A more jaded familiar manifestation of the sportswriter is found in the flatulent Mailerism of Ulick O'Connor on boxing.

Anthony Cronin's piece on horseracing (or more accurately, punting on horseracing) describes exactly the solipsism of the horseplayer who bets to

be proved right, a properly vicarious motive for the most physically passive yet psychologically precarious of sporting 'activities'. The fascinated idiocy of the punter is a familiar theme in Irish writing, and Cronin describes his negotiation between rational and irrational impulses in a doubly psychological and economic cycle of boom and bust as well as any writer since Francis Stuart.

The potentially overwhelming maleness of a project such as this is evident; both welcome and necessary corrective is provided by Mary O'Malley's 'A Bit Like Shakespeare' (on following Gaelic games from the periphery), and Sara Berkeley's ingenious and bizarre 'invention' of the sport of 'off-road car camping' in the American desert.

In this collection, good writing has come from those writers who were prepared to analyse properly their commitment to the sport they chose, refusing to take the attraction of the game for granted; in effect, the best sports writing is about the divination and expression of value. That is its attraction, but also its limitation; one cannot but shrink from the unblinking positivism of most sportswriting projects, whether good or otherwise. Nevertheless, *Playing the Field* delivers far more than its glib title promises; particularly well-introduced and intelligently-designed by O'Brien, his eleven have performed respectably well.

BOOKS RECEIVED

Neil Jarman *Displaying Faith: Orange, Green and Trade Union Banners in Northern Ireland.* Belfast, *The Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, 1999*
An illustrated study of the banners carried at contemporary parades in Northern Ireland. Over 100 colour photographs accompany the text that charts the history of the Orange tradition, including the Black Perceptory and the Apprentice Boys of Derry, and the nationalist experience of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Irish National Foresters, as well as more recent republican developments. The evolution

of trade union banners is also covered.

Irish Education for the 21st Century; edited by Noel Ward and Triona Dooney. Dublin, Oak Tree Press, 1999

A collection of essays dedicated to the memory of Michael Enright, a teacher, trade unionist and socialist public representative, whose untimely death in a traffic collision in 1997 deeply affected all who knew him. Contributors include Richard Bruton TD, Senator Joe O'Toole, Eamon Gilmore TD, Charles Lennon, Peter Cassells and former Minister for Education (now Minister for Health) Micheál Martin.

Richard Douthwaite *The ecology of money. Totnes, Devon: Green Books for The Schumacher Society, 1999.* (Schumacher Briefings No. 4)

Analysis of the nature of money, how its characteristics are determined by the way it is created and put into circulation, a description of different monetary systems used through history and a discussion of how and why we might consider moving to the use of some of these systems instead of the current system.

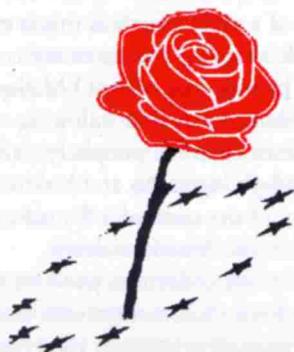
Patrick J. Roche *The appeasement of terrorism and the Belfast Agreement. Ballyclare, Co. Antrim: Northern Ireland Unionist Party, 2000*

The Deputy Leader of the Northern Ireland Unionist Party criticises the Belfast Agreement as the culmination of a process of capitulation to Irish nationalism and Sinn Fein/IRA. He puts forward a plan for devolved government based on unionism.

Please note address

**Times Change
P.O. Box 7328
Dublin 6
Ireland**

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For Documents and Further Information
Contact

Proinsias De Rossa MEP

E. mail: pderossa@europarl.eu.int

Telephone: (01) 678 9740

Fax: (01) 678 9737

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