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Tina.*

# British Association for Irish Studies

# Newsletter

ISSUE NO 25 JANUARY 2001



**CELIA de FRÉINE**

the subject of

**FOCUS INTERVIEW**

with

**Eibhlín Evans**

on

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**BATTLE IN THE BOOKS: HOW IRISH WAS THE DIASPORA FROM IRELAND?**

**BAIS CHAIR'S REPORT 2000**

**BAIS POSTGRADUATE BURSARIES SCHEME 2001**

**REPORT: HUBERT BUTLER CONFERENCE 2000**

**NOTICEBOARD**

## BAIS NEWSLETTER NO. 25

January 2001

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## EDITORIAL

Recently Irish migration has been a recurring theme in the world of Irish Studies. There has been RTE's *The Irish Empire*, a 5-part documentary series of the Celtic Tiger about the Irish abroad. Tim Pat Coogan's book *Wherever Green is Worn*, a wide ranging journalistic account of meeting Irish people across the globe, was launched at a splendid reception held at the Irish Embassy in London. Another book *Being Irish* consisting of a hundred people explaining their Irishness (including, by the way, Tony Blair) was compiled and edited by Paddy Logue, almost along the lines of a superior game show 'Do You Want to be Irish', launched in Britain at the Irish Club London and leaving the impression that to be considered Irish is very attractive nowadays, and that *anyone* can assume an Irish identity 'free from the bloodlines of ethnicity'.

Then there was that very successful conference co-hosted by the Irish Studies in the University of North London on the topic of *The Irish Diaspora*. At that conference there was one strikingly dissident voice which sounded a note of caution about our understanding of the Irish abroad. The sceptical voice belonged to David Fitzpatrick, author of *Oceans of Consolation: Personal Accounts of Irish Migration to Australia* (Cork 1994) and *The Two Irelands 1912-1939* (Oxford 1998). On being invited to present his challenging intellectual analysis in condensed form within the format of the Newsletter's *Battle in the Books*, Professor Fitzpatrick very generously agreed to do so. Apparently it is hoped that Professor Fitzpatrick's paper will appear in due course in published form alongside other conference papers given by the invited speakers. Readers of the Newsletter have the opportunity to become involved NOW in the debate about Irish Diaspora Studies which Professor Fitzpatrick opens up for thorough discussion at a time when to be considered Irish is to be in the fast popular lane in the so-called mature era of Irish development.

Many thanks to Eibhlín Evans for interviewing the writer Celia de Fréine during a recent visit to Connemara. The resulting Focus Interview opens up interesting subjects of debate within Ireland, such as the state of Irish women writers and of Irish language poetry. This excellent piece presents yet another opportunity to readers to prove that you are really out there by letting your Newsletter have your comments on matters arising, perhaps on my e-mail address indicated below.

A very welcome contribution arrived from Eleanor Burgess as a follow up to the last Focus Interview about Hubert Butler. Then for those members who were unable to attend the BAIS AGM 2000, there is a copy of the very comprehensive Chair's Report presented on that occasion by Sean Hutton.

Copy and/or discs (Word 97) with articles, reports, notices, letters etc. to be included in No. 26 should be sent to Jerry Nolan, 8 Antrobus Road, Chiswick, London W4 5HY by 9 April 2001.

Email: Jcmnolan@aol.com

*re Conf report*

## 15 FOCUS INTERVIEW: Celia de Fréine with Eibhlín Evans

Celia de Fréine is a poet, screenwriter and dramatist. She was born in Northern Ireland and now lives in Dublin and Connemara. Many of her plays have been performed on stage and radio. Her screenwork was shortlisted for the 1998 Celtic Film and Television Festival. Her poetry has been widely published and has won several major awards, including the Patrick Kavanagh Award, the Comórtas Filíochta Dhún Laoghaire Award, the British Comparative Literature Association University of East Anglia Award and Duais Aitheantais Ghradam Litríochta Chló Iar-Chonnachta. In 1997 she was awarded an Arts Council Bursary. Her first collection *Faoi Chabáistí is Ríonacha* will be published by Cló Iar-Chonnachta in 2001.

**EE:** As a writer you have had considerable success as a poet, a short story writer, as a script writer and as a playwright. Do you find it more fulfilling to operate in a range of genres?

**CdF:** I see myself primarily as a poet who also writes fiction, drama and has written for television. Poetry and playwriting are closely related as dialogue has to be succinct and description must be kept to the minimum. However, I've also been working on a novel for younger readers, the style of which is very direct; there are no long reflective passages or bridging sections within and between chapters; in fact most chapters read like scenes – so you could say it's somewhat like writing a script. So there are links between the different genres. I enjoy writing poetry but I think it's good to write in a more extended genre – it helps to excavate themes and ideas that are buried deeper. I find that after writing each play I write several poems. If I didn't write plays, I feel that my poetry would suffer.

**EE:** Before we discuss your poetry I'd like to ask you about your play *Nára Turas é in Aistear* recently staged in Dublin and Galway. What were your motivations there in terms of theme and style and what are your plans for future plays?

**CdF:** This play contained characters that had been living with me for about twenty years and I finally got around to exploring them and putting them together in this play. The play is set during the Pope's visit to Ireland in 1979 and is centred on five individuals who are social misfits within Irish society at the time. Each of them has a grievance with the Catholic Church. The action of the play is their struggle to get through the three days of the papal visit – days when their difficulties are heightened and they're forced to confront their histories, their present and their future.

**EE:** Your plays have been described as televisual. Is this accurate description and if so, is it deliberate?

**CdF:** People say that my playwriting is televisual. Yes, I've written for television, but, in fact, I wrote stage plays long before I wrote for television. This televisual aspect of my work is due to the influence of the Brechtian theatre of the 1930s where outside events very directly impinge on the lives of the characters. The connection serves to counterpoint the struggle of the individual within society, and to demonstrate how the personal and the political are always linked. This approach helps to give a bird's eye view of historical moments: to give a larger view of situations arising out of seemingly impersonal events. I wrote for television for three years. My first piece was shortlisted for the Celtic and Television Festival which was a terrific boost to me at the time. Recently I've been working on another play which is quite different in that it's more heavily influenced by the French Theatre of Genet and Camus. What I want to say at the moment in plays and in much of my poetry is best suited to the surrealist approach.

**EE:** Why does the surrealist approach appeal to you so much right now?

**CdF:** Because, I'm afraid, I see absurdity everywhere I turn. I've never enjoyed standard comedy shows or professional comedians because I think that kind of humour 'contrived'. I see humour and hilarity every time I read a newspaper or watch the news – especially our news in Ireland with so much about all the tribunals! When I first began to write poetry, I followed the usual approach to the standard themes but after some two years the surrealist approach seemed to take over. The surrealist tendency helps to highlight the themes which I am seeking to address.

EE: Why has the theme of social alienation been so important in your last play and recent poetry?

CdF: Going over my collection of poems, *Faoi Chábaistí is Rionachta/Of Cabbages and Queens*, which will be published next year, it struck me that the theme of the marginalized individual was a recurring one – women struggling in war situations, those discriminated against in narrow societies etc. Many years ago I was accused of waving the feminist flag but the truth is that I have always been concerned with the fate of the marginalized whether they are men, women or children. A literary journal which had previously published my writing refused later work on the basis that it was too harsh, too bleak. At the time I was teaching Travellers and teaching in the prison service, so being connected with people who were struggling to survive in a narrow society must have rubbed off on my writing which I must add was still humorous and certainly absurd. The poetry I'm writing at the moment is much more personal. Often there's a sea-change in a writer's work after the death of a parent, and I feel that this is true in my case.

EE: How would you describe that sea-change and what have been the problems or benefits for your poetry?

CdF: Irish writing in general has changed over the last ten years. Recent affluence and national success have engendered a self confidence in many areas, especially in the way we feel able to reflect on the past. For example, if Frank McCourt had written *Angela's Ashes* twenty years ago, it would probably have received little attention. The same is true of Nuala O'Faolain's *Are You Somebody?* When both of these books were published, the time was right for this level of confessional writing. Many writers who would have previously shied away from the confessional form are now much less inhibited in writing about humble origins and emotional difficulties. Irish writing is now more open. Mine certainly is, compared to my oblique work of five or six years ago. I wasn't deliberately trying to obfuscate my own background or feelings, but there was a great safety in my approach. The problems that come from writing more personal poetry is that subjects, such as family members, are more clearly exposed. On the positive side, the reader has to work less hard to understand the poem.

EE: How did you come to writing poetry and what are your future plans for writing poetry?

CdF: I started writing poetry about eight years ago when I was in full-time teaching. In a way I was forced to write poetry as I had a very limited amount of time in which to write. After two years, I won the Patrick Kavanagh Award, and that was the turning point because I felt encouraged to continue. I've won a poetry award each year since then. I came to poetry from a background in theatre, working first as a designer and later as a director. Through adapting scripts I eventually moved on to writing my own plays. I'm no longer teaching and can now devote myself fully to writing. My collection of poems *Faoi Chábaistí is Rionachta/ Of Cabbages and Queens* won the runner-up award in last year's Cló Iar-Chonnachta literary competition and will be published by them next year. I'm now working on my second collection, *Féileacán ar Foluain/A Butterfly Passing*, and also on a separate long poem.

EE: The long poem has a particular appeal to women poets especially in the last fifty years. Why have you elected to work in this genre at this stage of your writing?

CdF: I think the long poem chose me, rather than the other way around! Some years ago, in response to a request from a literary journal I tried to write a sequence of poems on one of our great national scandals and its effect on my life but I was unable to complete it at the time. In May this year I read an ill-informed piece by a journalist on the same subject and was instantly engaged. I sat down at the kitchen table and wrote the first draft of a poem that currently runs to over fifty pages. The long poem can accommodate a range of ideas. It can tell a story. It gives the writer scope to discuss several ideas and to shift through different emotional registers. I agree with you about the suitability of the long poem as a way of exploring the complexity of the interconnected issues women face.

EE: Can we talk about the experience of writing in two languages, in Irish and in English, and also discuss the issue of translation?

CdF: We were talking earlier about marginalisation. Poetry itself is marginalized and Irish language poetry is even more so. So why bother to write in Irish? Here again it isn't a matter of choice. Writing in Irish has chosen me. My parents were from the North of Ireland and the home that I grew up in was

very British. We always listened to the BBC. Not only had my parents no Irish, my mother knew nothing about Irish history, culture, music or myths. Once I learned Irish in school I felt very much at home in it as a language, and I feel that a great part of my writing voice is in Irish. Most established Irish language writers such as Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Cathal Ó Searcaigh and Michael Davitt publish dual language editions of their work. I have English language translations of all my poems and I like to see these published as few of my friends, relations and extended family have Irish.

**EE:** Is it important that you translate your own poetry?

**CdF:** I would find it very strange to have it translated by another person. I find that moving between languages enhances the work as this demands so much probing. It demands that you constantly ask yourself what exactly you want to say and whether this is the best way to say it. As well as helping with the clarity of the work, it helps to shape my ideas and increases my focus on both the form and content of the poems. But the most exciting and fulfilling aspect of self-translation is seeing how the literary, filmic and dramatic references change between languages, and the effect this has on the individual poem.

**EE:** Why do you think other Irish language poets don't do likewise?

**CdF:** At the moment there are few Irish language poets who were born and bred and still live in the Gaeltacht. I'm thinking of Cathal Ó Searcaigh because he needs the help of a translator. I mean this as a compliment. Cathal's language skills are superior to those he can command in English and so having a translator helps. Most Irish language poets who speak Irish in the home and workplace step into the English-speaking world, once they step outside their front doors. Those of us living in the English-speaking world exist between two languages. For example, Michael Davitt's mother was English and he explores the implications of this in a fine poem in his *Selected Poems Freacnairc Mhearcaín/The Oomph of Quicksilver*. Approximately half of the poems in his book are collaborative translations between himself and his editor Louis de Paor. Of my own generation of Irish language women writers, Rita Kelly is the only one who has published a dual language collection where her poems in Irish have been translated by herself. My own practice was bolstered by winning for the translations of my own poems into English the British Comparative Literature Association Translation Award.

**EE:** I would like to discuss the position of Irish women's writing. As you well know, this has been the subject of much controversy and debate in the past. Have things improved for Irish women writers?

**CdF:** Joan McBreen's recent anthology of Irish women's poetry *The White Page* testifies to the number of Irish women writing poetry today. Traditionally, women have been excluded from the canon of Irish writing. The fact of the matter is that most publishers, editors and judges of competitions have been and are still, in most cases, men. As in the case of McBreen's anthology, women are now coming forward editing anthologies and judging competitions. Women in these positions carry a great burden because everyone's looking over their shoulder, as it were, to see how they go. In my view, the best anthologies of women's writing were *Pillars of the House*, edited by A.A. Kelly and *Wildish Things*, edited by Ailbhe Smyth. These editors did not follow the conventional pattern of traditional anthologies. So things have improved, but still too often editors tend to impose unnecessary rules and regulations on their choices and fail to acknowledge such factors as the restrictions women experience in terms of the limited volume of their work and the infrequency of publication. Women editors have a responsibility to take such considerations into account and to challenge the conventional criteria. In Joan's anthology inclusion depended on the contributor having had at least one collection of poetry in print. By selecting only writers whose work had already been endorsed by a poetry publisher, she played safe and failed to address the very special circumstances surrounding women's writing and its publication. Having a book in print is no real indication of ability or excellence. Anyone can set up a publishing press to publish themselves and their friends – in fact, this is how most small presses come on stream. It would be a very useful research study to investigate why some very fine women poets do not have collections in print while other mediocre writers have several. Another pressing question is: why do women's writing appear so erratically, in some cases only at ten year intervals?

**EE:** How do you regard, in general, the record of the publishers of poetry in Ireland?

**CdF:** In Ireland the publication of poetry in English has been dominated by Gallery Press, Daedalus Press and Salmon Publishing although there are more publishing companies now coming on stream. In the case of these three presses, publisher and editor are synonymous. In other countries with a larger market, editors are employed and come and go over time. In Ireland three individuals have effectively controlled the publication of poetry for the best part of twenty years. I'm not saying that this is necessarily a bad thing, but the phenomenon is remarkable and seems worthy of some thorough research.

**EE:** Is there a similar situation in terms of reviewing new Irish writing?

**CdF:** I'm an occasional reviewer myself and, when reviewing, always try to adhere to the Code of Practice advocated by the Irish Writers' Union. I'm sure there's a similar code of practice within the NUJ, but judging by some of the reviews that appear this often seems to be ignored. Of course, the saddest aspect of reviewing in Ireland and of literary criticism in Ireland is the incestuous aspect of the whole business. Many journalists in Ireland also write creatively so there tends to be a clique where colleagues review the work of each other favourably in anticipation of reciprocal favourable reaction when the next publication appears.

**EE:** How does their reception in Ireland effect Irish writers?

**CdF:** Ireland today, Celtic Tiger notwithstanding, is still a small country with a small population but with many writers' groups and writing workshops. Yet the same small group of writers seems to surface and have their work favourably promoted on big festival occasions. To the outsider it must appear that there's only a small number of writers, which is patently not the case. I've noticed lately that some Irish writers who are well reviewed and received in Ireland are sometimes less well received in Britain – and vice versa. An example is Eilish Ní Dhuibhne, nominated for a major international award, the Orange Prize for Fiction, for her novel *The Dancers Dancing*. She has many awards and literary prizes to her name already but gets scant coverage in the Irish media. Another area for research, perhaps?

**EE:** What were your aims in setting up the Writers' Centre in Dublin? Do you think many writers have benefited?

**CdF:** I was involved in setting up both the Irish Writers' Union and The Writers' Centre. At the time, about twelve years ago, the publishing contract was a rare phenomenon in Irish publishing, not to mention advances or royalty statements. We now have a copyright collecting agency, but no public lending rights so far. In those days Irish prose writers were not being wooed by British publishers. Today few Irish poets are yet published in Britain. The Writers' Centre remains a wonderful asset because writers can meet there, use the facilities, launch their books etc. Much has been achieved thanks to the work of the Irish Writer's Union. On leaving school I worked in the civil service where I was also a union representative negotiating for arrears of pay owed to women colleagues for many years. I suppose you could say that I fitted easily into the writers' union first executive where, incidentally, I was the only woman. I was negotiating for the rights of the writer long before I became a marginalized Irish language poet!

## **BATTLE IN THE BOOKS 5: HOW IRISH WAS THE DIASPORA FROM IRELAND?**

The importance of ethnicity is a central but contested issue in migration studies. Is it useful to segment the great movement out of nineteenth-century Europe into homogeneous and distinctive 'national' migrations? To what extent was the performance of each national group of settlers in the New World enhanced or inhibited by its shared nationality? How effective were hostile stereotypes in creating or

exaggerating disparities in the performance of different ethnic group? Did ethnicity remain important for the descendants of emigrants, and what political and psychological factors have caused so many contemporary Americans and Australians to claim certain nationalities of origin, but not others? My purpose is to apply such questions to emigration from nineteenth-century Ireland. The answers provide a partial

test of the validity of Irish Diaspora Studies, one of the most popular and well-endowed sub-disciplines relating to the history of human migration. If nationality had less impact on the emigrant experience than other factors such as geographical region, class, religion, language, or sex, should scarce scholarly resources be redeployed accordingly? Or can some justification be found for treating emigration from Ireland as a distinctive process, worthy of analysis in its own right?

It is notoriously difficult to define any set of characteristics common to most of the inhabitants of Ireland, and therefore (presumably) to those who left Ireland. Though the distribution of certain physiological traits differ sharply from that in other European countries, few would now maintain that the Irish population constitutes a distinctive race with a common genetic pool radically different from that shared by north-western Europeans. The only language spoken by most nineteenth-century Irish people was English, the proportion of monolingual Irish speakers being minute even at the outset of mass emigration. Although bilinguals were somewhat more likely to leave Ireland than monolinguals in English, there is only scattered evidence of the use of the once-national tongue among emigrants. Indeed, the comparative advantage enjoyed by English-speaking settlers in North America and the British Empire gave Irish would-be emigrants a strong incentive to suppress their linguistic ethnicity and to 'Anglicise' themselves before departure.

The strong communal cleavages which weakened all attempts to achieve ethnic solidarity at home were most clearly evident in religious differences, which were largely replicated in the Diaspora. Though probably under-represented among emigrants, who tended to come from largely Catholic regions, Protestants formed a significant minority in the movement to Scotland, New Zealand, and the United States, and a majority in the case of Canada. Religious division is of course compatible with shared cultural practices, as anybody conversant with Ulster would point out. Yet the steady infiltration of British and also American culture in nineteenth-century Ireland renders it difficult to specify what was distinctively 'Irish' in the practices by which emigrants from Ireland interacted and constructed their mental worlds. The often dubious evidence of Irish distinctiveness is outweighed by the far more wide-ranging cultural affinities between emigrants from Ireland, England, and Scotland, whose

common language and upbringing under Britain's unique legal, administrative, and parliamentary system set them apart from those reared in continental countries. When segmenting European migration in order to assess the effects of 'cultural baggage', there is a plausible case for treating emigrants from the British Isles as a relatively homogeneous group, and the Irish as a slightly variant sub-group.

The belief that the collective performance of Irish emigrants was affected by their ethnicity takes many forms. The crudest variation, recently celebrated in 300,000 words by Tim Pat Coogan in *Wherever Green is Worn* (London 2000), imputes a superior national character to the Irish which accounts for their 'extraordinary contribution' to life in every country of settlement. As Coogan concludes: 'I too believe in the Irish people. Around the globe they prove themselves to be "an incredibly good nation". My final wish for them is that, having conquered their demons at home, that (sic) their Diaspora of the future may go forth only on an optional basis intent on upholding and building on the finest traditions of their race.' (p.666). Irish emigrant achievement, for Coogan, constitutes a triumph of Irish racial and national virtue over the obstacles of poverty, ignorance, alienation, and discrimination. Such a conclusion is a profession of faith, incapable of verification.

Equally tendentious, though less bombastic and more subtle, is Kerby Miller's celebrated thesis in *Emigrants and Exiles* (New York 1985) that Irish emigrants were inhibited in their economic performance and social adaptation by a residual 'Gaelic world-view', which discouraged individual enterprise and encouraged retreat into defensive ethnic alliances. The main evidence for this notion, apart from the actual record of Irish disadvantage in nineteenth-century America, is the reiterated expression of nostalgia by Irish emigrants in literature, balladry, and personal letters. This seems to me a crucial misreading of nostalgia, an outpouring of sentiment which is perfectly compatible with rational action in daily life, and which affects virtually everyone who leaves any home (that is, virtually every human adult). The 'exile' motif, so powerful in Irish literature yet so rare in personal correspondence, is a device for generalising the sense of personal loss, not a key to archaic and irrational elements of the Irish world-view. As for emigrant participation in ethnic networks, such as churches, fraternities, or social groups encouraging solidarity among

Irish emigrants, there is no good reason to dismiss such alliances as defensive, archaic, or inefficient. In a segmented society with many would-be elites vying for preferential access to employment, marriage partners, or political power, it makes good sense to pursue self-interest through a group bound by reciprocal loyalties rather than to sink or swim alone. Though not the only strategy for economic man or woman, ethnic combination had marked advantages for recently arrived emigrants over riskier strategies such as reliance on non-Irish trades unions, conspicuous repudiation of Irishness, or rugged individualism. Ethnic networks served displaced emigrants of all nationalities, and their appeal transcended differences of culture and 'world-view'.

A third interpretation of variations in emigrant performances gives primacy to ethnic and racial prejudice, instead of national character or mentality. Still popular among those who view history as a record of systematic exploitation, peopled by victims and culprits, this thesis has the attraction of representing Irishness as a fiction generated by rival nationalities, rather than a distinctive identity actually shared by emigrants from Ireland. The evidence of discrimination against Irish settlers is abundant and inconvertible, as also is the prevalence of hostile ethnic stereotypes justifying such discrimination. Yet, in many contexts, the practical impact of anti-Irish rhetoric and discrimination was negligible. The fabled abundance of advertisements advising that 'no Irish need apply' coincided, in both America and Australia, with a chronic shortage of non-Irish applicants for employment in occupations such as domestic service and building work. Consequently, Irish settlers were often over-represented in the very sectors where hostility to their engagement was most raucous. Likewise, anti-Catholic prejudice did not prevent extensive intermarriage between Irish Catholic women and Protestant men in societies with marked male majorities, as in all regions of recent settlement in the New World. Once again, rational action triumphed over sentiment in dictating the decisions of employers and marriage-seekers.

The profusion of ethnic stereotypes is best seen as part of the rhetoric generated by struggle between rival sub-groups, not an assertion of dominance by an elite over a marginal minority. Discrimination by Protestants and nativists against Irish emigrants was counteracted by exclusive combinations and mutual preference within the ethnic

community. Moreover, Irish emigrants proved no less adept than their adversaries in using racial abuse and discrimination to reinforce their own social and economic status at the expense of other ethnic minorities. In the absence of a monolithic Protestant establishment in any of the major countries of settlement, except perhaps Britain, anti-Irish discrimination was just another weapon in the cut and thrust of competing sub-groups striving to survive in the fluid and amorphous societies of the New World.

All three attempts to link ethnicity with the performance of the Irish Diaspora are based on the assumption that Irish settlers were systematically and demonstrably disadvantaged. Though true for certain destinations at various periods, such as the north-eastern United States in the earlier nineteenth-century and industrial Britain over a longer time-span, this supposition is profoundly misleading as an epitome of the Irish emigrant experience. Studies of occupational status in the United States (1900), New South Wales (1901) and Scotland (1911) all indicate that settlers born in Ireland were no longer at a marked collective disadvantage by comparison with the native-born or with other immigrant groups. Though earlier evidence of Irish poverty is abundant in all three locations, and elsewhere, it is clear that the strategies adopted by Irish emigrants were effective in overcoming their initial disadvantages. Despite the still widespread belief that Irish emigrants congregated and often remained in urban 'ghettoes', virtually no evidence of their protracted existence has been uncovered for any place of settlement after innumerable statistical studies of residential clustering. In place such as Australasia and Canada, the Irish were as likely to live in rural areas as in cities; while in Britain and the United States they were concentrated in regions marked by relatively high wages, full employment, and economic buoyancy. The most sustained and ingenious attempt to refute the thesis of Irish disadvantage and incompetence overseas is that by Don Akenson, whose *The Irish Diaspora* (Toronto 1993) convincingly documents the rationality, adaptability, and frequent success of Irish emigrants in exploiting their sometimes restricted opportunities abroad. If the emigrant Irish did not underperform, and were not systematically disadvantaged, then there is no ethnic problem to be solved. By this interpretation, the initial deprivation and poverty of mid-nineteenth-century Irish settlers was a temporary rather than endemic challenge, shared in some degree



by all nationalities in the early period of dislocation preceding true 'settlement'.

My argument so far suggests that the millions who left Ireland during the nineteenth century were not, in any instrumental sense, particularly 'Irish'. Their 'cultural baggage' distinguished the Irish from continental Europeans but gave them many advantages in common with British emigrants. Their performance as settlers suggest rational action unconditioned by ethnic peculiarities of outlook, apart from shared expertise in the construction of religious and fraternal networks acting for their collective benefit. In the case of those born overseas with emigrant parents or ancestors, the utility of the label 'Irish' is even more dubious. Clearly, it would be absurd to restrict the Diaspora to emigrants, since practices and networks developed by emigrants were often used to even greater effect by their descendants. Furthermore, the right of Americans, Australasians, or Britons with Irish lineage to declare themselves to be Irish, is undeniable. Yet the effect of intermarriage in all regions of settlement was rapidly to fragment ethnic communities, inviting descendants of mixed ancestry to select one of several plausible Old-World nationalities. Even for the first generation born outside Ireland, Irishness was often a self-consciously constructed identity, an amalgam of emigrant narratives and positive ethnic stereotypes of largely foreign manufacture. Whereas most emigrants bore their involuntary nationality lightly, their electively 'Irish' descendants were more inclined to flaunt and exploit their assumed characteristics.

This tendency, evident first in the United States, later in Australia, and most recently to a limited extent in Britain, was only in part sentimental in origin. It is easy to understand the appeal of an exotic, 'rooted' identity for those reared in the drab cities or suburbs of Britain, America, or Australia. Yet, by contrast with the unavoidable but unproductive nostalgia experienced by emigrants, the appropriation of Irishness by their descendants often brought social, political, or material advantages. Active participation in churches or fraternities benefited later generations more than the emigrants themselves, since these bodies usually peaked in power and influence early in the twentieth century, long after the period of heaviest emigration to all destinations except Britain. The growing, if not always justified, belief in the mystic power of the 'Irish vote' offered part-Irish Americans and Australians a superb launching pad for

political careers in the Democratic and Labor parties respectively. In quite recent years, the multi-cultural movement has made it profitable as well as prestigious to claim a European identity in the not-so-New-World, and for various reasons an Irish identity has so far proved more marketable than Britishness. Never before has Irishness been so important, and so useful, for those claiming association with the Irish Diaspora. And never before has it been more bogus.

Is there, then, any point in studying the Irish Diaspora as a unit? Would scholars and foundations do better to concentrate on the Diaspora from the British Isles, or the Ulster Diaspora, or groups of emigrants bound together by gender, class, religion, or language? Is it a nonsense to lump together emigrants settling in societies as diverse as England and Australia, California and Massachusetts?

The residual case for studying the Irish Diaspora rests not on the character of Irish ethnicity, but on the peculiar part played by emigration itself in Irish life. What distinguished Irish from British as well as most European migrations was its remarkable scale and unique profile. No other territorial unit used in official statistics had so consistently high a ratio of emigrants to population throughout the later nineteenth century. Only briefly was Irish pre-eminence challenged by the Germans in the intensity of movement to America. The persistent removal of over a third of each cohort of population was found elsewhere only in small isolated regions, and no other country experienced steady depopulation throughout the century after the Great Irish Famine. The composition of the movement out of Ireland was even more distinctive than its size, with its uniquely even balance of the sexes and preponderance of young unmarried adults. Despite substantial variations in intensity, no Irish region, religious group, or class escaped systematic emigration. Though temporary links developed between certain sub-populations and particular destinations, the emigrant experience was more homogeneous than one might expect. Since many families sent children to Australia and Britain as well as America, and since many emigrants thought nothing of roaming the English-speaking world in search of still better opportunities, the Irish Diaspora was not rigorously segmented according to destination.

The outcome was to create a people 'reared for emigration', increasingly well informed and

prepared for life abroad, deeply affected in its social organisation at home by foreign influences. Even today, historians are only beginning to plumb the profound effects of emigration on Irish marriage practices, fertility, economic organisation, political priorities, religious observance, and popular culture. If the experience of emigrants was only marginally affected by their Irishness, the character of Irish society was transformed by emigration. The peculiar interest of the Irish Diaspora therefore arises from its domestic consequences, and above all from the uniquely intricate process by which it was organised. The manner in which Irish emigration became

institutionalised, and regulated by powerful social obligations and constraints, is an extraordinary example of the capacity of collective interests and assumptions to govern millions of seemingly independent, individual decisions. The impulse to change one's country of residence thus became a defining feature of 'Irishness'. It remains to be seen whether the current reversal of net migration, resultant from unexamined prosperity, will eradicate the long-fostered belief that to be truly Irish one must leave Ireland.

**David Fitzpatrick, Trinity College Dublin**

### **BAIS CHAIR'S REPORT TO AGM (At the London Irish Centre-25 November 2000)**

On behalf of the National Council of BAIS I wish, firstly, to report on another year of substantial activity to promote and support Irish Studies in Britain, consisting of the following activities:

#### **(1) NATIONAL IRISH STUDIES CONFERENCE AND BAIS MILLENIUM LECTURE IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH LONDON:**

The concept of the conference 'The Irish Diaspora: Writing, Researching, Comparing' (3-4 November 2000) was very much that of Mary Hickman. The structure of the conference and combination of invited speakers and offered papers allowed for broad, comparative discussion of the Irish Diaspora while allowing a large number of postgraduate researchers and others to present papers on a range of related aspects. The subject of the BAIS Millennium Lecture - 'Celts and the Cosmos: history, human rights and Irish culture', delivered

by Luke Gibbons - fitted in well with the overarching theme and enhanced the proceedings of the conference. BAIS is very grateful to Mary Hickman, Sarah Morgan and their team for organising this conference, all aspects of which have resulted in very positive feedback. I want also to thank BAIS Council members Eibhlín Evans, Mervyn Busteed, and Bob Bell for liaising with Mary and her colleagues in the preparations for this conference.

#### **(2) BAIS BURSARIES:**

The second round of four £1000 BAIS Bursaries - to support postgraduate research in Irish Studies in universities in England, Scotland and Wales - were awarded this year, and a full report of the outcome of this initiative was published in BAIS Newsletter 23. While much of the development work had been done in the previous year, the onerous task of co-ordinating and administering the project was undertaken by National Council member Eibhlín Evans. In addition to Eibhlín, I want to thank the other members of the Awards Committee, who assessed and ranked applications for bursaries: Bob

Bell, Roy Foster (Oxford University), Mary Hickman (University of North London), Cormac McCarthy (Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool), Lance Pettitt (St.Mary's University College, Strawberry Hill), Shaun Richards (Staffordshire University) and Neill Sammells (Bath Spa University College). A special word of thanks to the funders of the project for 2000 - the Irish government, the Ireland Fund of Great Britain; and the Irish Ambassador in Britain, Ted Barrington, for providing the reception at the Embassy of Ireland in London at which the awards were made.

#### **(3) BAIS RESEARCH REGISTER:**

A revised and expanded edition of the BAIS Research Register was issued during the year. The processes of the compilation, upgrading, printing and distribution of the Register were carried out and overseen by National Council member Mary Doran. The BAIS Register, as Ambassador

Barrington has pointed out, 'a showcase for the current diversity, strength and vitality of Irish Studies in Britain.' I thank Mary for the high quality of her work in editing the Register, which it is intended to update and distribute on an annual basis.

#### **(4) IRISH STUDIES, BAIS NEWSLETTER**

These publications are two major benefits of membership of BAIS, and this year we distributed three issues of ISR and four issues of the BAIS Newsletter to our members. On behalf of the Association, I wish to thank: National Council member Neil Sammells and the ISR team at Bath Spa University College for producing a publication of such a high standard and interest to the Irish

Studies community and for the discount arrangement with the publishers Carfax by which we buy copies of the ISR and distribute them as a benefit of BAIS membership; and National Council member Jerry Nolan for all the work he has done during the year in soliciting, collating, DTP-ing, overseeing the printing of and distribution of the BAIS Newsletter.

#### **(5) NUACHTLITIR NA GAELIGE**

Two issues of the bilingual Nuachtlitir na Gaelige, of excellent quality in terms of content and production, have been distributed. The present Nuachtlitir concept was developed by BAIS member Cathal O'Beirne, who edits the publication and oversees its production. We are grateful to Cathal and to BAIS National Council member

Christy Evans, who is responsible for current BAIS liaison with him on Nuachtlitir issues. While distributed to all BAIS members, Nuachtlitir na Gaelige targets especially Irish language teachers and learners in Britain, as well as those with an interest in/ some knowledge of the Irish language.

#### **(6) HONORARY TREASURER AND HONORARY SECRETARY**

I wish especially to thank Domhnall Mac Suibhne, outgoing honorary Treasurer of BAIS, for his exemplary conduct of this vital post over a number of terms. He has been exactly the type of questioning colleague needed by organisations entrusted with the administration of trust and statutory funding. It was therefore with considerable regret that we learned that Domhnall did not feel able to stand for another term. At the moment, we do not have an Honorary Treasurer, a serious matter which will be addressed by National Council; but

Domhnall has kindly agreed to carry on the supervision of the accounts and the finances of BAIS until we find a replacement. I wish also to thank our Honorary Secretary, Mervyn Busted for the invaluable contribution he has made to BAIS not only by his support for the meetings of the National Council, in terms of Minutes and Agendas, but also because of his wise judgement and knowledge of procedures. He remains closely in touch with all aspects of the Association's work through contact with members of Council.

#### **(7) NATIONAL COUNCIL: RESIGNATIONS & INCOMING MEMBERS**

Domhnall Mac Suibhne and Marie Ryan did not stand again for Council. We thank them both for their contributions during their terms of office. Eibhlín Evans and Christy Evans, who were co-opted during its term, were elected to council in the recent ballot of members. Bob Bell and Lance Pettitt, who had previously resigned from Council,

stood again and were re-elected. Shaun Richards, a founder member of BAIS, decided to stand again and happily brings his long experience of BAIS to National Council. Claire Connolly was newly elected to Council and we hope to benefit over the years from her fresh views and enthusiasm.

#### **(8) OTHER THANKS**

Thanks to the former Embassy cultural attaché, Geoffrey Keating, now Irish Consul in Shanghai, for all his help and support during his posting in London; to Geoffrey's successor, Stephen Dawson,

who has already been helpful to us; to Sandy Trott for the very high quality of service she provides by way of paid administrative support on membership and other issues.

If I have placed an emphasis on thanking individuals, institutions and funders, it is to remind members that BAIS provides its services largely on the basis of voluntary efforts and teamwork of the members of the National Council in partnership with those institutions and funders.

**Sean Hutton**

## **BAIS POSTGRADUATE BURSARIES SCHEME 2001**

The British Association for Irish Studies has established a scheme to support postgraduate research in Britain on topics of Irish interest. BAIS will award 4 bursaries of £1000 each to postgraduate students based in a university in Great Britain conducting research on any aspect of Irish Studies. The aim of the awards is to further research in Great Britain in the subject area of Irish Studies. This will be done by providing assistance to take advantage of opportunities which would enhance a student's research project or to alleviate financial hardship which could otherwise hinder the pursuit of a student's studies. Students may use the bursary for travel expenses, payment of fees, subsistence expenses or other expenses related to the completion of the research project.

Applicants must be registered for a postgraduate degree in a higher education institution in Great Britain. The research project on which the applicant is working must be within the subject area of Irish Studies.

**ALL APPLICATIONS MUST BE RECEIVED BY 1 MARCH 2001.**

### **How to Apply:**

- Applicants should provide:
- Personal details (full name, contact details, date of birth)
- An outline of the research project, in no more than 500 words
- Details of the specific purposes for which the research funding is intended, and when the money will be spent
- Details of educational background, qualifications and postgraduate registration
- Information regarding any other source of funding received or applied for
- The contact details of 2 referees – applicants must arrange for references to be sent directly to the co-ordinator (address below)

### **Criteria for the Allocation of Bursaries**

- A panel of Irish Studies Academics, covering a wide range of disciplines, will judge the submissions and select 4 bursary winners according to the criteria:
- The research will make a significant contribution to Irish Studies
- The purpose for which funding is required are necessary, or of substantial benefit, to the research project
- Preference may be given to applicants who are not in receipt of other funding for this specific project

### **The Bursary winners will be announced in May 2001**

The decision of the Awarding Committee will be final. Successful candidates will be required to provide a report on how the funds have been spent and to acknowledge the support of BAIS in any publication resulting from the research

**Applications and references should be sent by March 1 2001 to:  
Dr. Eibhlín Evans, 48 Brampton Road, St Albans Herts AL1 4PT**

**REPORT: THE HUBERT BUTLER CENTENARY CELEBRATION 20-22 October 2000  
NOTICEBOARD: JANUARY 2001**

The newly-opened lecture room in the Parade Tower of Kilkenny Castle was filled to its capacity of two hundred seats: an appropriate venue for the celebration as it was Hubert Butler who had inspired the Marquess of Ormonde to give the castle to the people of Kilkenny in 1967, just one of the many ways in which he and his wife, Peggy, had been able to help enrich the neighbourhood culturally. Old friends gathered for a weekend of immersing themselves in memories of Hubert Butler and more recent admirers came to learn more about the Irish essayist with the growing reputation.

His daughter, Julia Crampton, launched the celebration by welcoming everyone and introducing Professor Roy Foster, who gave a very far-ranging and thought-provoking opening address on 'Hubert Butler and his Century' in which he dilated on the essay 'Peter's Window', a vivid account of Hubert's three month stint teaching English in Leningrad in 1931. One of Roy Foster's main points was that Butler was an obsessive seeker and exposé of the truth, no matter how uncomfortable the consequences.

One of those occasions took place in the early 1950s when, at a meeting in Dublin's Shelbourne Hotel, the Papal Nuncio happened to be present, Hubert frankly drew the audience's attention to the massacres and enforced conversions of the Orthodox by the Catholics in Croatia during the Second World War, citing his own experience of three years in Croatia before the war and his research in a Zagreb library during 1947. When the Nuncio walked out of the meeting, the Kilkenny County Council and the Corporation held special meetings to denounce Hubert who was subsequently forced to resign from the Kilkenny Archaeological Society and other local cultural bodies. It was a major blow to all his plans but half a century later, official Kilkenny recognition of the Butler achievements happened at the Centenary Celebrations.

As Roy Foster resumed his seat the Mayor of Kilkenny, Paul Cuddihy, dressed in his robes and chain and flanked by the mace and sword bearers mounted the platform. Julia and her family joined him. His very moving speech started with the words: 'This evening I wish to apologise publicly for the treatment the late Hubert Butler received in Kilkenny in 1952. I wish to apologise because it is important to do so when you are in the wrong and we were in the wrong. I am not here to pardon him as he did nothing that was wrong.' Would that Hubert and his wife Peggy were present. They were there in spirit. The Mayor ended by expressing pride in Hubert Butler the Kilkenny man who would be remembered by generations to come as one who had fearlessly told the truth and taken a stand for right.

At the Saturday morning session, chaired by his niece's husband Nicholas Grene, there were speakers who had known Hubert well. Joseph Hone, the novelist, who came to live at Maidenhall when he was two, vividly described Hubert at home. I, who first came when I was ten, made use of Hubert's letters to his mother to recreate his first quarter of a century. Christopher Fitz-simon, a former director of the Abbey Theatre who was six when he first came to Maidenhall, recalled his very telling Trinity College student impressions of Hubert in the 1950s. Judge Peter Smithwick, of the famous family of brewers, remembered Hubert's involvement in local affairs. Antony Farrell, founder of the Lilliput Press, knew him as an octogenarian but proved to be the catalyst that brought about Hubert's renown. Anthony spoke of the work: 'this treasure-trove, this Aladdin's cave of manuscript material which bore the imprint of an utterly inimitable voice' and of working with Hubert and Peggy: 'a team if ever there was one and their palpable devotion and loyalty was a lesson in living.'

Among other contributors were Caroline Walsh of *The Irish Times* on Hubert's contribution to that newspaper; Prionsias O'Driscoll on the Kilkenny debates which Hubert initiated in 1954; and Richard Crampton, son-in-law and cardiologist, on the relevance of his magnum opus *Ten Thousand Saints, a Study in Irish and European Origins* in the light of current research on our origins through DNA. A full report of the Conference, including all the papers, will be published shortly. On Sunday afternoon Neal Aschenson fittingly gave the closing address 'Hubert Butler's Contemporary Relevance'. He prefaced it with a reference to the Mayor's apology saying that he had never heard a politician speak so sincerely. That apology seemed to be a good omen for the future. Will the 21st century see the open and pluralistic society that Hubert Butler strove for so valiantly as the Ireland of his dreams.

**Eleanor Burgess**

**NOTICEBOARD : CALL FOR PAPERS**

**CONFERENCE TOPIC: FACTS AND FICTIONS- IRELAND AND THE NOVEL IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

At the **Centre for Editorial and Intertextual Research, Cardiff University 14-16 Sept 2001**

Plenary Speakers include: Marilyn Butler, Joe Cleary, Ian Ferris, Margaret Kelleher, Joep Leerssen, Joseph McDonagh, Norman Vance

This conference invites papers which, rather than regarding 'Ireland', 'Britain' or 'the novel' as stable objects of knowledge, will locate ideas of nationality within the multiple contexts determining how fictions were written, read and distributed in the nineteenth century.

Please send abstracts (max: 200 words) by April 27, 2001 to **Dr. Jacqueline Belanger**, School of English, Communication, and Philosophy, Cardiff University, Cardiff CF10 3XB, Wales UK

Tel: +44 (0) 29 2087 6339 Fax: +44 (0) 29 2087 4502 E-mail: [belangerj@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:belangerj@cardiff.ac.uk).

Conference web page: [www.cf.ac.uk/encap/ceir/facts](http://www.cf.ac.uk/encap/ceir/facts)

**EFAIS CONFERENCE, DECEMBER 2001**

**6-8 December 2001 at Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark**

"Ireland and Europe in Times of Re-Orientation and Re-Imagining"

The Third Conference of EFAIS (The European Federation of Associations and Centres for Irish Studies) is being hosted by the Nordic Irish Studies Network (NISN) and the Centre for Irish Studies, Department of English, Aarhus University, Denmark

First Call for Papers within or across the fields of literature, cultural studies, art, history, sociology and politics

Deadline for Submission of Proposals: 1 June 2001 & Deadline for Abstracts: 1 September 2001

Further information for submissions of proposals to be announced at the second call and at the NISN website:

[www.au.dk/engelsk/nisn/enfacis2001](http://www.au.dk/engelsk/nisn/enfacis2001)

For queries, panel proposals, and abstracts contact:

**Michael Boss**, Department of English, Aarhus University, DK-8000 Aarhus, Denmark

Fax: (45) 8942 6540 E-mail: [engmb@hum.au.dk](mailto:engmb@hum.au.dk).

**VISUALISING THE MARGINS: REPRESENTATIONS OF ETHNICITY AND NATION**

An International Conference at **Manchester Metropolitan University 4-6 April 2002**

Papers could consider the visualisation of ethnic and national identities in relation to areas such as conflict, cultural geographies, hybridity, neo-colonial economics, globalisation, bodies, orientalism, and post post-colonial and post-communist culture. Such issues can be examined in relation to a range of visual media, such as film, television, advertising, graphic imagery, photography, museum display and art.

Papers are welcomed from academics working in different fields (such as cultural studies, geography, history, film studies, art history, anthropology) and from practitioners. Papers could take the form of visual presentations, such as short films and videos.

Conference Committee: **James Aulich, Fionna Barber, Simon Faulkner, Ewa Mazierska.**

Abstracts of between 200 and 300 words should be sent by the 27 July 2001 to:

Visualising the Margins, c/o **Jane Bedford**, Department of Art & Design, Manchester Metropolitan University, Righton Building, Cavendish Street, Manchester M15 6BG

Fax: 016- 247 6897 E-mail: [J.Bedford@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:J.Bedford@mmu.ac.uk)

**STOP PRESS MESSAGE**

**COURSE AT GAELIC COLLEGE, EDALE, DERBYSHIRE: 26-28 MAY 2001**

**Christy Evans**, a member of BAIS council, is organising a 3-day intensive course in the Irish Language in the Derbyshire Peak District. 'The Gaelic College' will offer classes at all levels between 26-28 May 2001. The course will cost £10 to attend. Further details and an accommodation list for those interested in improving their Irish are available from **Christy Evans, Shenfield High School, Alexander Lane, Shenfield, Brentwood, Essex CM15 8RY** Tel: (01277) 219131 Fax: (01277) 226422

**BAIS NATIONAL COUNCIL**

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**DATE FOR NEXT BAIS COUNCIL MEETING SATURDAY 3.02.01**

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