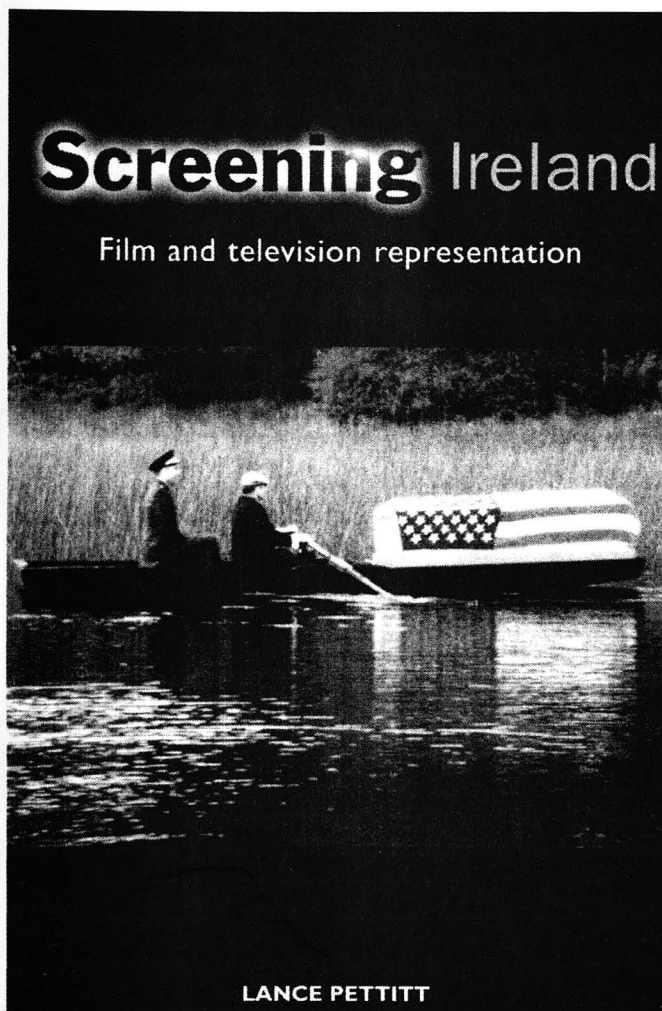


British Association for Irish Studies

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FOCUS INTERVIEW 19

with

LANCE PETTITT

about

SCREENING IRELAND

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BAIS NEWSLETTER NO. 29

JANUARY 2002

EDITORIAL

Two regular features of the newsletter continue to grow from strength to strength. In **Focus Interview 19** Lance Pettitt expands eloquently on the theme which is fast becoming very much associated with his challenging work – 'Screening Ireland'. In **Battle in the Books 9** Tim Forest tackles with surprising gusto that perennial subject of the Irish Border. This issue's Noticeboard is worth checking out as there is quite a medley of notices including some advanced news about a proposed new BAIS Website.

The forthcoming *Field Day Anthology of Irish Literature, Vols 4 & 5: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* (CUP, Autumn 2002) should be one of the highlights of the Irish Studies year 2002. The advanced publicity includes the following: 'The fact that the issue of gender was not acknowledged in the first three volumes eludes to the difficulty involved in such a post-modern version of cultural history. The particular challenge to the editors of *Irish Women's Writing and Traditions* was to radically exceed the agenda set by the earlier volumes. The editors have unquestionably succeeded in their task.' One of the editors, Gerardine Meaney, who is responsible for Section 7 'Women's Writing, 1700-1960', has very kindly agreed to write a short piece for the newsletter. It is hoped that the new series **Women's Writing and Traditions** in future issues of the newsletter will mark the birth of this great enterprise.

Copy and/or discs (Word 97) with articles, reports, notices, letters etc. to be included in No. 30 should be sent to Jerry Nolan, 8 Antrobus Road, Chiswick, London W4 5HY by 6 April 2002 at the very latest.

Email: Jcmnolan@aol.com

FOCUS INTERVIEW 19: LANCE PETTITT ON SCREENING IRELAND

Lance Pettitt is Principal Lecturer and Course Leader in Media Studies and Popular Culture at Leeds Metropolitan University. A former Co-Director of the Centre for Irish Studies at St Mary's College, London, he is author of *Screening Ireland: Film and Television Representation* (MP, 2000), *December Bride* (Cork UP, 2001) and guest editor of *Irish Studies Review's* recent special issue on Irish cinema and television (9:2, August 2001). His next book, *Conformity and Dissent: Irish Media and Popular Culture* is with Routledge (due in 2003).

JN: Why are you a little dismissive of those old-fashioned popular Anglo-American Irish theme films like *The Quiet Man* and *Ryan's Daughter*?

LP: I don't think I'm being dismissive of these popular representations by visiting great-name directors like Ford and Lean. Instead, what I am suggesting is that viewers should think critically about their response to these famous films which are far too easily *praised* or, equally, *dismissed* as pastoral and unchallenging. *The Quiet Man* has spoken and still speaks to the Irish, both in Ireland and America. Ford's film told the story of a Yank returning to Ireland when millions were leaving the place. That central theme of migration intensely appeals to the Irish imagination. The success of J.B. Keane's *The Field*, as a play and a film, and films like *This is My Father* continue to highlight the appeal of this core narrative. In the case of *Ryan's Daughter*, the Irish iconography arose from a very different source. The film is a classic statement from the late 1960s about how the British in the persons of the English director David Lean and English screenwriter Robert Bolt tended to misunderstand and misinterpret Irish history and culture. Both films provide great entertainment for mass audiences, but the promotion of a critical understanding of popular pleasures is an important part of my job as an academic.

JN: To what extent do contemporary Irish dissidents use film as a critical weapon in bringing about radical change in Irish society?

LP: Who are the dissidents? Actually the 1990s have produced much apolitical film-making in Ireland. Neil Jordan's *Michael Collins* (1996) appears to have a subversive tendency but in reality the portrayal

of de Valera is a case of Jordan rowing with the tide because Dev's Ireland has been an easy target for the last decade, particularly as Fianna Fail faltered. It was important for putting the Irish civil war on screen and discussed widely. At one level, Jordan's version of Pat McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* (1998) furthers Jordan's project to debunk the shibboleths of de Valera's Ireland in the context of a celebration of a startling cultural mix. For more dissident film work, one has to go back to the 1970s and 1980s to the work of Bob Quinn and of Cathal Black. His *Our Boys* (1980) is about a 1950s Christian Brother School, and Black used dramatised sequences in monochrome which showed lessons, beatings and the lives of the boys and the brothers in a story about the school's decline and closure and set that story in the cultural context of documentary footage of the 1932 Eucharistic Congress in Dublin and a St. Patrick's Day parade of the 1950s. The measure of dissent in Black's film can be best appreciated when set against the background of Pope John Paul II's Irish visit in 1979 and in the light of the fact that RTE delayed transmission of the film until 1991. Dissidence also features prominently in Joe Comerford's *Traveller* (1982), with a script by Neil Jordan, which dealt with the harsh realities of Travellers' existence in contemporary Ireland. Comerford has said that Irish cinema's exploration of the margins of society is necessary to test the understanding of Irish culture.

JN: Have Irish film makers managed to transform the old story of the country's struggle for freedom into a narrative with global appeal?

LP: The country's protracted struggle for an independent and united Ireland has certainly dominated Irish life and culture throughout the 20th century. In the history of cinema during the same period, the Hollywood epic of heroic struggle has had a profound effect on the popular imagination worldwide. In spite of the fact that Jordan's heroic *Michael Collins* broke box office records at home, the film did not do very well at the American box office probably because the sheer compression of events and personalities made it very difficult for viewers outside of Ireland to keep up with much of the detail of the story. The point about the film's narrative density has been made to me by my American students. On the other hand, an Irish film like *My Left Foot* has been a worldwide success at the box office even though this extremely well acted film projected little more culturally than an updated bland and sentimental version of screen Ireland. Recently Terry George's *Some Mother's Son* was a fierce yet deeply sympathetic interpretation of Belfast Hunger Strikers during the early 1980s which was not too popular with some republican supporters because of its imaginative perspective formed by the contrasting attitudes of the two mothers.

JN: How successful have Irish feminists been in breaking into the world of making feature films about Ireland?

LP: Within Ireland – to be blunt – not very successful, but that is to do with the limited opportunities for women generally in the business and the difficulties of raising money. Pat Murphy succeeded in making two films, *Maeve* (1981) and *Anne Devlin* (1984) in the early 1980s. Both were part of the radical agenda of filmmaking from this period that we've just talked about. *Maeve* was formally and politically a critique of the traditional male forms of nationalism and republicanism at the very time when the Belfast Hunger Strikers were at the forefront of Irish political debate. *Anne Devlin*, a much more conventional film technically, brought to public notice the neglected figure of a woman who had refused to betray the Irish patriot Robert Emmett. However, the next feature film which Pat Murphy managed to make was *Nora*, some fifteen years later. A good example of a feminist film director opening up a taboo area of Irish life was *Hush-a-bye-Baby* (1989) by Margo Harkin when she was a leading member of the Derry Film and Video Collection (DFVC) and was successful in winning financial support from Channel 4. *Hush-a-bye-Baby* highlighted the ways in which religion, school and family in nationalist Derry during the 1980s shaped the fate of the pregnant schoolgirl Goretti. Very recently there has been Kathy Sheridan's *Disco Pigs*, a brilliant if finally flawed film which was shown at the Cork Film Festival in October 2001. There are others like Trish McAdam, Orla Walsh and Geraldine Creed, and Emer McCourt and Hilary McLaughlin (as producers) who've made their mark in the last decade. Irish women film directors can only continue to make their ideas heard and seen if and when they manage to win the necessary financial backing in a developed filmmaking culture.

JN: Does censorship still play an important role in influencing what films are shown to the Irish public?

LP: The important thing to bear in mind about the whole issue of censorship in Ireland over the last eighty years is that censorship has also been extensively used in Britain and the USA during the same

period. What is significant, though, is that censorship in Ireland has had distinctive characteristics, look out for Kevin Rockett's forthcoming book on this topic. The Irish Censorship of Film Act in 1923 enshrined a national policy of tightly controlled film exhibition for the general public. The ideology behind the legislation was the Free State Government's endorsement of form of popular culture associated with rural communal life and a profound distrust of cinema because the medium was seen as a threat to the moral and social fabric of Irish country life. The parallel censorship of literature did not prevent Irish writers from being published abroad and banned, but any tendency towards creative film making was successfully inhibited at home for many years. One of the most notorious protests against film censorship was made in 1968 when Peter Lennon denounced film censorship as 'cretinous' and made the highly controversial documentary *The Rocky Road to Dublin*. These days, there is a more receptive atmosphere for film making – though, as I said, a lot of film has become seemingly less politicised. But an Irish Arts Council document has recently appeared, *Developing Cultural Cinema in Ireland*, which is a far cry from the Free State's utter failure to support and encourage Irish made film productions during the years when both State and Church remained deeply suspicious of the powerful medium of film. It remains to be seen whether future state sponsorship of 'cultural film' will enable film of high quality to be made in Ireland.

JN: Turning now to television, are Irish TV soap operas like *Fair City* any different in approach from English TV soap operas like *EastEnders*?

LP: The most popular Irish soap *Fair City* began in 1989 by trying to imitate 'the in-er-face' style of *EastEnders* and *Brookside* which tended to produce a glut of sensational incidents featuring very confrontational characters. Then *Fair City* settled down and adopted the approach of well researched story lines typical of Dublin life. Engagement with controversial issues were strongly pushed to the fore in *Fair City* as in the story line of the gay student Eoghan and his complicated relationships. Irish viewers continued to enjoy the 'London' of *EastEnders* and the 'Liverpool' of *Brookside* but began to find a very special appeal in the soap about Dublin. Television in Ireland, as everywhere, has tended to develop as the main vehicle of family entertainment and as the most obvious forum to examine family life itself including its dysfunctional variants. Home-produced soaps remain high up in the ratings: the Irish public have shown themselves willing and prepared to accept and understand the variety of Irish living nowadays. Counselling professionals have argued that the understanding of the community's problems can be often best raised in soaps because most people will watch the programme while the same people might well switch off documentaries on the same subjects. Incidentally the influence of the soaps has been acknowledged by Telefís na Gaeilge in *Ros na Rún*, a fifteen minute serial set in the Gaeltacht with a subtitled repeat shown on RTE. *Ros na Rún* is a good example of how even the modern Irish Language movement has cheerfully adjusted to the changing landscapes and complexities of Irish life.

JN: Why have you described Jordan's version of McCabe's *The Butcher Boy* as 'far from heritage cinema and closer instead to a postmodern conception in Irish film'?

LP: *The Butcher Boy* is not an Irish heritage film because it re-imagines Ireland in very disturbing ways. We are made to enter small town Ireland in 1962 through the consciousness of Francie Brady, a boy who becomes progressively a psychotic killer and who at one devastating moment imagines a lake in a rural setting being exploded by an atomic bomb at about the same time that the entire town is awaiting the imminent coming of the Blessed Virgin. The film is postmodern for the unbridled way in which it unmasks Ireland in the period of the Cuban Missile Crisis as a confused and confusing eclectic cultural mix. The mass media culture of comic books and American westerns jostle on equal terms with the lore of priests, police and psychiatrists. Right from the opening credit sequence, the film's audience is left grasping for a fixed and reassuring Irish identity but left gasping at the extreme difficulty of settling in a safely stable standpoint. When one of my students recently described the effect of *The Butcher Boy* as 'deeply unnerving', I agreed.

JN: Why do you consider *December Bride* to be such an important film about Ireland?

LP: *December Bride* as a novel by Sam Hanna Bell which, by the way, was banned in the Irish Republic when it was first published in 1951 and as a film with a script by David Rudkin was very much the achievement of creative Irish migrants in Britain. O'Sullivan's film is more radical than the novel which lays a strong emphasis on the ostracism of the strong willed servant girl Sarah. O'Sullivan's filming of the story exposed the deep roots of Ulster-Scots culture in beautiful

surroundings and clearly signalled a direct challenge to the assumptions of Anglo-American representations of Ireland. O'Sullivan consciously imitated and adapted elements into his style of filming from masters in the European art cinema such as Dreyer, Bergmann, Traffaut and Axel. The production was sponsored by the London Film Four Premiere Series. The film brought to life a tight-knit Presbyterian community during the period 1900-1918 when Ulster Protestants were facing up to a rapidly changing and unsettling future. The film's appearance some seventy years after the period represented and some thirty odd years after the novel's first publication resurrected the life of a lost community where some Ulster Protestants chose to defy the convention of a respectable marriage and to think of their futures in new radical ways as in the instance of the three way relationship between the rebellious Sarah Gomartin (the eventual December Bride) and the brothers Hamilton and Frank Echlin on their farm near Strangford Lough in County Down. In my recently published book which is part of the *Ireland into Film Series*, I use *December Bride* as a suggestive case history of how the film has brought about an exciting reassessment of the work of the writer Sam Hanna Bell who can now be seen clearly as one of those socialist writers and cultural activists whose work, taken collectively, represent a future cultural alternative to the kinds of Protestant unionism that has dominated the political map of Northern Ireland for far too long.

JN: How successful has *December Bride* been in influencing audiences north and south of the Irish border?

LP: *December Bride* is an art house type of movie but it was one of the most popular films shown at the Lighthouse Cinema in Dublin, it has been shown on TV north and south of the Irish border. Screenings of the film at the Queen's Film Theatre always go down well – witness this year's Belfast Film Festival audience. The video has also sold very well in Ireland. Renewed interest in Sam Hanna Bell's novel has meant that both the novel and the film are now featured on the literature syllabus of the Leaving Certificate. I have been told that the putting of the work about the Blasket Islands *Peig* on the Leaving Certificate syllabus was the kiss of death for that book! That is why I would be very interested to find out how teachers are handling *December Bride* in the classrooms. The educational potential of the novel and the film is enormous – in the Republic, a new window could be opened on the history of Ulster Protestantism and in the North, and there is a great opportunity for self-scrutiny within the Protestant community. Thaddeus O'Sullivan made another film *Nothing Personal* some five years after *December Bride*. *Nothing Personal* focused on the urban working class of Belfast during the short lived truce between the republicans and the Ulster loyalist paramilitaries in 1975. O'Sullivan's main concern here is to explore the social lives and psychology of working class men involved in the UDA and the VHF. The film says little about the underlying culture or the current politics but includes an acute scrutiny of the psychopathology of the all male paramilitary gangs and their associates. As examples of 'Screening Northern Ireland', *December Bride* is so much more significant for its uncovering of Protestant roots in Ulster, while the graphic cataloguing of the criminal behaviour of paramilitaries, no matter how closely observed in *Nothing Personal*, cannot suggest a way out of the world of brutal violence in which sworn enemies are happy to run their lives.

JN: Is Irish film replacing literature as the most important means of exploring the nature of Irish identity here and now?

LP: There is not much doubt about the historical fact that the literatures of the Irish Revival made the major contribution to the whole cultural process of what has been termed 'inventing Ireland'. In the mid-1990s, statistics showed that more people in Ireland watch film and buy videos than in any other European country. The importance of audio-visual media in the modernisation of Ireland was acknowledged in 1993 when the Irish Film Board was re-launched after a previous closure in 1987. The supporters of the new Irish Film Board included filmmakers, trade unions, business companies and educationalists who recognised the lucrative potential of an expanding audio-visual sector. About the same time there were other developments – the setting up of the Irish Film Institute and the Irish Film Archive, the expansion of film schools and media courses in higher education, the development of educational programmes in the schools system. Michael D. Higgins as Minister for Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht from 1992 was very active in promoting audio-visual dimensions in education for the arts. Síle De Valera does not seem to be acting with as much assurance and sense of creative purpose, particularly in relation to digital media. As I've tried to show in *Screening Ireland*, the audio-visual arts are enormously popular in Ireland. Of course, the adaptation of works of literature and original screenplays from established writers will remain strong features of Irish art and popular cinema. There is much evidence, however, to suggest that for the majority of Irish people, the audio-visual media have

become the main public area where they feel like examining their lives and fashioning realistic images of themselves for the future. Certainly it seems to me that there is a new kind of Ireland at present being invented through moving image culture, and that there have been some notable Irish achievements in this field at home and amongst the Irish abroad.

BATTLE IN THE BOOKS 9: THE IRISH BORDER

What is 'the Irish Border?' Many people can tell you that it is a line that stretches from Lough Foyle to Carlingford Lough. What is the significance of this line? Was it imposed by the British Parliament in 1920? Has the border always existed? Is there a border at all? Is the border all in the minds of the Irish? Despite their recurrence in Irish historiography, these approaches are all somewhat problematic, and battles between them often leave both participants and onlookers with many unanswered questions. A grasp of what is going on is needed badly in order to respond fully to the central issues of what the border is, how it came to be, and what it means for Ireland. One way of beginning the task is to go to, or go back to, the battling schools which have kept the war going.

1. Nationalist School

James Connolly, in a 1916 speech, summed up neatly the Nationalist perspective on the Border: 'the frontiers of Ireland...are as old as Europe itself, the handiwork of the Almighty, not of politicians'. The Nationalists tended to place the entire onus of partition on the British government. They cited eight centuries of perceived British oppression of Ireland as proof of their beliefs. Within the Irish historical context, the Nationalist aspired to make the Irish nation on the island of Ireland congruent with the boundaries of an Irish state. For such a Nationalist, the majority of the population of Ireland was of Celtic extraction, and historically Catholic in belief. It was only to be expected that the Celtic and Catholic indivisible traditions should enjoy sovereignty over the island of Ireland.

Of course, this blanket definition did not take into account the many subtle differences within Nationalism. Stephen Howe, in *Ireland and Empire: Colonial Legacies and Irish History and Culture* (2000) disentangles five distinct Nationalist approaches to the creation of the border. These range from partition being used to keep Ireland hostage to Britain to attributing sole cause for the border to the machinations of Northern Protestants. All of these perspectives, however, share some important characteristics. Howe uncovers a few trends that bring these viewpoints together. He states that Ireland 'is seen as having waged an eight centuries' fight against British imperialism...The struggle is for the predestined return of complete independence for that ancient nation: a completion to which Partition, Ulster Unionism, economic dependence on foreigners, cultural imperialism, the English language or all of these are seen as central obstacles'. So the Irish border came to be seen as a manifestation of centuries of British interference in and oppression of Ireland. This nationalist school of thought only really emerged in the nineteenth century. The broadening of the franchise and the spread of free public education led to the indoctrination of the masses into a nationalism designed by their leaders to mobilize them politically. In 1868, an article in *The Irishmen* summarized the rise of this new hermeneutic: 'Twenty-five years ago Ireland had no history...It required the fire of patriotism to undertake the task of studying their details...But the fervid enthusiasm of an ardent nationality kindled by a holy fire...was destined to light up all the dark passages...Irishmen with their heart and soul in their work arose to do justice to their native land. By their efforts...Ireland grows into history'. Imbued with this kind of Nationalist ethos, millions of Irishmen and Irishwomen began to push first for Home Rule and then for an Irish Republic.

The creation of the Free State in 1922 was the fruit of this nationalism, but partition dampened Nationalist enthusiasm. Not only were six counties still under the detested rule of London, but the South was still under the nominal rule of its historic oppressor. Both of these were blatant obstructions of the right of Ireland to rule itself. In 1925, P.T. Ginley, a member of Sinn Féin, asserted that 'No one has any right to mutilate Ireland, and least of all that little body of foreign colonists in the north-east. We ought to regard them as George Washington regarded those who were on the side of England during the American War of Independence – as portion of the foreign forces holding down this country.' Eamon de Valera called the presence of the British in the North an occupation by declaring, at a St. Patrick's Day rally, that 'a new Pale hedges around the burial place of Patrick and the See from

which he ruled the Church of Ireland – a Pale which the majority of Irishmen may cross only by sufferance.’

The artificiality of the border, according to many Nationalists, was further proved by the fact that Northern Ireland only consisted of six of the nine counties of Ulster. Nationalists often blamed this division on the doings of ‘foreign’ Protestants such as Sir William Craig, who once asserted that ‘we quite frankly admit that we cannot hold the nine counties’. The Six County unit was often seen as essentially a Belfast Partition with Belfast cast in an un-Irish light – in other words, *British* light. To Nationalists, the natural ties within Ulster and between Ulster and the South were torn asunder by the foreign and subversive elements of a mere rump of an alien province. Joseph Devlin, a leading advocate of the rights of Catholics in Northern Ireland, criticized the notion of a boundary at all. He stated that the border was merely ‘a trick of English politicians...Here in Ulster the Protestants were asked to start a Parliament for a section of a province, of a section of a nation.’ Aodh de Blácam, in *What Sinn Féin Stands For*, described the members of the Orange Order as being filled with ‘some anachronistic, totemistic, atavistic savage lust. There can be no doubt that the bigotry of North-East Ulster is a form of mass insanity...for the infected masses are incited periodically by men who claim spiritual guidance...by calling themselves Protestant.’ Those who opposed the Nationalists found themselves dehumanised, for they clearly were not capable of the rational thought that Nationalists possessed. The motives of those who wanted to remain within the United Kingdom was simply reduced to British or Unionist trickery.

Quite a few questions arise out of such narrow definitions of events. Is there room in the Nationalist vision of Ireland for the Irish who do not subscribe to their agenda? Are all Catholics Nationalist? Are all Nationalists Catholic? Why cannot people define themselves as ‘Irish’ and a Unionist? Did Dublin play as great a role in the creation of the border as London or Belfast? These are many gaps in thinking within the Nationalist School. Claire O’Halloran, in *Partition and the Limits of Irish Nationalism* (1987) offered a convincing critique of Nationalist thought. She showed that while Nationalists decried the border, it nonetheless created a sharp divide between the ‘true Irish’ of the South and the ‘foreign’ elements of the North. This distinction emerged because most Nationalists refused to come to terms with those who did not identify with the indivisibly Gaelic, Catholic, Nationalist ethos. They tended to write off the Protestant perspective in Irish history. O’Halloran asserted that blaming the northern unionists for partition and then ascribing their views to ignorance or perversity was a dual process designed to free nationalists from self-doubt. It was easy to assume that Northern Protestants were either being manipulated by the British or were not truly Irish in the first place. No wonder many Protestants truly felt threatened by the stridently nationalist establishment that emerged in the south. This image was reinforced by the policies of Irish Republicans who crafted the Free State exclusively in their own image. One of O’Halloran’s central arguments was that ‘de Valera’s new Constitution was designed for an exclusively nationalist and sectarian twenty-six county state, despite his claims to the contrary.’

While Nationalists denounced the border, they in fact recognized it as a boundary between ‘their’ particular vision of Ireland and the foreign, subversive elements beyond the divide. They tacitly accepted partition while rhetorically denying it legitimacy. Both this inherent contradiction and an overly simplistic analysis of the motives of Unionism reveal severe shortcomings in the Nationalist understanding of the border.

2. Unionist School

In stark contrast to a unitary and homogenous Ireland, the Unionists focus on the seemingly insurmountable differences between North and South. Unionists adhered to the doctrine that Ireland, later Northern Ireland, must stay in the United Kingdom. They differed decisively from the other people in Ireland in terms of religion, ethnic origin, economic interests, and sense of national identity – they were ethically linked to Britain rather than to ‘Ireland’. Like Nationalism, many approaches to the border jostled unhappily within the Unionist School. These range from a vehement assertion of the ‘Britishness’ of Northern Ireland, to a study of the distinctness of Ulster from both Britain and the Republic. What united, and still unites, Unionists is the assertion of a distinct Ulster identity, be it a British or a local one. Another part of their living tradition is to accept the British Empire as in many respects a progressive or civilising force, not only in Ireland but throughout the world.

Far from being an arbitrary boundary, the border between North and South became for Unionists a natural line that separated irreconcilable cultures. Proponents of this approach charted a history of partition that delves back centuries. Robert Cielou, a Unionist historian, stated in *Spare My Tortured People: Ulster and the Green Border* (1983) that 'in Ireland there has been an age-long north-south dichotomy'. He attributed the emergence of a border to the introduction of Christianity in Ireland, which took root in the South much earlier than in Ulster. He recalled the erection of the 'Black Pig's Dyke,' which from early on separated Ulster from the other Irish kingdoms, as further proof of the historic distinctness of Ulster. M.W. Heslinga, in *The Irish Border as a Cultural Divide*, argued that the border reflected the long-standing cultural links between the North and Scotland. He stated that the most people in Ulster historically identify with the Scots residing across the narrow North Channel. He pointed out that 'the contrasts...between the two parts of Ireland determined by the land boundary [and]...the similarities between the two parts of Ireland and Great Britain'. A.D. Buckley put an emphasis on Ulster's linguistic distinctness: 'North of the area that corresponds roughly to the Northern Irish border, people speak...Ulster Anglo-Irish...Ulster is divided geographically by the River Bann. Roughly east of this river...is another dialect. This is the Ulster Scots dialect.' For many Unionists, then, the border became the frontier between a threatening Free State and their cherished links with Britain. It was the necessary defence of Protestants against the Catholic diehards bent on their subjugation. Ulster Protestants felt they shared more with their coreligionists across the Irish Sea than with their compatriots to the South. In contrast to the pastoral and impoverished South, large parts of Ulster were prosperous, industrialised and enmeshed within the greater British economy. Any diminution of this link would devastate the North's economy. Unionists did not want to destroy what they felt was nourishing and profitable. According to many Unionists, history has proven their suspicions of the South to be true. As the South degenerated into civil war, the North looked at its neighbour as behaving as they would expect a Catholic power to behave towards a Protestant minority. As the South distanced itself from Britain, Unionists concluded that the rise of this Nationalism accelerated a growing realization amongst the Protestants of Ulster that they were a separate nation, not just a different religion, from the Catholic, Gaelic south. They looked at the fact that it was the South that first installed tariff walls and customs posts. This led many northern producers and wholesalers to redirect their southern exports to British and local markets, a process which reinforced Northern adherence to the principle and the fact of partition. So as the South grew increasingly Catholic and Gaelic, the North developed into a Protestant and British state.

Historical developments also played a role in reinforcing the border such as the decline in the Protestant population of the South, the 1937 Irish Constitution with its territorial claim to the North, Irish neutrality during the Second World War, the infrequency of Unionist visits to the South, the 1950's IRA campaign. Yet much like the Nationalist School, the Unionist School is rife with oversimplifications and omissions. Almost every news story that has come out of Northern Ireland for the past thirty-plus years has dealt with 'the Troubles.' These news reports all demonstrate one of the serious flaws in Unionist reasoning. Unionists are correct in asserting that there are two traditions in Ireland. However, implicit in this claim is that Ulster is one homogenous unit. The Troubles themselves indicate that Northern Ireland is an intensely divided society. There are several senses in which Northern Ireland is not just one place but several. The Protestant population – only 60% of the provincial total – is divided between Presbyterians and Anglicans. Add to this mix the marked contrast between the two counties east of the Bann with the much more Catholic western counties. Also, the historic distinctions made between Ulster and the South do not mesh well with the fact that Cavan, Monaghan, and Donegal are in the Republic. Are the divisions between North and South then as ancient as Unionists make them to be? Before 1603, Ulster was arguably the most 'Irish' part of Ireland. Many Unionists simply do not see themselves as having anything in common with their countrymen across the border. As Steve Bruce suggests, 'very many Unionists have never crossed the border...have only hostile images of the South, and have no desire to do anything which might change these images.' Like its Nationalist counterpart, the Unionist School is plagued with its own simplifications and omissions that mitigate its effectiveness as an explanatory model for a comprehensive understanding of the Border.

3. Revisionist School

In contrast to its much more organised and developed cousins, a new school of thought has emerged in the last thirty years or so that has made its own contribution to the debates surrounding the Irish border. In this specific context, revisionism was an attempt to critique, or 'revise,' the quasi-mythologies of

Nationalism and Unionism. Within the Irish context, revisionism, regardless of its colouration, entailed a reinterpretation of history, as Desmond Fennell (1996) claimed with regards to a traditionally Nationalist script of the Irish past: 'It is a retelling of Irish history which seeks to show that British rule was not, as we had believed, a *bad* thing,...and that Irish resistance to it was not as we have believed, a *good* thing...The underlying message is that our relations with Britain on the Irish question the Irish have been very much at fault. This is the popular image of historical revisionism'. The goal of most Irish revisionist authors was merely to point out the contradictions and omissions that neither Unionism nor Nationalism fully resolve. This tearing down of one problematic interpretation, only to replace it with another, was, and still is, anathema to many revisionists. This is not to say that their contributions to our understanding of the Irish border have been insignificant. Indeed, the plethora of revisionist approaches to the border have only broadened the ways the border can be explained.

One such framework denies the existence of an Irish border at all. Central to this is the perceived decline of nationalism in the last fifty years or so. The carnage of the two world wars, coupled with the European Union, have mitigated loyalties to the nation-state. As nationalism throughout western Europe decreases, and as Europeans focus on their similarities, the borders that define nations grow irrelevant. In 1995, Shane Connaghton kept a diary of his experiences while filming a BBC production along the border. Although Connaghton is by no means a historian, his accounts reflect a perspective that fits quite neatly with this approach. In one entry, he states that 'we were across the border at Clogher, Co. Fermanagh...The nearest villages are Redhills in the South three miles away and Newtownbutler six miles away into the North...A Cockney voice calls out, 'Where are we? Is this Ireland or England?' It's a good question. Here roads, animals and people all meander across the border with a fair amount of abandon. All along his border, inhabitants on both sides of the border cross it routinely'. Connaghton's diary is replete with instances of peaceful cross-border and cross-denominational encounters. Peter Kelly, of the SDLP leader, echoed these sentiments in *The Belfast Telegraph* (5 March 1998) by asking about 'when are the so-called well-informed going to inform themselves that the border has now been relegated to an imaginary entity which, if we really tried, we might even have difficulty finding...So there's no real border, it seems...Going down to Ireland's capital is merely an extension of our common heritage – not an outrageous sortie into enemy territory as some seem to think! And we meet our fellow Irish. Or, more accurately, fellow Europeans'.

Most revisionists have never denied the existence of a boundary between North and South, but they prefer to stress cross-border cooperation and reconciliation. Much of the literature in this area focuses on economics – instead of the more charged fields of politics and culture. This is an approach that has been quietly adopted by many mainstream newspapers and news media throughout Ireland. *The Irish Times* (18 January 2000) outlined an EU programme that 'established three cross-border networks from the 18 local authorities north and south of the border...making them "blind" to the Border'. In *The Belfast Telegraph* (16 February 1999) Jennifer Doherty mentioned that the Tyrone-Donegal frontier, a 'Border Towns Marketing Scheme' was created to promote jointly the northwest of Ireland, that 'builds upon the natural connections that...aims to create a new regional identity that we can jointly promote'. So interchanges between North and South began being developed at a record pace to reflect the natural flow of people and goods as both enthusiastically respond to financial incentives for cross-Border co-operation.

Do these cross-border cooperation stories reveal the whole truth about the nature of the border? Connaghton himself ostensibly paints a rosy picture of a border that is more of an inconvenience rather than a permanent divide. However, the aftereffects of violence fill the pages of his diary. They serve as a sharp reminder that a stark division between the two Irelands remains. The word 'border' crops up quite often in both Connaghton's and Kelly's accounts. This demonstrates that even though they assert that the divide between North and South is minimal, both men are quite cognizant of each and every time they cross it. Also, despite a boom in the number of cross-border contracts and organizations, the border is still very much salient. Jamie Smith writing in *The Irish Times* (14 December 1999) sounded a note of caution by commenting that 'if projects that suited towns in the Republic suddenly started going to Northern Ireland, local politicians would be in uproar...Unionists are not overly excited about greater North-South cooperation either.'

J.C. Beckett, the Irish historian, once commented that 'partition...depends upon very important differences between two groups of people...The real partition of Ireland is not on the map but in the minds of men.' This sub-branch of revisionism locates the true border between North and South in the social mores that divide them. This so called *mentalité* approach examines the attitudes of the common

Irishman and woman to see how Irish history and society are affected by decisions made everyday by ordinary people. The Border becomes more or less a physical manifestation of this mental divide.

Over 25 years ago, Rosemary Harris conducted the comprehensive study *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster: A Study of Neighbours and Strangers in a Border Community* (1972) of a border town she renamed 'Ballybeg'. While many of the social conditions have changed significantly since then, her work nonetheless serves to show just how divided Catholics and Protestants populations were, and still are today. That considered, the town she chose, which was fairly evenly divided between Catholics and Protestants, exhibits a stark degree of segregation. In almost every situation, from schools to sport to shopping, a person's religious background seemed to dictate his or her behaviour.

While revisionists who downplay or reject the existence of the border are correct in pointing to the economics, demilitarization and the repeal of the territorial claims in Articles 2 & 3 of the Irish Constitution, the fact is that for the majority of Irish men and women, the Irish Border continues to bulk large on their mental horizons.

4. The Irish Border Now

The Good Friday Agreement has led to a period of precarious power sharing within the state of Northern Ireland. Of course all decent people throughout the world are desperately willing that through the power sharing assembly, the battle over the Irish Border will be peacefully resolved for ever. But even if there is a total cessation of terrorist hostilities and the emergence of democratic ways, the Battle of the Irish Border will still not be concluded. In 1997 Robert Fisk, in a version of J.C. Beckett's approach, reported meeting people very close to the border: 'So where, I asked them, was the border? "They say it's along the ditch to the right of the road...But if you want to know where the real border is, it's here." And he tapped his right forefinger on his head.' At present, it seems highly unlikely that all the major problems which are connected with the resolution of the border in Irish minds will be resolved in the lobbies of Stormont. It seems likely that the Battle of the Irish Border will continue posing mental and imaginative challenges to the future generations of the Irishry on either side of it.

Tim Forest University of Texas Austin

Women's Writing and Traditions 1: Engendering the Postmodern Canon?

After a decade of research and editing, the final two volumes of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* will be published by Cork University Press in September 2002. The volumes have their origins in the controversy surrounding the first three volumes, sharply criticised for their under-representation of women's writing. That controversy focussed very much on contemporary writing and the virtual invisibility of the women's movement. The two forthcoming volumes (commissioned by Seamus Deane, general editor of Volumes 1-3) are, however, much broader than this in their historical, disciplinary and thematic range. The editorial structure is very different from the previous volumes. Three literary critics, three historians and two Irish language editors formed a

multidisciplinary and collaborative panel, which identified areas for inclusion and commissioned a total of 47 other contributing editors, from a wide variety of academic disciplines, journalism, the arts and political groups to research, identify and edit material for inclusion. The result was the identification of a more complex and diverse array range of sources than even the editorial panel had ever envisaged. The sheer volume of material from which the selections had to be made led to the eventual conclusion that the one volume originally planned simply could not do justice to the material. The editorial staff of Cork University Press, now the publishers of the volumes, arrived at the pragmatic solution of a two volume set, which now covers material from the sixth century to the present day.

Each of the panel editors assumed responsibility for an individual sections, early in the commissioning process. These eight sections are 'Representations of Women in the Irish Language: from the Medieval to the Modern' edited by Mairin Ni Dhonnchadha, 'Religion Theology, Ethics and Science, 1500-2000' edited by Margaret MacCurtain, 'Sexuality' edited by Siobhain Kilfeather, 'Oral Traditions' edited by Angela Bourke, 'Women and Politics, 1500-2000' edited by Mary O'Dowd, 'Women in Irish Society, 1200-2000' edited by Maria Luddy, 'Women and Writing, 1700-1960' edited by Gerardine Meaney and 'Contemporary Writing, 1960-2000' edited by Claire Wills. One aspect of the volumes which gives me as an editor particular satisfaction at this stage is the juxtaposition within this structure of women's voices from workhouses, convents and prisons with those of story tellers, singers and keeners alongside women's poetry, fiction and drama. The very diverse and complex picture of women's history and creative output which results is the outcome of the collaborative and multidisciplinary nature of the project.

My own editorial activity was concentrated in the traditional literary genres, however, and as such my section bears a closer relationship with the first three volumes than those dealing with oral or historical material. I have kept a shortlist of items which I was originally dismayed to discover were not in the first three volumes as a reminder of how far we have travelled. Editing this anthology has been a voyage of discovery for me as editor, primarily into the extraordinary wealth of material written by women between 1890 and 1960 which I edited in detail, but also vicariously through the work of contributing editors and my colleagues on the editorial panel. We started with a relatively modest project of recovering and presenting to an academic and general readership the writing and records of women in Ireland. We have ended considerably more modest, acknowledging that a comprehensive account of this material awaits decades

more research, but also more ambitious, for these volumes now offer a challenge to the way in which Irish writing and traditions are understood, primarily in relation to women, but with broader consequences. It became clear after the first years or two of reading and research that the material we were dealing with did not fit easily into any of the existing paradigms for Irish literary history. It also became clear to me, working in the areas closest to those in which the then prevailing ways of constructing the history of women's writing in the English language had been established, that those paradigms too were challenged by the material. There is no strong tradition of realist domestic fiction, for example, and only limited examples of the female *bildungsroman*. In contrast there were numerous examples of women writing political poetry, drama and fiction, particularly historical fiction, which constituted an important if often overlooked intervention into the 'mainstream' discourses of nationalist and unionist politics. In the twentieth century, popular dialect poetry is as strong a current as strenuous modernist experiment with form. At this point, surveying the array of material as it wends its way through the production process, I can see within it a map to new ways of reading as well as writers new to our consciousness of what was written in Ireland and why.

These new volumes do not complete the *Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, in the sense of offering a final, definitive or canonical account of Ireland's writing. Their very existence challenges the idea that anthologies can ever be more than provisional versions, selections on the basis of criteria that produce and are produced by the values, debates and politics of the culture in and for which they are composed. Their existence also, however, challenges the idea that the absence of claims to totality justifies exclusions of particular groups or points of view. These volumes insist on differences, but are predicated on sexual difference. Of necessity they have found a practical solution to the difficulties implicit in recovering and representing women's

history, literature and culture without homogenizing it. They seek to undermine the generalization of all Irish women into one type, one history, one 'figure', to recover their diversity. To undertake such work is, nonetheless, to propose a provisional narrative of women's relation to culture in Ireland. Not all of the material in these volumes is by women, but it is all concerned with the way in which gender is produced and has been produced by Irish

societies in history. This is not, however, an exercise in gender studies. Despite their internal diversity, volumes 4 and 5 of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing* insist on one difference as a defining one in the process of selection and editing. They produce, in short, a feminist anthology.

**Gerardine Meaney University College
Dublin**

NOTICEBOARD

NEW BAIS WEBSITE LAUNCH SPRING 2000

BAIS is expanding its use of web and e-mail resources by launching a new website and an e-mail list service for BAIS members. The e-mail list allows members to post and receive announcements about events and other information. The website will be launched in Spring 2002. As a visitor to the site, you will be able to find details about the continuing work of the Association and information about forthcoming events. You will be able to download application forms for BAIS membership and for the BAIS bursary scheme. If you would like to join the e-mail list or receive notification of the website launch, please contact Dr. Siobhán Holland at Siobhan.Holland@rhul.ac.uk (01784) 442118, English Subject Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham Hill, Egham, TW20 0EX

Conference Announcement & Call for Papers

SCOTLAND, IRELAND AND THE ROMANTIC AESTHETIC

5-7 July 2002, University of Aberdeen

Plenary Speakers: Kevin Barry, Ian Duncan, David Hewitt, Fiona Stafford, Timothy Webb

Intended for general Romanticists as well as Scottish and Irish literary specialists, this international conference, the first of its kind, aims to investigate connections and parallels between the literatures of Scotland and Ireland in the period 1760-1830, including their relationship with English Romanticism. Fostering dialogue between academic fields kept traditionally apart, the conference will explore the Irish and Scottish dimension of the Romantic movement, and encourage a more integrated approach to the literary culture of the period. Proposals for 20 minute papers relating to any aspect of this subject are invited; comparative and/or interdisciplinary approaches are especially welcome.

Possible topics include:

English bards and Scotch reviewers * national epic, tale and song * the aesthetics of revolution and counter-revolution * rhetoric and belles lettres * Edinburgh, Dublin and the regional book trade * allegories of union and the Glorvina solution * primitivism, forgery and invented identity * literary tourism in Scotland and Ireland * stereotypes and caricatures * miscellanies and national canon- formation * literary representations of dialect * romantic ecology of Scotland and Ireland

This conference is jointly organised by the Department of English and the Research Institute for Irish and Scottish Studies. Please abstracts (300 words) to **Catherine Jones, Dept of English, University of Aberdeen, King's College, Aberdeen AB24 2UB. Closing Date for Proposals: 1 April 2002.**

For further details contact c.a.jones@abdn.ac.uk or visit <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/sira/>

TASK FORCE ON POLICY REGARDING IRISH EMIGRANTS

The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Brian Cowen, T.D., has established the Task Force on Policy regarding Emigrants with a mandate to develop a coherent long-term policy approach to meeting the needs of Irish emigrants. The terms of reference cover all aspects of emigration including pre-departure services for emigrants, service overseas, and services for returning emigrants.

The Task Force is undertaking a public consultation process and, in that context, wishes to invite submissions from interested organisations or individuals on any aspect of its terms of reference.

Written submissions should be addressed to: **The Executive Secretary, Task Force on Policy regarding Emigrants, Department of Foreign Affairs, 69-71 St. Stephen's Green Dublin 2**

Submissions should arrive not later than 15 February 2002.

St Patrick's College Inaugural IRISH RESEARCH SEMINAR: 12-13 April 2002.

St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin will host this IRISH RESEARCH SEMINAR on new directions in IRISH STUDIES before graduate students, faculty and the interested public.

Those taking part include:

Dr. Garret Fitzgerald – Social and Economic Aspects of Education
Professor Margaret Jacob (UCLA) – History and national identity
Professor Decland Kiberd (UCD) – Current cultural debate in Ireland
Professor Máirín ní Dhonnchadha (NUIG) – The Irish tradition and English literature
Dr. Joe Clery (NUIM) – Irish colonial/postcolonial studies

Free Registration. Full Programme to follow.

Supported by the Research Committee, St. Patrick's College and the University of Notre-Dame-Keough Centre, Newman House, Dublin, in association with the Students' Union, St Patrick's College.

For further information, please contact: **Dr Nicholas Allen English Department Trinity College Dublin allenn@tcd.ie** or **Dr. Mary Shine Thompson, English Department, St Patrick's College mary.Thompson@spd.ie**

LÁ FÉILE INIS MEÁIN

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Treasa Ní Fhatharta Oileánach agus duine de phríomh-chaohnóirí “Teach Synge”

Pat McCabe Scríbhneoir

John Garton & Moira O'Sullivan ag léamh giotaí as shaothar Synge agus ó Canaola

Martina Evans File

Tim Ó Grady Scríbhneoir *I Could Read the Sky*

Christy Evans Brian Friel and the Gaeltacht

Some of the above have pledged their support but will attend if other commitments allow. There will be numerous other writers and musicians.

Ticeidi x 1: £15; x 2: £28 ; x 3: £42; x 4: £54; x 5: £60

Full Details from: Christy Evans, Shenfield High School, Alexander Lane, Shenfield, Essex CM15 8RY

THE IRISH LITERARY SOCIETY LONDON

(New Hon. President: Seamus Heaney)

Forthcoming Meetings during 2002

Tuesday 29 January

Brendán Mac Lua on FRANK FAHY (1854-1935) , one of the founders of The Irish Literary Society

Tuesday 26 February

Cyril Barrett S.J. on George Moore (1852-1933), to mark the 150th anniversary of Moore's birth

Tuesday 26 March

Michael Parker on Seamus Heaney's Poetry (1966-1975)

Meetings take place at 7.45 pm. in the Irish Club, 82 Eaton Square London SW1W 9AJ

There are 8 meetings throughout the year from September to May

The meetings are open to members but non-members are very welcome to attend a meeting before deciding to become a member.

REMINDER: RE. BAIS BIENNIAL CONFERENCE AT STAFFORDSHIRE UNIVERSITY, 6th-8th SEPTEMBER 2002 on DISRUPTIONS & CONTINUITIES IN IRISH POLITICS, SOCIETY & CULTURE

Proposals for papers and panels (200 words) by 30th April 2002 and enquiries to Shaun Richards, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, PO Box 661, Staffordshire University, Stoke on Trent, ST4 2XW. esrl@staffs.ac.uk

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Note: The result of the recent ballot on subscriptions was as follows:

To raise standard fee from £20 to £25 – 48 in favour and 7 against;

To raise concessionary rate from £12 to £20 – 25 in favour and 31 against.

(M. Busted, Secretary)