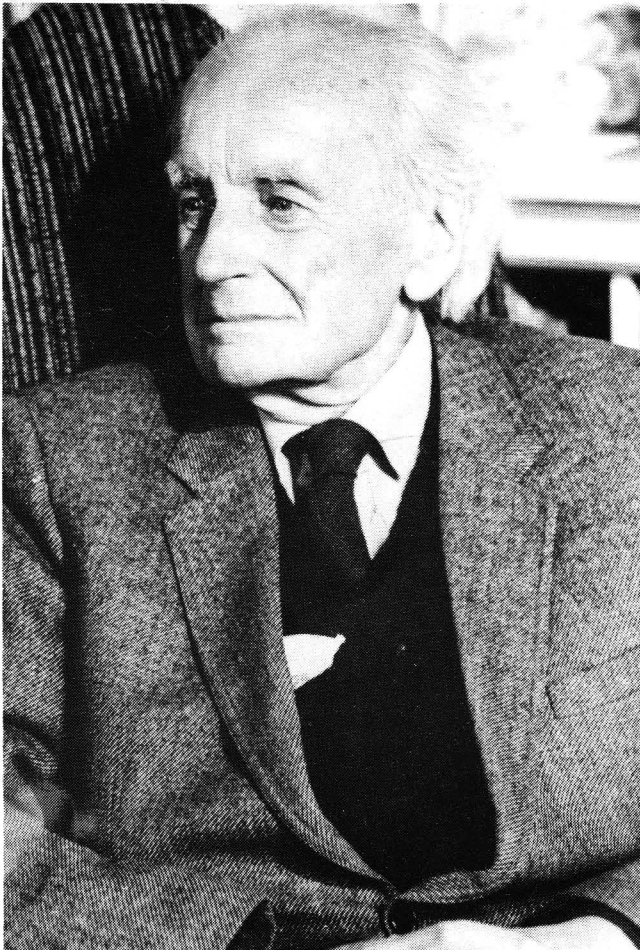


# British Association for Irish Studies Newsletter

ISSUE No 24 OCTOBER 2000



**HUBERT BUTLER**

*(1900 - 1991)*

THE SUBJECT OF

**FOCUS INTERVIEW**

WITH

**ROBERT TOBIN**

ON

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*Wherever Green is Worn*

**NOTICEBOARD**

**BAIS NEWSLETTER NO. 24**

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**EDITORIAL**

Focus Interview 14 marks the centenary of the birth of Hubert Butler and involves one of the 'new voices' in Irish Studies: Robert Tobin who was awarded a BAIS 2000 Bursary to help in his postgraduate work at Merton College Oxford. Battle in the Books 4 is a fascinating discussion of translation by the current Chair of BAIS. Then there is a most interesting report from ESSE5 which touches on pressing current concerns in Irish Studies. My heartfelt thanks to Robert Tobin, Sean Hutton and Malcolm Ballin.

The big event in the near future is the conference being hosted by BAIS and the Irish Studies Centre in North London University on **The Irish Diaspora**, 3-4 November 2000. Members should already have received full details of this most exciting event and the registration form. There is a summary of the event on page 11. This is an urgent reminder that the deadline date for concessions to BAIS members is Friday 22 October.

**Copy and/or discs (Word 97) with articles, reports, notices, letters etc. to be included in No. 23 should be sent to Jerry Nolan, 8 Antrobus Road, Chiswick, London W4 5HY by 8 January 2001. Email: Jcmnolan@aol.com**

**14 FOCUS INTERVIEW: ROBERT TOBIN ON HUBERT BUTLER**

**Hubert Butler** (1900-1991) was born in County Kilkenny, educated at Charterhouse and St John's College Oxford, and travelled extensively in Europe during the 1920s and 1930s – in Russia, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Austria, among other places. On the death of his father in 1941, Butler returned to the family home of Maidenhall in Bennetsbridge, County Kilkenny, where he lived for the rest of his life. He wrote many challenging essays based on his experiences abroad and in Ireland, which were published in various periodicals, the most notable of which was *The Bell*. Lilliput Press began a programme of collective publication of Butler's sustained intellectual journalism in a series of books: *Escape from the Anthill* (1985), *The Children of Drancy* (1988), *Grandmother and Wolfe Tone* (1990) and *In the Land of Nod* (1996).

**Robert Tobin** is a postgraduate student at Merton College Oxford who was recently awarded one of the four BAIS Bursaries 2000 for his ongoing research into the topic of intellectual dissent in Ireland between 1930 and 1990. His unpublished M.Phil. thesis explored the work of Hubert Butler. He has published two pieces about Butler: 'There is Always a Choice: the Protestant Inheritance of Hubert Butler' in *Journal of the Butler Society* (Vol. 4, no. 2, 255-260) and 'Did the Nuncio Wear Slippers? Hubert Butler and Protestant Dissent in 50s Ireland' in *New Voices in Irish Criticism*, ed.P.J.Mathews (Four Courts Press, 2000, 205-212).

**JN:** Why did you choose to research Hubert Butler as an area of special study?

**RT:** My interest in Butler arose out of what originally I thought was a fairly obvious

question. While studying at Trinity College Dublin, I asked Terence Brown one day what had happened to the Southern Protestant intellectual community after the passing of Yeats and AE. It seemed in my reading of various

historical accounts of Irish literary life that the trail ran cold before the start of the Second World War. That's when Terence suggested I read Hubert Butler, whose name I had never heard before. It didn't take me long to realize that not only had I come across a crucial piece in the puzzle I was working out, but also one of the best prose stylists I had read in a long time.

**JN:** How extensively did you explore the Butler Papers in the collections of Trinity College Dublin?

**RT:** At this stage in my work, I would say that I have looked at between one-half and two-thirds of the papers archived in Trinity. There is a huge amount of material relating to Butler's research into the origins of various Irish and European saints, which culminated in his 1972 book *Ten Thousand Saints*. Although his inquiry into the saints is important to understanding who he was – he himself considered it his life's work – it is not the primary focus of my particular project. I have been through most all the manuscripts and typescripts of the essays and articles he wrote, and that trawling has yielded up some wonderful stuff. I am also slowly working my way through his correspondence, which was voluminous.

**JN:** What were the main reasons for Butler's fervent adoption of 'the common name of Irishman'?

**RT:** Like a number of Irish Protestants, Butler had a great reverence for the people and institutions of the eighteenth century, which despite the well-known injustices of the time, nonetheless produced some of Ireland's greatest public figures. He certainly wasn't the first to regard that century as a comparatively golden age of Protestant progressivism before the betrayal of the Union took place. Wolfe Tone's 'common name of Irishman' became for Butler an encapsulation of what he, a twentieth-century Southern Protestant living in the midst of Catholic Nationalist Ireland, kept hoping might yet be achieved someday after the sectarian and political pendulum had ceased its violent swinging. His frequent reference to the 'common name' was his invocation of a historical figure whose appeal and authority had become general among Irish people even as the concept itself was employed to suggest a shared, more pluralist future.

**JN:** How did Irish Protestants generally respond to Butler's idea of creating one humanistic community of Irish Protestants north and south of the Border?

**RT:** That's an important question, because it opens up a side of Butler's ideas and attitudes that have tended to be overlooked or misunderstood. On the one hand, some Northern commentators on his work have dismissed him a little too readily as an elitist Southerner who neglected the North or belittled the Northern Protestant perspective. The facts don't bear this view out, however. He was a committed member of the Irish Association and travelled to the North for its meetings on numerous occasions. In the spring of 1952, he hosted an excursion of the Belfast Field Naturalists' Club to Kilkenny, an event which in those days was sufficiently novel to make national news. In 1954, he organized the first of the Kilkenny Debates, which was on Partition and generated controversy in both the North and South. And, when *The Bell* finally folded in the mid-50's, he wrote a manifesto for a specifically cross-border replacement magazine to be called *The Bridge*, which unfortunately never took off due to lack of funds. So, the idea that he wasn't really interested in the Northern Protestant point-of-view just doesn't hold water. On the other hand, there was a lot of reluctance among his fellow Southern Protestants to speak out too loudly on any public issue in the 50's, especially something as sticky as cross-border Protestant solidarity. I think he believed that Northern and Southern Protestants had important things to teach each other: the former showed that Protestants shared a unique inheritance in Ireland that merited respect, while the latter demonstrated that it was indeed possible to live peaceably alongside one's Catholic neighbours.

**JN:** Why did Butler's Anglo-Irish nationalism differ so strikingly from the fenian unionism of his great hero Standish James O'Grady?

**RT:** In a way, Butler's Anglo-Irish nationalism or republicanism was possible because O'Grady had already wrestled a generation earlier with how to reconcile his own apparently conflicting impulses. O'Grady's insistence that he should be able to be some kind of 'fenian unionist' -- Lady Gregory's clever coinage, not his -- may not have been tenable in the long run, but it was certainly an important intellectual and psychological stage on the road towards a

coherent twentieth-century Protestant nationalism. Whatever others may have claimed, Butler himself never accepted the idea that his background and his politics couldn't co-exist perfectly naturally. So, even though he clearly parted ways with O'Grady in terms of unionism and even in terms of embracing Gaelic culture, he inherited his hero's conviction that Irish Protestants could, when it came to identity, have their cake and eat it, too.

**JN:** Did Butler ever attempt in practical ways to follow the example of the cooperatives set up by two other Irish heroes Horace Plunkett and AE?

**RT:** The local Bennetsbridge creamery, of which Butler's father George was the first chairman, continued to function into the middle of this century, and Butler remained an ardent supporter of it till it closed. Both Hubert and Peggy Butler were deeply involved in a number of other local initiatives that worked along the co-operative lines advocated by Plunkett and AE. As a market gardener, Butler was a founding member of the Country Markets, which continues to this day. And insofar as the co-operative ethos that Plunkett and AE advocated was meant to encourage 'better living' as well as 'better farming' and 'better business,' certainly their encouragement of local artistic and cultural activity was a concrete way of advancing the shared vision.

**JN:** Were there any instances of non-Irish figures having a decisive influence on Butler's thinking?

**RT:** There are so many non-Irish figures whom Butler admires in his writing that it is hard to pick just a few. The ones who stick out in my mind, though, are Chekhov and Boucher de Perthes. In Chekhov, Butler found a literary and moral sensibility with which he clearly felt a deep kinship. He resonated with Chekhov's ambivalent sense of love and sorrow for a rural culture which he knew was passing away, be it the Russia of the czars or the Ireland of the Ascendancy. And in both cases there was a very clear recognition that things had to change, but in the midst of that change there was an optimism and a faith in the future accompanying the experience of loss. By contrast, Butler also drew inspiration from the eccentric French archaeologist Boucher de Perthes, who is credited with 'discovering' pre-history. In him,

Butler found his ideal of the amateur scholar-gentleman, the non-academician who pursued knowledge passionately and in obscurity and purely for its own sake.

**JN:** What is your explanation for the amazing long-running pattern of distrust of many of Butler's expressed views on the part of both the Irish Catholic Church and the Irish government?

**RT:** Rightly or wrongly, Hubert Butler represented a recent past which most Catholics in Ireland understandably wanted to put behind them. In that sense, he had a strike against him before he even opened his mouth. Couple that with the fact that when he did speak, his position on most issues was decidedly 'liberal' at a time and in a country which could not by any standard be judged liberal itself, then you have a recipe for unpopularity. While I appreciate what someone like Brian Fallon in *An Age of Innocence* is trying to say – that the 30's-50's in Ireland have often been unfairly caricatured – there is no getting around the fact that Hubert Butler was not treated very well when he spoke up for what he believed. Why the Church and government should have reacted so rigidly is not something that can be easily explained away.

**JN:** Did Butler ever attempt to play an active part in the emergent left of Irish politics associated with the political activities of friends such as Noel Browne and Owen Sheehy Skeffington?

**RT:** He was a strong supporter of Owen Sheehy Skeffington's various campaigns, and I know that he also supported what Noel Browne was trying to do with the Mother and Child Health Scheme. His only foray into political activism was a campaign in 1954 to get elected to the Kilkenny County Council as a voice for the 'minority view.' At the announcement of the election results – Butler was roundly defeated – a drunk Fianna Fail councilman publicly branded him a communist, for which the man later had to apologise in the local newspaper. Aside from that unpleasant episode, his political activity was more or less limited to advocating progressive social policy and tolerance in Ireland through his writings and his letters to the *Irish Times*. He did, for example, speak out in favour of abortion rights at the time of the referendum.

**JN:** What is your reaction to the recent claim that Butler had the intellectual stature in Ireland



analogous to the role of a writer like Czeslaw Milosz in Poland?

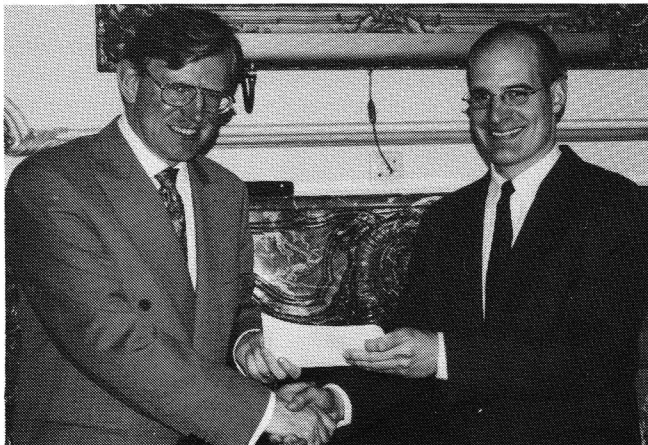
**RT:** I am always a little reluctant to draw such analogies, mainly because I think an intellectual's value and position in his country is unique and determined by factors which do not really translate easily. At the most superficial level, I think Butler does have an intellectual and ethical stature comparable to people like George Orwell, Vaclav Havel, or Czeslaw Milosz. What he still does not have, however, is the full recognition from the majority of his own countrymen that his voice is as equally Irish as theirs, and that is something no amount of international recognition can readily overcome. Why this inability even now to give the man his due? I think it's really a case of 'a prophet in his own country.'

**JN:** Are other key figures now emerging in your current study of intellectual dissent in Ireland between 1930 and 1990?

**RT:** No one from a Southern Protestant background has emerged whom I consider the equal of Hubert Butler in that particular sense. Certainly figures like Elizabeth Bowen, Arland Ussher, L.A.G. Strong, and Monk Gibbon were intellectually engaged, but I would hesitate to place them alongside Butler as dissidents. From a Southern Catholic background, though, there are some obvious choices. Sean O'Faolain deserves a lion's share of the credit for maintaining standards of intellectual integrity in Ireland during this period. Alongside him are Owen Sheehy Skeffington, Peadar O'Donnell, and Frank O'Connor. And whatever people may think of his pronouncements on Northern Ireland, there is no denying that Conor Cruise O'Brien has fought the battle for intellectual freedom as valiantly as anyone.

**JN:** Are there significant cultural differences between forms of opposition to dissent in Butler's case with the forms of opposition to intellectual dissenters in contemporary Ireland?

**RT:** Ireland has undergone such enormous social changes in the last twenty years that it's inevitable that there are. Obviously the steady decline in the Catholic hierarchy's influence over Irish society means that his concerns about how it dictated public opinion are no longer as pressing. And certainly membership in the EU has meant that Irish politics are no longer as myopic or exclusive as they once were. In place of some of the old forms of opposition, though, I think there are new ones to take their place. No one should begrudge Ireland its new-found prosperity – goodness knows it's been poor long enough – but with that prosperity comes new, perhaps even more insidious forms of repression to watch out for. As an American, I am all too familiar with how 'it's good for business' can become an excuse for sweeping a lot of things – and people – under the national carpet. How will people in Ireland react to voices that question the social price of its economic miracle? Certainly Butler himself was avowedly anti-materialist. It's also an irony that Ireland, for so long a nation of immigrants, has been so singularly ungracious in its welcome of the new black and brown faces now arriving on its shores. How will dissenting voices that don't necessarily have Irish accents be received? It's a fair question, and one I'm confident Butler would have asked if he were still alive today. On the positive side, though, Ireland has come an awfully long way since 1900, the year Hubert Butler was born. And in that sense what he once said about Owen Sheehy Skeffington could apply to him as well: 'So many of those struggles for intellectual freedom and tolerance that he waged no longer exist because he won them for us.'



**Robert Tobin  
being presented with one of the  
BAIS 2000 Bursaries  
by the Irish Ambassador in London,  
Ted Barrington**

## BATTLE IN THE BOOKS 4:

### ENGLISH-LANGUAGE TRANSLATION OF MODERN IRISH-LANGUAGE POETRY

David Cairns and Shaun Richards have described the underpinnings of the cultural nationalism of which translation from Irish was one of the manifestations, and which, by the end of the nineteenth century, made available in translation extensive examples of extant Irish manuscript literature. It can be argued that one of the main beneficiaries of this process was the Yeatsian project for a modern Irish literature in English. But at the same time, that cultural nationalism which gave an impetus to translation also gave rise to movements to halt the decline of the Irish language, and to extend its use. A key moment was the foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893. Without that organisation's remarkable vigour into the early years of the twentieth century, as well as its subsequent influence on the educational policies of the Irish Free State, it is doubtful whether there would be a body of modern Irish-language poetry to provide us with the English language translations under discussion. Most significantly in this context, the Gaelic League encouraged the creation of a modern Irish-language literature. The growth of the Nuafhíocht can be charted through a number of anthologies: *Cuisle na hÉigse* (Éamon Cuirteís ed., Dublin 1920), *Nuabhéarsaíocht* (Seán Ó Tuama ed., Dublin 1950), *Nuafhíli 1-3* (Séamas Ó Céileachair ed., Dublin 1956, 1968, 1979). It has been in the 1980s and 1990s that translation of modern Irish-language poetry into English has become almost *de rigueur*.

To date, it looks as if Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill takes the prize for the most distinguished line-out of translators assembled in one volume with her collection *Pharaoh's Daughter* (Dublin 1990), containing both relatively faithful translations and freer versions. Translation by English-language poets provides warranty and status. As Alan Titley argued in a Poetry Ireland symposium in 1993: "people...hear...what the English-speaking media says about poets whose work has been translated. The fact that Biddy Jenkinson is not more widely read by the Irish-reading public is proof...that translation has had a huge effect...on the public." (*Poetry Ireland Review*, 39, Autumn 1993) Gréagóir Ó Dúill stated, in the same issue, that translation into English "is now so prevalent that untranslated Irish poets can achieve little reputation even within their own language community." Tomás Mac Síomóin, himself an Irish-language poet, and co-translator with Douglas Sealy of Máirtín Ó Direáin: *Selected Poems – Tacar Dána* (Goldsmith, 1984), raises allied issues in the symposium already referred to:

Now there is a danger that, via the effect of translation from Irish, young Irish-language poets will be moulded by another readership and another tradition. The monoglot English-speaking readership chooses...Irish-language poets whose work they see in translation and elevates them. They are anthologised, put on the syllabus, rewarded with publicity. This is not in itself a bad thing, but it is done to the exclusion of other poets, whose voices are perhaps better, perhaps more experimental, who are extending the language in a way which makes it impossible to translate...

The same effects are not likely to be achieved in Ireland by inclusion in *Une Ile et d'Autres Iles* (Quimper 1984) or *Anthologie de la Poésie Irlandaise du XXe siècle* (Paris 1996). The issues which Tittley, Ó Dúill and Mac Síomóin raise are substantial issues arising from the unequal relations between the first and second official languages of the Irish state.

Recently, Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith suggested that, "Problems of translation, audience and linguistic groundedness and community abound for writers of a minority language, especially those for whom it is not their mother tongue," although he also commented, with reference to the publication under review that, "the...translations...for the most part do not unnecessarily enhance or subvert the original." (*Times Literary Supplement*, 11 August 2000) In *Cyphers 27* (Dublin 1987), Pearse Hutchinson, reviewing *The Bright Wave/An Tonn Gheal* (ed Dermot Bolger, Dublin 1986), made a number of pertinent points with regard to translation from Irish to English.

Hutchinson denounced the "parasitism" "over-indulged in for far too long...on the part of innocents lacking Gaelic", drawing a parallel with American Spanish verse "much pillaged by gringo mistranslators", and set out his own stall on the issue of translation:

The integrity, modesty, and respect – the responsibility... - shown by Patrick Pearse, and by his best successor, Thomas Kinsella in *Poems of the Dispossessed* – has not, in Ang-Ir-Crit, Caught On. With exceptions.

He went on to give examples of poor translation which fully supported the point he was making. Commenting on what he considered a mistranslation by Michael Hartnett, he stated: "Now it may be the reader's job to infer; it is not the translator's job to overinfer."

Hutchinson has referred, in the "luminous introduction" (Robert Welch, *Cyphers 34*, Summer 1991) to a bilingual volume of his own Irish-language poems with English-language translations (*The Soul that Kissed the Body* (Dublin 1990), to the differences between the Irish and English languages, and the fact that certain of his Irish-language poems are not included because they "simply don't come across in English." He also refers to "a certain baroque note that has crept in" in his attempt to convey the intensity of the Irish-language poem - of which the following might perhaps stand as an example:

Ná cáinigí mé go borb géar,  
a Ghaela m'ae istigh, má dúras  
go borb géar gur bréagach liom cuid  
nach beag í de chóras bhur dtreibhe –  
mo threibhe-se, fiú, i gcead  
don dream is binibí dí...

Too sharp or fierce don't scourge me,  
Gaelic nation I love and need, for speaking  
sharp and fierce against  
lies in the tribe's code -  
it's my tribe too, for all  
the spite-mongers in your sanctum...

The above from 'Bréag na hEagla'/ 'The Lie of Fear', and translations such as 'Hope, tho' Small, by Courtesy of Fear', 'Amhrán Bréagach', or those of a number of striking love poems, fulfill the criteria set out in the review of *The Bright Wave/An Tonn Gheal* quoted above. They are not word for word translations, nor are Irish-language idioms

necessarily translated literally, though they are echoed or represented by equivalents, and the English-language translation mirrors the simplicity and directness of the Irish original.

The editor of *The Bright Wave/An Tonn Gheal*, Dermot Bolger, set out his aim as follows: "In giving my instructions to translators, I have stressed that, for this book, I am more concerned that the spirit of the original poem should come across and work as effectively as possible, as against merely reproducing a strictly literal line for line version." In any act of translation there may well be a tension between the two approaches set out above as a dichotomy, but the translator needs to work with both in mind. In his introduction to his translations in *Poems of the Late T'ang* (London 1977 ed), A C Graham wrote:

Beyond a certain point one cannot reconcile the demands of translation and of poetry, and must opt for one or the other....Every translator must therefore decide whether to stop at the point from which the English reader will have his (sic) best view of Omar Khayam, or attempt the further step by which Edward Fitzgerald takes his place in the line of English poets....the rare versions of foreign poems which achieve the status of absolute poetry in English will be ones from which we can learn nothing dependable about the originals.

In the Poetry Ireland symposium referred to above, Mícheál Ó Cróinín criticised Paul Muldoon's translation of the term 'Bean a' leasa' as 'a fine young thing' and 'her ladyship' ('An Crann'/ 'As for the Quince') arguing that,

There is nothing in Muldoon's translation to indicate, or render in a parallel way, the history of that particular term 'bean 'a leasa' and the associations which the term has in literature and folklore. It's a bad translation; it makes the poem incomprehensible. The sense of this traditional, female figure invading and upsetting the lives of a modern suburban couple is totally absent.

Again, in the Cyphers review of *The Bright Wave/An Tonn Gheal*, Hutchinson criticises Muldoon, "who knows better", for his "impatient jazzing-it-up" in a way which "radically alters the tone" of a poem by Liam Ó Muirthile. Reviewing *The Astrakhan Coat* (Dublin 1992), a selection of poems by Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill with English-language translations by Muldoon, I wrote (*Irish Studies Review*, 4, Autumn 1993):

The voices of the female personae of these poems are well captured in many of Muldoon's translations. However, there are occasions when over-blown passages fail to do justice to the original; and in 'Radharc ó Chábán tSíle'/ 'The View from Cabinteely' the process of translation is quite radical. Ní Dhomhnaill's quietly stated picture of evening normality holds throughout, which is why the image of bombs falling "ar bhrucahbhailte mar seo" (on suburbs like this) is so effective. Muldoon's rendering of "ag ullmhú suipéir" ('preparing supper') as "cooking up a storm" and "Éiríonn liathróidí caide" ('footballs rise') as "footballs score direct



hits” are merely two examples of the means by which he alters the whole dynamic of the poem.

Reviewing *An Crann Faoi Bhláth/The Flowering Tree* (eds Declan Kiberd, Gabriel Fitzmaurice, Dublin 1991) (*Irish Studies Review*, Spring 1992), I noted that, “Translations are also included which fail to register significant elements of their originals” and referred to “a serious and general slackness” about the translation of Seán Ó Ríordáin’s major poem ‘Cnoc Melleri’. This slackness was a matter not only of language but also of form. Much of modern Irish-language poetry is written in a form as close to free verse as it is possible to approach in Irish. Seán Ó Ríordáin – one of the cornerstones of the nuafhilíocht – wrote ‘Cnoc Melleri’ in an effective, loping verse form which was not adequately reflected in the verse form of its sluggish translation.

If a strong focus above is on Muldoon, it is because his is an influential voice at the freer end of approaches to translation from Irish to English, and one which is often marked by that “overinfer[ence]” which Hutchinson castigates – and perhaps underinference also, on the evidence of these criticisms. It is also because it appears that his approach to translation, with its strengths and weaknesses, offers the model for the processes involved in the transitions between Michael Davitt’s *Selected Poems/Rogha Dánta* (1987) and *Freacnairc Mhearcair/The Oomph of Quicksilver* (Cork 2000).

In the introduction to *Freacnairc Mhearcair/The Oomph of Quicksilver* (the arresting English-language title comes from a line in a Muldoon translation), the editor, Louis de Paor, states:

In presenting Davitt’s work to a bilingual and an English speaking audience, we have attempted a more expansive approach to the process of translation which would allow his poetic voice in Irish to reproduce itself as nearly as possible in English....It is to the great credit of the translators that they have, as far as possible, attempted to replicate Davitt’s voice(s) in English rather than impose their own poetic signature on his work.

Care has been taken: cribs have been provided, translations have been reworked with translators’ collaboration. A certain amount of tinkering with translations between *Selected Poems/Rogha Dánta* and *Freacnairc Mhearcair/The Oomph of Quicksilver* is evident: in the 1987 volume “the monk’s cat shit’s on the parlour floor” in Philip Casey’s translation, while in that of 2000 “pangur bán shits on the kitchen floor” in the de Paor/Davitt translation (“cacann pangur bán i lár an tí”, ‘Paranáia’/ ‘Paranoia’). Translators have been replaced. As Philip Casey is the chief casualty among translators (12 translations 1987; 1 translation 2000) it is worth comparing one of his translations with its replacement (by a de Paor/Davitt translation), ‘An Léiritheoir’/ ‘The Director’ (1987) ‘The Producer’ (2000):

No, it wasn’t a dream.  
They’re the bombastic cannon of the heavens  
announcing the end of the Easter heatwave.  
They shoot you shafts of migraine to the window

No, it wasn’t a dream.  
The sky’s artillery triumphantly  
declares curtains on the Easter  
heatwave, shooting bolts of migraine

in an all-mighty electric show.  
 In the silence between outbreaks  
 hosts of tears assemble  
 and wait on the brink of release  
 for the director's GO!

against the pane,  
 an almighty show of light.  
 In the pause between claps  
 a company of tears stands by  
 ready to break on cue.

In the second line "gunnaí" ('guns') is strengthened, in both translations, to "cannon" and "artillery" respectively. In the third, "declares curtains" has a strength which better represents the strength of "clabhsúr" in the phrase "ag fógairt clabhsúir" than simply "announcing the end." The fourth line of the earlier translation, "They shoot you shafts of migraine" appears to be an awkward attempt to represent the syntax of the original Irish: "releasing/shooting darts of migraine from them." Taken as a whole, the earlier translation is more literal, while the latter is tighter and more effective - without doing an injustice to the original.

Paul Muldoon has a strong presence in each volume. 'Eléna', an awkward translation striving for literalness, with almost none of Muldoon's characteristic fluency and 'oomph', in the first, is translated by Gearóid Ó Cruaíoch, with a Muldoon-like fluency, in the second. Some of the crossovers have a characteristic Muldoon translation signature, as in the rendering of "má tá sé ionnaibh" ('if you have it in you') as "let's see you strut your stuff" ('Sráid an Amhrais'/'Disillusion Street'). An example of a different kind is the translation of a verse in 'Cranlaoch'/'Hearts of Oak', which reads literally something like - 'A little acorn of light that descended/from the red branch down/rooted in a fallen poem (i.e. a poem lying on the ground, like a fallen apple)/in our bare little field and grew.' - as

A little acorn of light pitched  
 Into our bald patch  
 From the red branch above  
 Might take root there, and thrive.

The Irish-language image is quite vivid and beautiful, but is lost in the translation.

There are Muldoon signatures in the de Paor/Davitt translations. For example, in 'Lá na gCeaintíní'/'The Day of the Bickering' (1987), softened to 'Off Day' (2000), where "Tigh lán de ráflaí", accurately rendered by Jason Sommer as "A house full of rumors" (1987), becomes "A house electric with rumors". Incidentally, "teitheadh" ('fled') is translated as "ran away" by Sommer but as "left" by de Paor/Davitt. Given the subject matter of the poem this is not an insignificant change. However, one of the real disappointments of the 2000 volume is the reductionist version by Brendan Kennelly of 'I gClochar na Trócare'/'In the Convent of Mercy', where the spirit of Benny Hill would seem to be the presiding muse. Despite a number of faults, Dermot Bolger's translation for the 1987 volume gives a much clearer indication of how Davitt's paced and subtle poem works, down to the sting in its tail.

“What I am trying to stress is the necessity of evaluating these translations as *translations*,” argued Mícheál Ó Cróinín, in the Poetry Ireland symposium referred to at the outset. I would suggest that translation into English from Irish, in the field of poetry at least, is one that still requires close and critical attention.

**Seán Hutton**

### **REPORT: ESSE5 2000 CONFERENCE IN HELSINKI**

The 5<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the European Society for the Study of English took place in Helsinki between 25-29 August 2000. The conference, attended by University teachers of English from Europe, started with a plenary lecture by Raymond Tallis on the difference between literary and scientific discourse. This raised in a highly confrontational way, a presumed opposition between literary theory and evidence based on scholarship. At the conference’s Irish Studies Seminar, convened by Claire Connolly and Margaret Kelleher, theory and scholarship met in a more productive relationship. Conference delegates saw this seminar as exemplary of the way collegiate discussion can be engendered on papers already published in summary on the conference website. Panellists, who included BAIS members, had studied each other’s contributions and came prepared to discuss an agenda, suggested by the convenors, concentrating on the utility of the concept of Renaissance in Irish cultural production.

The papers themselves covered mainstream genres such as drama, poetry and fiction, together with more diverse cultural productions such as radio, cinema, periodicals and science. The morning session of the seminar dealt with 20<sup>th</sup> century concepts of Renaissance and which ways in which Irish writers entered into dialogue with past themes and related these to the living present. Shaun Richards perceived echoes of Synge in Martin MacDonagh. Christine Mahoney and I commented on the way cultural productions, such as radio programmes and periodicals, were used to present images of Irish people to themselves. The question of identity arose again in Moynagh Sullivan’s exploration of the connections between modern women’s writing and the revival, focused around comedy in the poetry of Medbh McGuckian. Bruce

Stewart offered an analysis of Seamus Heaney’s relationship to Ulster regionalism and to alternative conceptions of the cultural geography of Ireland. Nick Daly discussed the significant role of Irish directors in the development of the silent cinema. Marie Arndt described how the Italian Renaissance affected Sean O Faolain’s view of the role of the modern Church.

In the afternoon session, discussion shifted directly to the Irish Revival, perhaps the most evidently influential Renaissance in Irish culture. Ina Gjurjan addressed the rhetoric of the Revival and its impact on political life. Jacqueline Belanger interpreted some of the Revival’s literary criticism and its interventions in debates about Irish identity. Selina Guinness dealt with ways in which theosophy was used by George Russell and others to project larger affiliations for Irish nationality and Keith Gregor investigated Yeats’s deployment of mythicisation in *On Baile’s Strand*. Ben Levitas expanded our understanding of the role of violence in the cultural politics of the period. Eve Patten’s paper on the resistance of Yeats and his followers to the recognition of the role of Irish scientists pointed to some of the limitations of the Irish Revival.

In her response, Anne Fogarty pointed out how the seminar illustrated the dominance of Yeats in discussion of the Irish Revival, even while alternative histories were being explored as alternatives to the Yeatsian grand narrative. The interplay between literature, culture, nationalism and politics, and the repeated drive to interpret the past in the name of present preoccupations, had implications for the ways in which Irish Studies were being constituted. Selina Guinness quoted James Cousins as suggesting that Ireland had the type of a renaissance habit that would find signs of birth in a graveyard.

**Malcolm Ballin**

# The Irish Diaspora

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**Irish Studies Centre, University of North London**  
AND  
**British Association for Irish Studies**  
**3-4 November 2000**

*Confirmed speakers:*

**Hasia Diner, New York University** **David Fitzpatrick, Trinity College, Dublin**  
**Luke Gibbons, University of Notre Dame, Indiana**  
**David Lloyd, Scripps College, California** **Bronwen Walter, Anglia Polytechnic University**  
**Avtar Brah, Birkbeck College** **Mary Hickman, University of North London**

The aim of the conference is to assess Irish migration and diaspora research in terms both of its placement in wider diaspora studies and its internal rationale, processes, debates and methods.

The recent upsurge of interest in the Irish diaspora forms part of a wider emphasis on transnationalism and globalization and the inter-related themes of 'race', ethnicity and migration. One objective of this conference is to locate the significance of Irish diaspora studies in this wider context. Another objective is to take stock of the current state of knowledge about the Irish diaspora and present some of the latest exciting research.

Planned workshop themes include: culture and identity; health and identity; resistance and assimilation; 'whiteness'; 'race' and ethnicity; nationalism and diaspora; religious identities and diaspora; sources for research; representations of 'Irishness'; local identities; diasporic identities; Ireland and diaspora.

*A limited number of student bursaries are available, sponsored by The Irish Post/Smurfit Media.*

**Booking details**

**£50, reduced to £45 if booked before 22 October 2000**

**BAIS members:**

**£45 or £40 before 22 October 2000 (proof required)**

**Concessions (JSA/students/OAP):**

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**Sterling cheques/money orders only, payable to the University of North London.**

**For more details or to book a place contact:**

**Professor Mary Hickman,  
Irish Studies Centre,  
University of North London, 166-220 Holloway Rd.,  
London N7 8DB.**

**Tel: +44 (0)20 7753 5018**

**Irish**  
studies centre





**REPORT: THE IRISH EMBASSY LAUNCH OF *WHEREVER GREEN IS WORN***

There was a most enjoyable reception held at the Irish Embassy on Thursday 22 September 2000 for the London book launch of *Wherever Green is Worn*. There were speeches from the Irish Ambassador, Ted Barrington; from a representative of the publishers Hutchinson Random House; and from Tim Pat Coogan, the author himself. Copies of the book in the Embassy sold out quickly. There was general admiration of the sheer extent of the research which took the author so far afield: to North and South America, to Africa, to the UK and Europe, to Asia and to Australia and New Zealand.

A first reading of the book suggests the sheer scale of the story of the Irish Diaspora – a very complicated story indeed of why and how some seventy million people on the planet earth nowadays think of themselves as ‘Irish’. The main thrust of the book’s narrative concerns the arresting phenomenon of how a people who left a small island (often as a result of war, famine and poverty) could still go on to achieve great things in the spheres of politics, the arts and religion throughout the world. At times the reader of this book may be bemused by the tendency to journalistic point-scoring; but hopefully all such bemused readers will quickly shift their attention back to the global sweep of the narrative. The author’s modesty shines forth in the Epilogue: ‘I have attempted to chart the contours of the Irish from their origins through fame, fortune and disaster as they rose to their present plateau of success...I leave it to others,

perhaps better resourced, either to retrace my steps so as to avoid the inevitable pit-falls, or to explore other facets of the subject.’

Of special interest to BAIS members will be the few pages on the subject of Irish Studies in Britain, pages 174-178. The beginnings of Irish Studies in Britain is described as a cultural dimension of the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement. In this book’s account, the first steps towards Irish Studies were made by the group named Anglo-Irish Encounter, headed by Kenneth Whitaker and Sir David Orr. Out of this group’s discussions emerged the British Association of Irish Studies, with strong support from the Irish Embassy in London and the Allied Irish Bank. In 1990 a debate arose within BAIS centred around the question of whether the Association should take sides in Irish political disputes or remain primarily concerned with the promotion of the teaching of Irish Studies within British academic institutions at all levels. There is in this book a succinct but vivid depiction of the personalities caught up in the dramatic events which led to a ‘split’ within BAIS, but which happily proved not to be fatal. In 2000, BAIS functions as an organisation aiming at sponsoring scholarly research into all the traditions of Ireland. Thus is our Association presented as a significant piece in the jig-saw which, when viewed in its completed state, deserves the title of ‘The *Epic* Story of the Irish Diaspora’.

**The Editor**

**NOTICEBOARD: OCTOBER 2000****CALL FOR PAPERS****NEW VOICES IN IRISH CRITICISM**

After two successful conferences in Dublin and Belfast, the 3<sup>rd</sup> New Voices in Irish Criticism Conference will be held in Galway 2-4 February 2011. The aim of this annual conference is to provide a forum for the upcoming generation of critics within the Irish Academy and postgraduate students working on Irish material overseas; and to give them the opportunity to

engage in critical debate with their colleagues. In order to promote interdisciplinary panels, proposals are encouraged not only in the field of Irish Studies but on international topics such as postcolonial cultures, British and American literature and international politics. Everyone is welcome to submit material and participate in the conference. Some priority will be given to ‘new

voices', from those who have not been heard at previous New Voices Conferences. More established academics are warmly invited, as a

discussion panel of 'new' and 'old voices' is envisaged as part of the programme.

**Suggested topics for 20 minute papers include:**

- translation and cultural confrontations
- reconstructions of the past
- Poetics and aesthetics
- Ireland and urbanisation
- Fiction and faction
- Gender, race, class and identity
- Issues of postmodernism in Ireland and abroad
- Challenging Irish critical orthodoxies
- Theatre and performing arts
- Changing landscapes
- The creative critic and the critical artist

Topics can be discussed from various disciplines within the humanities, including art, film, politics, sociology, philosophy, archaeology, literature and other sciences. The conference will be conducted mainly in English but Irish language papers are also welcome..

One page abstracts should be posted by pigeon or e-mail by 1 November 2000 to:  
**Karen Vandavelde**, New Voices, English Department, NUI, Galway  
[KarenV@oceanfree.net](mailto:KarenV@oceanfree.net)

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**DATE FOR NEXT BAIS COUNCIL MEETING**

**SATURDAY 14.10.00**

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