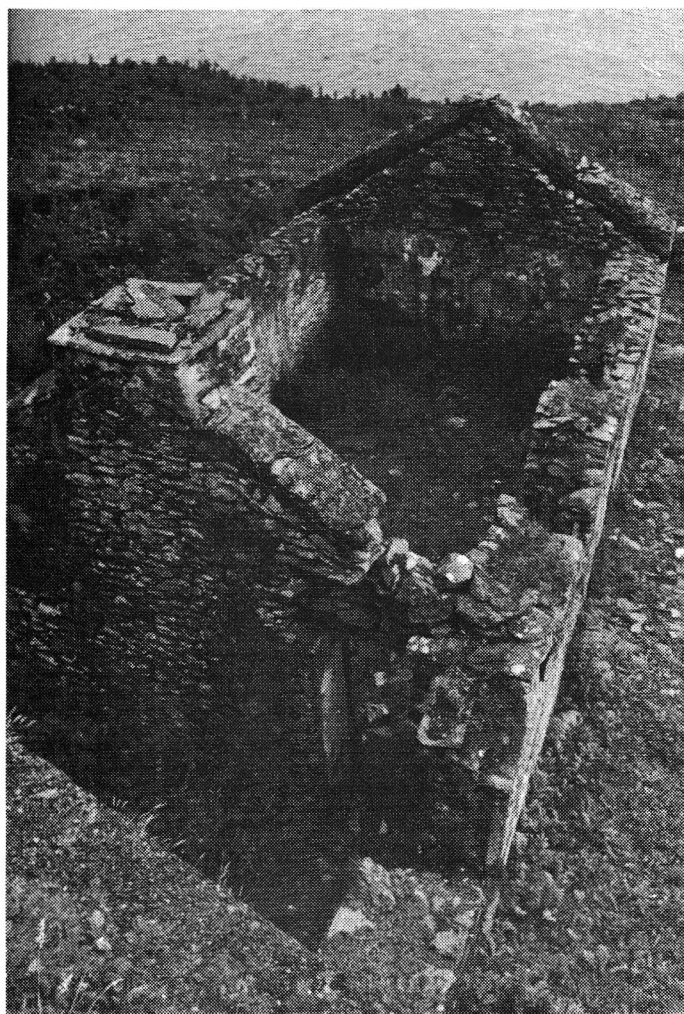


British Association for Irish Studies

Newsletter

ISSUE NO. 19 JULY 1999



THE BLASKETS

see

FOCUS INTERVIEW

with

ROY STAGLES

Page 1

BATTLE IN THE BOOKS: NEW SERIES

THE BAIS BURSARY AWARDS 1999

SSNI CONFERENCE REPORT

LETTERS FROM THE CHAIR OF BAIS AND *MATRIX*

BATH BAIS CONFERENCE 1999 – THE PROGRAMME

BAIS NEWSLETTER NO. 19

JULY 1999

Contents

Focus Interview: Ray Stagles	1	Letter from the BAIS Chair	10
Bath Conference Report	5	BAIS CONFERENCE 1999	11
The BAIS Bursaries 1999	6	Bais National Council	14
Letter from Matrix	6	Bais Membership Application Form	15
Battle in the Books	7		

EDITORIAL

The good news about the 1999 BAIS Bursary Awards is featured in this issue. The BAIS Conference at Bath Spa University College in September is our next big occasion. The details of the Conference, the sole item in this quarter's Noticeboard, shows beyond question what an exciting event *MARGINS, MAINSTREAMS AND MOVING FRONTIERS* promises to be and why it deserves your support. An Open Noticeboard will again operate in the October issue of the Newsletter. Suffice to mention here two other interesting conference taking place during the next quarter:

The Merriman Summer School, Lisdoonvarna, County Clare (21-28 August) – enquiries to Cliodhna Ni Anluain (01-453 1818) and the Irish Book-History Conference at the University of Ulster, Coleraine (29 August) – enquiries to Wendy Taulbutt (01265-324187).

Copy and/or discs (Word 6/95) with articles, reports, notices, letters etc. to be included in No. 20 should be sent to Jerry Nolan, 8 Antrobus Road, Chiswick, London, W4 5HY by October 1 1999.

FOCUS INTERVIEW: RAY STAGLES ON THE BLASKETS

The Blasket Islands: Next Parish America by Joan and Ray Stagles was first published by O'Brien Press in 1980, and the paperback was reissued in 1998. From their very first visit in 1966 to the wildly beautiful and uninhabited archipelago three miles off the Kerry coast, Joan and Ray Stagles began a long process of understanding the history of the islands. They began speaking to ex-islanders in and around Dunquin on the Dingle peninsula, tracing family genealogies, studying in minute detail the housing and field systems, piecing together an account of the Famine on the islands during the 1840s, tracing the slow erosion of a way of life which might be said to have expired in 1953 when the Blaskets were officially abandoned as economically unviable. Their book still stands as an invaluable aid for others to understand much of the complex historical background to the autobiographical writings of the three Blasket writers – Tomás Ó Criomhthain (1856-1937), Peig Sayers (1873-1958) and Múiris O'Súilleabháin (1904-1950) who were all mainly responsible for making the Blaskets way of life known all over the world. After a recent talk to the Irish Literary Society in London's Irish Club, in which he expressed his own great love of the place where the ashes of his wife Joan were scattered in 1978, Ray very kindly agreed to discuss with the editor his very special involvement with Blaskets culture.

The BAIS Series of Focus Interviews edges into its third year with Ray Stagles on the Blaskets. I am publishing what I am hoping may become an occasional series 'Battle in the Books'. The 'battle' is the battle of ideas in Irish Studies arising out of recently published books with a distinctive viewpoint. Malcolm Ballin has chosen to feature Brian Fallon's book about Ireland 1930-1960 in the first 'Battle in the Books'.

I am glad to report the editor has been receiving some letters at last. Letters are at the core of two pieces in the Newsletter: one from Andy Morrison in response to the last Focus Interview about Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland*; and the other from the Chair of BAIS in response to Charles O'Beirne's recent proposal for a *Nuachtlitir na Gaeilge*.

JN: What inspired you and Joan to visit the Blaskets for the first time? What do you now remember of your first impressions not only of the islands but of the islanders whom you met on the mainland?

RS: We first heard about the Blaskets by an accident of fate. As first year students of University College London in October 1939, we were evacuated to Aberstwyth, as was Robin Flower, Keeper of the Celtic Mss. at the British Museum. One evening we heard him give a fascinating talk on 'The Western Island' – i.e. the Great Blasket Island. Six years later, again by chance, we saw on a railway bookstall his recently published book under that title, and bought it and read it with very great interest. However it was not until 21 years later, on a fine June day in 1966, that we finally made it to the Island itself, having by then also read in translations the books by Tomás Ó Criomthain, Peig Sayers and Muiris O'Súilleabháin. We were rowed across in a curragh, and had four exquisite hours exploring the deserted village and the eastern end of the island. We were quite overwhelmed by the bold splendour of the Island, its magnificent views of the mainland, and its remoteness. That day was the turning point of our middle-aged lives. From then on we camped there, often quite alone, each summer holiday until Joan's health failed. We made friends with the ex-islanders on the Island itself. On fine days they brought over visitors, saw to their sheep still pastured there, and did a little fishing off-shore. We got to know them as they joined us for tea or coffee outside the *Dail* at the top of the village. Despite difficulties of communication, we quickly found them to be very friendly men, warm-hearted and distinctive in their personalities. They delighted in telling and hearing stories about the Island. On the mainland their womenfolk were equally friendly and welcoming.

JN: I gather from your book that it was your wife Joan who spearheaded the research. What qualities did she bring to that work? What stage had the research reached at her untimely death in 1978?

RG: Joan brought to her work outstanding qualities of intellect and personality. Although she had no formal training in historical research, she worked in a well-led local history group while we were living in Shropshire in the late

1950s, and that stood her in good stead later. She was methodical, thorough and persistent. She taught herself to read and write Irish through Gael Llin records and Irish grammars. But equally important were her personal qualities of sensitivity to other people. It was Joan who persuaded Máire Ni Ghuithin to write her interesting account of Island domestic life entitled *An tOileán a Bhi*. For the last years of her life researching the Blaskets was her chief interest. In England her studies frequently took her to the British Museum Library and to the Colindale Newspaper Library. In Ireland, there were many visits to the Royal Irish Academy, the National Library, the Land Commission, etc. From 1976 onwards she concentrated on the Famine Years on the Dingle Peninsula. Her sudden death on 6 July 1978 sadly brought that work to an end, but I've been happy to share her extensive notes with Irish scholars researching that period.

JN: What were the initial reactions of the ex-islanders to being 'researched'? How did your relationships with the ex-islanders change and develop up to the first publication of the book in 1980 and beyond?

RS: I don't think the islanders Joan talked with regarded themselves as being 'researched'. She didn't carry around a tape-recorder or make immediate notes of conversations. They were just pleased, even amused, at her interest in what for them was common knowledge. Her main research was concerned with questions to which the answers were to be found only in nineteenth-century records, books and papers of which they were unaware. What most pleased the ex-islanders was the fact that we came back, year and year, to camp on the island and to greet them as personal friends. When finally our book came out, they were delighted at the thoroughness and accuracy of Joan's work, as instanced, in particular, by her chapter on the Island families.

JN: I note that you have written a guide-book to the present-day Blaskets. What particular features of the place should the occasional visitor not miss? What part do the famous island biographies still play in visitor response to the islands?

RS: When visitors who have read the Island books come to its ruined village they ask 'Where

did Peig live?, Can you show us Tomás's house?, Where did Dado live?'. Sadly the present conditions of the village houses – some of them no more than footings now – does not help one understand how families, large and small, lived in them. However you can still distinguish the variety of house styles in the village, and note how the older houses were tucked in to the hill, whereas the 'Government Houses', built by the Congested Districts Board early in this century stand exposed to the weather. In the centre of the village you can stand in the ruins of the school house (where 30 years ago, old adjustable desks were still to be found) and remember Tomás's stories about his various teachers there. Visitors should go west beyond the village if they have time, and so appreciate its size and grandeur – it is indeed the 'Great Blasket'. On the magnificent cliff walks to the north and south, you can relate to Muiris's adventures hunting rabbits and climbing down the cliffs for seagulls' eggs. Then as you look out over the formidable rocks to the north, you can begin to appreciate the dangers of fishing in these waters from canvas-skinned canoes.

JN: Have the Blaskets become more or less part of the tourist heritage trail? What are the dangers and opportunities inherent in such a development?

RS: The standard tourist route on the Dingle Peninsula certainly includes the recently built Blasket Centre in Dunquin, but I doubt if even 10% of its visitors ever cross to the island itself. Access is governed by the vagaries of the weather – no ferries run during the not infrequent periods of high winds, driving rain, or thick mist. If too many people were to cross to the Island in a good summer there would be acute problems of water shortage and the danger of even further damage to the village's buildings and even to the island's ecology. All this indicates the urgent need for the Island to become a National Park, whose wardens would sensitively manage and control the whole island, and explain its history to visitors.

JN: May we now focus on your own chapter in the book entitled 'The Flowering of Literary Talent'? Why do you think the way of life on the Blaskets which was primitive, dangerous and on the brink of social extinction appealed so much to scholars like Robin Flower?

RS: I don't think you can lump together, usefully, all the scholars who went to the Great Blasket Island. Some of the very earliest, like Carl Marstrandar, were fundamentally philologists interested in the forms of 'pure Irish' they found on the Island. In the cases of Robin Flower and George Thomson, it is clear that they had wider interests – or came to have them. Bláithín went to the Island in the first place to equip himself for his appointment as Deputy-Keeper of the Celtic Mss. at the British Museum. But when he arrived on the Island, and was lodged with Tomás Ó Criomthain as his tutor, he quickly appreciated the personal qualities of his host and his gift for story-telling and narrative. So Flower came to relate his professional interest in Irish language and literature to the distinctive personalities of the islanders and their fund of Irish folklore. George went one step further. He was impressed by the combined simplicity and richness of the whole Island's way of life. He saw that it had preserved some of the qualities and virtues of traditional European communal peasant life, with echoes even of classical Greek society. The posthumous memorial book published by Brandon Press in 1987 under the title *Island Home: the Blaskets heritage* cogently presents this view. He too, like Robin Flower, developed warm personal relationships with a number of islanders, and this proved to be the most powerful reason, not shared by all visiting scholars, for return visits to the Island.

JN: Both Flower and Thomson were Englishmen who had been to Oxbridge. How do you explain this curious love affair between English scholars and Blasket islanders?

RS: I believe that it was the personal qualities of those particular scholars which made it possible for them to share so fully the islanders' zest for life and a glad acceptance of other people as they are. In such a context, differences of cultural background and formal education pale somewhat into insignificance.

JN: Have you ever discussed with any of the ex-islanders the nationalistic uses of the Blaskets autobiographies as celebrations of an Irish-speaking Arcadia of heroic primitiveness especially during those heavily censored years of the 1930s and 1940s in the Irish Free State?

RS: No, I've never discussed with the ex-islanders the literary politics of that period – a period which now seems quite remote to us. We know that for Tomás it was a matter of great pride just to have his work published, and to be photographed holding it in his hand. George Thomson told me that what Muiris looked forward to most was the colourful cursing of his Island elders when they read what he had written about them! So I think that it was the importance of their books within the Island that concerned them, and their neighbours, most. Actually *Twenty Years a-Growing* ran into censorship problems with An Gum, the Government publishing agency, who wanted to cut out the references to young boys drinking porter at the Ventry races. George Thomson, however, found an English publisher for the work in translation, and with an introduction by his friend, E.M. Forster, it became an immediate best-seller.

JN: I know that you would like to see the Blaskets as a National Park. How could such a Park inspire the youth of Ireland for the next century?

RS: Any National Park is, firstly, an area of great natural beauty worthy of being protected by legislation so that it can be preserved and enjoyed by people of this and succeeding generations. The Great Blasket Island is an

outstanding example of such beauty. This last Summer a German visitor standing with me at the top of the Island village affirmed that the view of the mainland at that point, all the way from Sybil Head right across Dingle Bay to the Killarney mountains, was one of the finest in Europe. Secondly, the Island village has a very special place in Irish literature and history, and needs to be managed, discreetly sign-posted and partially restored, as part of Ireland's living heritage. A National Park, whose managers would be subject to public accountability, is undoubtedly the appropriate future for the Island. In addition, the Island could be a new, living cultural centre. Already, in recent years, it has again become, intermittently, a base for fishing, craft work, boat building and scientific studies of various kinds. If, within the National Park, the schoolhouse were to be rebuilt and simple camping facilities provided, then in conjunction with the Blasket Centre on the mainland, summer courses in Irish language and literature, Irish music and dancing, and Irish crafts could be provided in a truly inspiring setting. Through participation in such activities, young Irish people could enrich their understanding of their national heritage, and also perhaps might discover the powerful influence of natural beauty and grandeur, and the satisfaction of living simply for a while without all the apparatus of our modern technology.



ROBIN FLOWER 'AT HOME' IN THE NÍ GHUITHIN KITCHEN IN THE EARLY 1930s.

REPORT: 1999 Conference of the Society for the Study of Nineteenth-century Ireland

During the weekend of 9-11 April, The Irish Studies Centre at Bath Spa University College hosted the annual conference of the Society for the Study of Nineteenth-century Ireland, which was the first time that this young and enthusiastic society has held its annual conference outside of Ireland. The conference theme – ‘Ireland and the Union: Questions of Identity’ – is one likely to feature quite frequently at Irish Studies gatherings over the next year or so, given the approaching bicentenary of the passing of the Act of Union. If the quality of the papers and discussions at the Bath conference are anything to go by, then students of the Irish nineteenth-century are in for a rewarding and imaginative examination of the Union’s impact on a wide spectrum of Irish life.

More than fifty delegates from Ireland, Britain, the United States, Canada and France attended the conference. The delegates were treated to a selection of papers that explored many of the fascinating literary, political, musical, linguistic, social and sporting dimensions of Irish identity under the Union. It was particularly encouraging that almost one-third of the papers were contributed by postgraduate students. Their confident and original explorations of such topics as the links between operatic representations of Brian Boru and perceptions of Irish nationalism in the 1810-77 period (Nuala McAllister, University of Ulster), political dimensions of Somerville and Ross’s *In Mr. Knox’s Country* (Julie Ann Stevens, Trinity College, Dublin), portrayals of ‘Hibernia’ and ‘Britannia’ in Sheridan Le Fanu’s *The Rose and the Key* (Ann Cahill, Bath Spa University College), ‘Irishness’ in the works of Charles Robert Masturin and Bram Stoker (Theresa Hanley & David Thiele, both from Boston College), and the controversy in 1899 over the pedagogic utility of the Irish language (P.J. Matthews, Trinity College Dublin) – to list but a representative sample – made a valuable contribution to the conference proceedings.

The generally high quality of the postgraduates’ contributions was matched by that of their more established academic colleagues. While one cannot possibly cover all of their papers in this short report, it is hoped that the following short survey of my personal favourites will give a good sense of the originality and quality of their contributions. Brian E. Rainey (University of Regina) was one of several delegates who explored the theme of diaspora identities. In focusing on the tempestuous career of Limerick-born Nicholas Flood Davin, a journalist,

lawyer and Home Ruler poet-politician who made an indelible impression on late nineteenth-century Saskatchewan, Dr. Rainey succeeded in showing how the unique experiences of just one Irish emigrant in Regina can also throw light on the life of the Irish community in general in that part of western Canada. In a session on pre-Famine Irish attitudes towards the British monarchy, both Jacqueline Hill (NUI, Maynooth) and James H. Murphy (All Hallows College) presented amusing accounts of Irish fascination with the ‘royals’ of the period. Dr. Hill drew an inimitably humorous parallel between Irish reaction to the death of Princess Charlotte in 1817 and the more recent unrestrained response to the death of Princess Diana; while Dr. Murphy demonstrated how the wily Daniel O’Connell equated Repeal of the Union with loyalty to the Crown and simultaneously burlesqued his protestations of loyalty by developing his own monarchical style, in which Queen Victoria was incorporated, in a supporting role, into the ‘royal’ O’Connell dynasty! Dr. Murphy certainly suggested that there was more to O’Connell’s protestations of loyalty than met the eye. Another delegate, Mike Cronin (De Montfort University) examined another of the ‘givens’ of Irish history, the distinctively Irish nature of the Gaelic Athletic Association, with equally intriguing results. Dr. Cronin’s challenging exploration of the ethos of the early GAA revealed that, notwithstanding Gaelic sports enthusiasts’ claims that they were restoring traditional pastimes to Irish youth and their proclaimed hostility towards British sports, the GAA activists, in fact, shared far more with British sportsmen than they would have cared to admit.

The conference papers provided plenty of original insights into the theme of Irish national identity in the nineteenth-century, and one can only hope that the research in progress is soon published. The conference also saw the launch of two books: *Irish Encounters: Poetry, Politics and Prose* (Sulis Press), edited by Alan Marshall and Neil Sammells, and *Reviewing Ireland: Essays and Interviews from Irish Studies Review* (Sulis Press), edited by Sarah Briggs, Paul Hyland and Neil Sammells. Delegates met the lively standards of social activity usually expected of SSNCI conferences, and for those with sufficient stamina on Sunday afternoon, Dr. Graham Davis (Bath Spa University College) conducted a walking tour of Bath.

Brian Griffin, Bath Spa University College

AWARD OF THE FIRST BAIS POSTGRADUATE BURSARIES

At a reception in the Irish Embassy in London on the 24th May 1999, hosted by the Irish Ambassador Ted Barrington and Clare Barrington, the first BAIS Awards were presented to four postgraduate Irish Studies students engaged in research at higher education institutions in Great Britain. The awards were presented by Dr. Margaret Ward, Vice-Chair of BAIS, who commended the overall standard of the applications for bursaries and the high standard of the successful applications.

Each award consists of a bursary of £1000. The Bursaries are funded by a grant from the Irish government (Irish Soldiers & Sailors Trust) and from The Ireland Fund of Great Britain. The project itself was initiated because BAIS became aware of the need for supplementary funding to enable many graduate students to cover the costs of university fees and the costs involved in travel and subsistence when visiting archives vital to their research.

Speaking at the reception, Ambassador Barrington said: "I commend BAIS for the inauguration of these annual awards which will assist in the promotion of quality research in the field of Irish Studies in Britain. The unique position occupied by BAIS in the field of Irish Studies in Britain makes it the ideal body to oversee the project." Sean Hutton, Chair of BAIS, thanked the funders of the project and pointed to the fact that the committee of leading academics in the field of Irish Studies in Britain which developed the project and assessed the applications was a sure guarantee of the quality of the awards. Dr. John Brannigan, Convenor of the committee, said that assessing the applications only served to make the committee aware of the stringent financial circumstances of, and personal sacrifices made by, many graduate students engaged in quality research.

The first four bursaries have been awarded as follows:

Ivan Gibbons (Birkbeck College, University of London)

Field-History: The British Library Party and the establishment of the Irish Free State

Craig Bailey (King's College, University of London)

Field -History: Irish Identity and the Middle Classes in London, 1780-1840

Marcella Edwards (University of Strathclyde)

Field -Literature: An Exploration of Poetic Practice in Ireland Since 1967

Yvonne McKenna (University of Warwick)

Field-Social Science: Migration of Irish Women's Religious Orders' to England: 1945-present

LETTER FROM *MATRIX*

Andy Morrison was stimulated by the last Focus Interview with Bruce Stewart about Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* to write to the Editor to announce the first ever issue of the small press magazine "devoted to all things literary" by a group of postgraduates and undergraduates in Queen's University Belfast. For the first issue Andy and Aidan Fadden had conducted an interview with Declan Kiberd under the title of "A Cultural Language for the Political Class". One suggestion in Andy's letter to the Editor was that the words of Kiberd needed to be heard; the other suggestion was that some

information about *Matrix* should appear in the BAIS Newsletter. In his letter, Andy writes: "I have been working with a group of friends at the Queen's University of Belfast to produce a postgraduate journal with a largely Irish and literary theme. Although each contributor has a connection with QUB, by no means does that assert what our ambitions are for *Matrix*. We are looking for any material of a creative, journalistic or academic nature relating not just to things literary, but politics, arts, philosophy and so on. Any material can be e-mailed to me."

Andrew@morrison.freeseve5090.co.uk

The first issue of *Matrix* (April 1999, 57pp.) whets the appetite for more. I was particularly impressed by Grant Hartley's 'Reviewing the Queen Mother: the Critical Response to Seamus Heaney's *Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996* which is a compelling analysis of how the "closed circle can be seen to operate, with the critic unwilling to step outside parameters largely decided in collaboration with the poet", and by Maurice Macartney's "Waiting for Beckett" which is a subtle analysis of the Beckett trilogy that much illuminates how Beckett has turned the "the unrepayable debt, the obligation to continue without fixed and certain points of reference, into a strange kind of hope". There are some beautiful poems by Alan Gillis which draw inspiration from Quasimodo, Rilke and Pessoa, and a penetrating description of a stroll through the centre of Dublin on a warm summer's day in Joanne Feeney's story "Fin de Siecle".

As for the Declan Kiberd Interview which takes up nine pages, here is part of Kiberd's reply to Andy Morrison's question about the difficult question of Irish literature and culture in various post-colonial theories: "Indeed, this is a

problematic and interesting case. It's because so many of our people were involved in the building of the Empire, as well as the unpicking of it, that it gets so complicated. It looks as if we're trying to go both ways, you know, if we don't win as Imperialists then we might win as victims. But I believe this is exactly what makes Ireland so rich, that it is both post-Imperial and postcolonial. Luke Gibbons has formulated Ireland as being a First World culture with a Third World memory. I argue, at the end of 'Inventing Ireland', that in the pages of Roddy Doyle you get a text in which the First and Third Worlds jostle side-by-side in the estates, like Barrytown, on the northside of Dublin. Basically, this is a global perversion of the North-South confrontation and it means that Ireland is a very interesting but pressured place to live."

Copies of *Matrix* April 1999 are available from Andrew Morrison, Flat 2, 22 Meadowbank Street, Belfast BT9 7FG. Send a postal order for £1.00 (including postage), made payable to Andrew Morrison.

BATTLE IN THE BOOKS: *An Age of Innocence: Irish Culture 1930-1960* by **Brian Fallon**
British Writers of the Thirties by **Valentine Cunningham**

Brian Fallon argues that the period 1930-1960 in Ireland has been much demonised and that it has been unfairly represented as 'dominated by insularity, defensive minded nationalism, the Church, censorship, a retreat from the rest of the world.' The core argument of the book is that 'we should beware of seeing the epoch as homogenous and monolithic...' Valentine Cunningham exposes innocence and naivete in the surface sophistication of the English writers under his critical scrutiny. What has most fascinated me about reading these books, side by side, is having to think about the implications of the intriguing contrast between the disguised innocence in Cunningham's writers and the underplayed sophistication of the Irish writers included in Fallon's study.

Realism was the major critical issue of the time. In England, this was an overtly political question, invoked by the statement of doctrine of Socialist realism issued by Radek at the Moscow's Writers' Congress of 1934. English writers in what F.R. Leavis dubbed 'the Marxist

decade' were subject to a Left orthodoxy which seemed to preclude pluralism. Realism in the context of the Ireland of the 1940s and 1950s, as deployed by such writers as Sean O'Faolain, Peadar O'Donnell, Patrick Kavanagh and others emerged as a radical critique from the margins of the prevailing populist state orthodoxy.

The de Valera government favoured literary emphasis on nostalgia for a lost Gaelic tradition which seemed to many writers a form of outworn romanticism. In opposition to this politicised use of fantasied history, Sean O'Faolain and other writers in *The Bell* chose to present a realistic account of Irish life, where they concentrated on the lives of marginal people and described a new nation in the process of formation which was facing perilous international problems. *The Bell's* writers delivered editorial challenges to prevailing government wisdom in ways designed to negotiate skilfully the perils of literary and wartime censorship. Can these dissident writers be held to be 'innocent' in any sense of the word? *The Bell* chose to reach out in order to

create a new regional audience for itself, among the schoolteachers, the librarians, the shopkeepers, the various elements of the Irish petty bourgeoisie. The sophistication of the whole project which involved reclaiming the low-key language of documentary reporting for a dissident political position and addressing a newly defined constituency in a new nation, at least equals that of the political theorists in *Left Review* or *Penguin New Writing*.

Cunningham lists the preoccupations of English writers, drawing attention to the youth culture of the 1930s with its juvenile interest in schools, adventures, mountain climbing and the search for the heroic figure, whether in the shape of intrepid pilots, proletarian folk heroes, or Fascist dictators: 'The British authors at the heart of the Auden generation are, in practice, mere lookers on at the period's heroics. They are a troupe of middle class voyeurs of the big, the tough, the butch and the airborne...' Many English writers of the period experienced problems in coming to terms with an adult world on anything but a frivolous basis, having 'imbibed the same team spirit at more or less the same snobbish, socially narrowing, blinkered schools... this training was hard to shuck off.'

Such English nursery 'innocence' contrasts with the alternative picture of the Irish writers in Fallon's period. In an Ireland which was on the way to becoming, in O'Faolain's phrase 'a nation of urbanised peasants', issues of class and political groupings were refracted in a complex way through the prism of historically established religious loyalties, and were much less a matter of romanticised affiliations, self consciously adopted by particular individuals to economic groupings with whom they had no personal links. Nowhere in the English scene, as described by Cunningham, was there the conscious effort to create the sense of direction so clearly identified in *The Bell*. The attempts of *Mass Observation* to observe working class life from outside, the pathetic disguises (wigs, hats, old jackets) of would-be documentary writers, the 'slumming' activities of Orwell and others, Isherwood's eating of sweets to spoil his middle class teeth, all these larkish charades and subterfuges, seem innocent in the sense of being schoolboyish, when compared with the subtle reportage of O'Faolain and O'Donnell.

Both Ireland and England were post-war societies in the 1920s and 1930s. The kind of

trauma was felt quite differently in each country. English writers in the aftermath of the first World War and in the run-up to the Second World War were reoccupied with what Cunningham calls 'the destructive elements'. Conflict and violence, guilt about survival or non-participation, obsession with images of rape, death, blood, smashed faces, the effects of bombing and high explosives all feature heavily through the poetry and novels of the period. In many writers there was a desire to travel, to leave England behind, to get across frontiers and simultaneously cross class barriers, to 'go over to the proletariat'. While the writers were 'notably leery of patriotism', the Spanish Republicans commanded much emotional allegiance.

In Ireland, after the War of Independence and the Civil war, as well as the experience of some Irishmen in the First World War, the effects of wartime experiences on writers appear less central. Fallon contends that there was a general weariness with military conflict. What did characterise the mood of the newly independent state was a degree of national introspection, a search for some new collective identity rather than for an immediately important role in international affairs. Fallon emphasises the dangers of exaggerating the isolationism which is commonly perceived, pointing out the prominent part played by de Valera in the League of Nations, the windows which the Church kept open on European affairs and the inevitable permeation of Ireland's borders by foreign media, notwithstanding the efforts of the censors. The effects of Irish neutrality in the period of the 'Emergency', as the civil servants termed the Second World War, can be too much emphasised, according to Fallon.

Meanwhile Irish writing was, for the most part, dominated by the national theme in the local perspective. An obvious failing was that Irish publishing was weak, despite such exceptions as the Talbot Press, the Cuala Press and the Dolmen Press. A reading of the *Dublin Magazine*, whose writers comprise a roll call of Irish literary life in the period, demonstrates the antipathy of its editor, Seamus O'Sullivan, towards the English school of Auden and reveals the conscious preoccupation of poets like F.R. Higgins, Austin Clark and Patrick Kavanagh with intimate, parochial details of Irish life. The 'self-regarding coterie' which Terence Brown

describes as its editorial board bears at least superficial resemblance to the British literary elite described above. It was largely left to *The Bell* to challenge the hegemony of prevailing myths. Richard Kearney has well described the work of O'Faolain and his colleagues: 'their work cultivated wit, iconoclasm, and a deliberate estrangement from accredited wisdoms. They wiped the domestic slate clean. They served as a middle generation cutting through the lush vegetation of tradition to clear spaces where new voices might be heard.'

Censorship is another area of revealing contrast. Fallon is concerned that, in Ireland, 'censorship has done more to create the *legenda negra* that clings to an entire epoch than any other factor'. He points out that the censorship was a popular measure, supported by ordinary people concerned with their children's morals, relatively well educated but still lacking culture and unable to see much sense in a defence based on literary merit. The Irish censorship was aimed at suppressing unacceptable foreign imports and was never founded in a desire to attack intellectual freedom. In England, the activities of the film censors led to similar objections from intellectuals and the effects of American prudery and repressiveness, represented through the Hayes office, are well known. Fallon's special pleading here takes little account of the indirect effects on writing careers, such as that of Kate O'Brien. Nor does it acknowledge and analyse the intensity of informal censorship in Ireland, at the levels of local library committees, books available for teaching, or of the degree of self-censorship this induced which lead to an impoverishment of the range of topics that could be dealt with by novelists, constituting what Terence Brown calls 'a licence of Irish Grundyism'.

On the other hand, the extent of censorship in England at the same time, as described by Cunningham, is more extensive than is often realised. It affected Cyril Connolly's *Rock Pool*, Lawrence Durrell's *Black Book*, Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*, *Tropic of Capricorn* and *Spring*, and, of course, *Ulysses* and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. Again the indirect effects were probably quite significant, especially given the sexual

orientation of many English writers of the period. Coded references to gay relationships within 'the adolescent hothouse' complained of by Q.D. Leavis, abounded but a work like Forster's *Maurice* had to be privately circulated. Cunningham comments that 'where coyness about speaking out has turned into a furtiveness commanded by fear, there is inevitable a drop in literary power'.

Cunningham refers in the last chapter 'Too Innocent a Voyage' to the 'self-deceiving fantasies about easy just-around-the-corner futures, the emptily mass-minded delusions and the quasi-totalitarian cravings that 30s radicals indulged in.' He argues that some of the Christian writers of the period like C.S. Lewis, Graham Greene and T.S. Eliot found it more congenial to write about the existence of evil. Utopian fantasies appear less prevalent in Ireland which was a society more attuned to the Catholic acceptance of the existence of sin and the need to live in its shadow. The kind of 'innocence' evoked in Fallon's title only makes ironical sense in the case of *The Bell* writers who displayed such a substantial degree of subtle intellectual complexity. Fallon's 'Age of Innocence' was, in reality, the formative epoch in Irish writing which moulded post-colonial Ireland, eventually loosened the grip of history upon it and created some of the terms in which we can understand Ireland's process of modernisation. Fallon argues that present-day Ireland, despite its apparent economic prosperity and self-confidence, is now 'curiously riven'. What does exist are the residual scars of the real struggles that took place during the thirty year period which he has reviewed largely as an apologist for a sentimental view of the de Valera era. Yet he has also drawn our attention to the struggles in the best of Irish writing 1930-1960 which, if read in the way for which I have been arguing suggests quite a different perspective on the whole period.

Suggested further reading:

Terence Brown, *Ireland: A Social and Cultural History* (1985)

Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland* (1997)

Malcolm Ballin, Cardiff University

LETTER FROM THE BAIS CHAIR

Re: *New Proposal Nuachtlitir na Gaelige*

Scríobhfaidh mé an chuid is mó den alt seo as Béarla os sa teanga sin an scríobhadh an t-alt a bhfuilim chun tagairt a dhéanamh dó. Cuirim fáilte roimh an alt sin agus an tairiscint a dhéantar ann – nuachtlitir a chur ar fáil do BAIS. Ach déantar faillí mhór san alt sin: sé sin nach tugtar an creidiúint atá dlite don mbeirt a ghlac cúraimín Gaelige orthu ó bhunaíodh BAIS agus a d'fhéach chun struchtúr ar fáil do mhúincadh na Gaeile I Sasana – Siobhán Uí Néill agus Cáit Thompson – agus cuireann sé díomá orm nach bhfuil aitheantas tugtha don obair sin in alt Mhic Uí Bheirne.

I am disappointed to see no recognition of the work of the two people who undertook chief responsibility for BAIS's activities to support the teaching of Irish in Britain, since the foundation of the association, in Charles O'Beirne's otherwise very welcome article in Newsletter 18. Rather the opposite, for, at the outset of that article, the author states that nothing has been done to support teachers and learners of the Irish language. This does a great injustice to the efforts of Siobhán Uí Néill and Cáit Thompson: two people who went about their work quietly, not perhaps 'blowing their own trumpets' sufficiently and, if anything understating the importance of their efforts.

Siobhán, who was a member of the BAIS Council from the inception of the organisation, initiated meetings for teachers and learners of Irish which allowed the teachers to exchange ideas on methodologies and gave learners the

opportunity to practice the language. Cáit, when she took over from Siobhán, developed this support work considerably in a number of directions. She established a newsletter, and among the contents of the issue I have before me are contributions commemorating that Gaeilgeoir and critical critical supporter of what he liked to describe as BÁIS, Pdraig O Conchúir, a letter from An tUasal O'Beirne about Irish-language activities in Cambridge, information on the work of Institiúid Teangeolaíochta Éireann; and a report on the very successful bi-lingual BAIS, Teanga agus Náisiún, which had just taken place at the Hammersmith Irish Centre. Cáit also organised the brilliantly conceived BÁIS Teanga agus Cultúr day-conference; a mixture of language classes, lectures on methodology and resources, readings by Irish-language writers, and the concluding céilí/cóisir – which were attended by Irish-language teachers and learners from throughout the country. Cáit also undertook the onerous task of fundraising, organising, accounting and reporting involved in the provision of scholarships for Irish-language teachers in Britain to attend training courses in the Irish Gaeltacht. And in referring to Cáit's work, I want to acknowledge the back-up support always received from her English husband Ron.

We need to thank both Siobhán and Cáit for their work with BAIS on behalf of the Irish language; and now that Cáit herself has resigned her Irish-language brief we need members willing and qualified to undertake and develop that aspect of BAIS work.

Seán Hutton

PROVISIONAL PROGRAMME FOR BAIS CONFERENCE 10-12 SEPTEMBER 1999

FRIDAY 2.00 - 4.00 Registration and coffee

4.00- 5.45 **THE IRISH IN BRITAIN**

CHAIR: *Mary Hickman (University of North London).*

THE HEALTH OF THE IRISH IN BRITAIN

Maire Gaffney (London)

QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY AND THE HEALTH OF THE IRISH PEOPLE IN BRITAIN

Mary Tilki (Middlesex University)

WOMEN ON THE MARGINS- ETHNIC IDENTITY AMONGST IRISH WOMEN RELIGIOUS LIVING IN BRITAIN

Yvonne McKenna (University of Warwick)

6.00 - 7.00 AGM

7.15- 8.15 DINNER

8.30 Poetry Reading with Matthew Sweeney in the Bar (Michael Tippett Centre, BSUC)

SATURDAY MORNING 9.30-10.15 PLENARY SPEAKER:

Ailbhe Smyth, Director, WERRC, University College Dublin.

'MAKING FOR THE FUTURE: THINKING ABOUT CONTEMPORARY FEMINISM IN IRELAND'

10.15-10.45 COFFEE BREAK

10, 45-12.30 PARALLEL SESSION 1A

THE IRISH IN FILM

CHAIR: *Lance Pettitt (St Mary's Strawberry Hill)*

KITSCH AS AUTHENTICITY: SOME RECENT VISUAL MOTIFS IN IRISH CINEMA

Ruth Barton (National College of Art and Design, Dublin)

THE LUCK OF THE IRISH - AN INTERDISCIPLINARY EXAMINATION OF HOLLYWOOD'S TREATMENT OF CULTURE

Stevan Jackson (East Tennessee State University)

'A GALLOUS STORY AND A DIRTY DEED': WORD AND IMAGE IN NEIL JORDAN'S

'TRAVELLER' (1981)

Keith Hopper (St Giles, Oxford)

PARALLEL SESSION 1B

THE IRISH IN FICTION, MUSIC AND POETRY

CHAIR:

RECONFIGURING IDENTITIES: RECENT NORTHERN IRISH FICTION

Liam Harte (St Mary's, Strawberry Hill) and Michael Parker (University of Central Lancashire)

'ENGLAND IS MINE': SECOND-GENERATION IRISH MUSIC MAKING IN POST-WAR ENGLAND

Sean Campbell (Liverpool John Moores University)

A SPLINTERED TRADITION: MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN'S SEARCH FOR 'ANOTHER NATION'

Sarah Fulford (University of Kent at Canterbury)

PARALLEL SESSION 1C

LITERATURE, PROTESTANTISM AND POST-COLONIAL IDENTITIES

CHAIR: *Eleanor Burgess (BAIS)*

POSTCOLONIAL IRELAND: CHANGING THE QUESTION

Claire Connolly (Cardiff University)

JOYCE'S PROTESTANT READERS

Joe Brooker (Birkbeck College, University of London)

THE HORIZON AND THE BELL - COMPARISONS

Malcolm Ballin (Cardiff University)

PARALLEL SESSION 1D

GENDER, CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND VISUAL REPRESENTATION

CHAIR: *Louise Ryan (University of Central Lancashire)*

POPULAR REPRESENTATION AND RECEPTION OF THE TRAVELLERS IN THE CULTURAL REVIVAL OF THE 1890s.

Paul Delaney (University of Kent)

ETHNO-CULTURAL NATIONALISM - PICTURING PRIMITIVE WOMEN AND POLITICS 1920s-1930s.

Tricia Cusack (University of Birmingham)

POSTMODERNISM, IRISHNESS AND THE HISTORIES OF ART

Fionna Barber (Manchester Metropolitan University)

LUNCH 12.30-1.30

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

1.30-3.00 PARALLEL SESSION 2A

IRISH WRITERS AND PLACE

CHAIR:

IMAGINED FRONTIERS AND ROUND TOWER IRISHMEN: JOHN HEWITT AND THOMAS CARNDUFF

Sarah Ferris (Newcastle)

THE POWER OF PLACE IN ELIZABETH BOWEN'S SHORT STORIES

Tessa Hadley (Bath Spa University College)

WANDERING TO THE WORLD'S EDGES: DESMOND HOGAN'S TRAVEL WRITING

Jerry Nolan (London)

PARALLEL SESSION 2B

THE MEDIA AND REPRESENTATIONS OF GENDER AND ETHNICITY

CHAIR:

SHIFTING FRONTIERS: SEX, GUERRILLA WAR AND THE IRISH REPUBLICAN PRESS 1920-1923

Louise Ryan (University of Central Lancashire)

REPRESENTATIONS ON WOMEN FROM THE NORTH OF IRELAND IN BRITISH DOCUMENTARY PROGRAMMES

Jayne Steel (University of Lancaster)

LEARNING TO BE IRISH IN BRITAIN: DIDACTICISM, DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE BRITISH MEDIA

Sarah Morgan (University of North London)

PARALLEL SESSION 2C

CONTEMPORARY IRELAND AND THE FUTURE

CHAIR:

AT THE END OF THE MILLENNIUM: BRITAIN'S VIEW OF IRELAND

Mary Hickman (University of North London)

RELIGIOUSLY INTER-MARRIED FAMILIES: A FRONTIER OF ECUMENISM IN IRELAND

Richard O'Leary (Nuffield College, Oxford)

IN THE WAKE OF THE X CASE: PARLIAMENTARY DISCOURSES OF ABORTION AND THE NATION-STATE

Lisa Smyth (University of Warwick)

3-3.30 COFFEE

3.30 - 5.30 OPTION Tour of Bath with Graham Davis

3.30- 5.30 PARALLEL SESSION 3A

GENDER ROLES AND PRIVATE RESISTANCE IN NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY IRELAND

CHAIR:

THE IRISH OWENITE COMMUNITY OF RALAHINE, 1831-1833

Margaret Morse (Chichester College of HE)

PROSTITUTION AND FEMALE SEXUALITY IN LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY IRELAND

Lorna Sixsmith-James (Salisbury)

TWO POLITICAL WIVES - MARRIAGE, MOTHERHOOD AND THE POSITION OF WOMEN IN IRISH SOCIETY

Sally Warwick-Haller (Kingston University)

THE MARKIEVICZ CONNECTION: PUBLIC LIVES AND PRIVATE TENSIONS

Rita Lees (Bristol)

PARALLEL SESSION 3B

ULSTER NATIONALISM AND NORTHERN IRELAND

CHAIR:

FENIANS IN ULSTER

Brian Griffin (Bath Spa University College)

POLITICS ON THE MARGINS: NATIONALISM IN NORTHERN IRELAND 1939-50

Christopher Norton (University of Wolverhampton)

FROM PEACE TO RECONCILIATION? FUTURES FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

John Barry (Keele University)

THE REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT 1977-1994

Kevin Bean (Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool)

7 - 8 RECEPTION

8 - CONFERENCE DINNER -

AFTER DINNER SPEAKER: FINTAN O'TOOLE

IRISH MUSIC AND BAR IN MICHAEL TIPPETT CENTRE

SUNDAY 9.30 - 10.15 - PLENARY SPEAKER

MONICA MCWILLIAMS, NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY, WOMEN'S COALITION.

COFFEE 10.15-10.45

11.00 - 1.00 PARALLEL SESSION 4A

THE IRISH PEACE PROCESS

CHAIR:

**'THE WARS ARE OVER AND THE GOOD GUYS HAVE LOST': THE PEACE PROCESS IN THE
BASQUE COUNTRY AND IRELAND COMPARED**

John Shaw (University of Central Lancashire)

**NEW NATIONALISM, NEW UNIONISM AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY; QUESTIONING THE
BOUNDARIES IN NORTHERN IRISH POLITICS**

Chris Gilligan (University of Salford)

THE BRITISH ARMY AND THE NORTHERN IRISH PEACE PROCESS

Caroline Kennedy-Pipe (University of Durham)

PARALLEL SESSION 4B

ECOCRITICISM, CLASS, GENDER AND POST-MODERNISM

CHAIR: *Jerry Nolan (BAIS)*

CLASS AND RELIGION: IRISH AND SCOTTISH WOMEN POETS

Grainne Walsh (University of Warwick)

ANNE HAVERTY'S 'ONE DAY AS A TIGER'

Gerry Smyth (Liverpool John Moores University)

**'AND THEN THERE IS THIS SOUND': THE POSSIBILITY OF ALTERNATIVES IN TREVOR
JOYCE**

Marcella Edwards (University of Strathclyde)

PARALLEL SESSION 4C

SCOTTISH ANTI-IRISHNESS, ANGLO-IRISH PATRIOTISM, AND IRISH AMERICANS

CHAIR:

EARLY MODERN SCOTLAND AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ANTI-IRISHNESS

John Young (University of Strathclyde)

**FROM MAINSTREAM TO MARGIN AND REAPPRAISAL: A STUDY OF AN ANGLO-IRISH
LANDLORD**

Mervyn Busteed (University of Manchester)

**RESTRUCTURING A LIFE: THOMAS O'CONNOR (1818-1887) 'CATTLE KING' OF REFUGIO
COUNTY, TEXAS.**

Graham Davis (Bath Spa University College)

LUNCH 1 - 2

END OF CONFERENCE

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