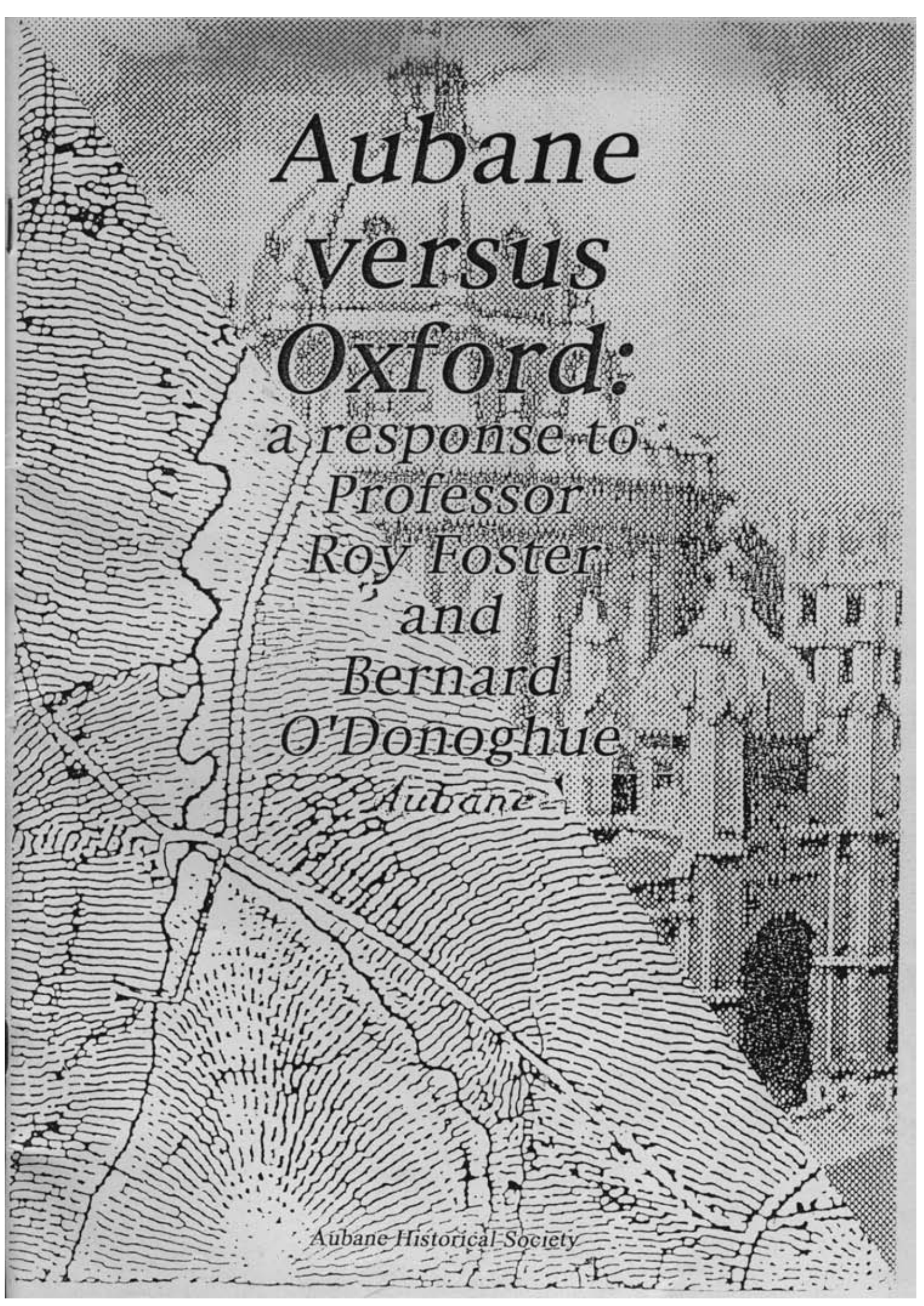
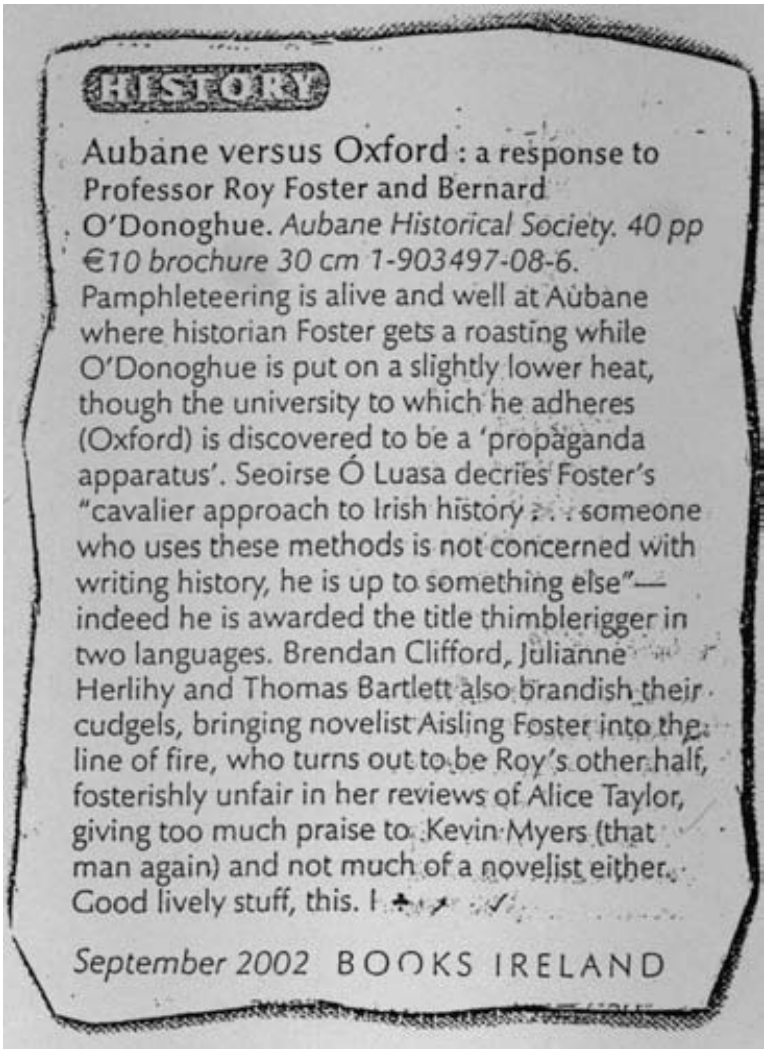


Aubane versus Oxford:

a response to Professor Roy Foster and Bernard O'Donoghue

Aubane

Aubane Historical Society



HISTORY

Aubane versus Oxford : a response to Professor Roy Foster and Bernard O'Donoghue. *Aubane Historical Society. 40 pp €10 brochure 30 cm 1-903497-08-6.*
Pamphleteering is alive and well at Aubane where historian Foster gets a roasting while O'Donoghue is put on a slightly lower heat, though the university to which he adheres (Oxford) is discovered to be a 'propaganda apparatus'. Seoirse Ó Luasa decries Foster's "cavalier approach to Irish history . . . someone who uses these methods is not concerned with writing history, he is up to something else"—indeed he is awarded the title thimblerigger in two languages. Brendan Clifford, Julianne Herlihy and Thomas Bartlett also brandish their cudgels, bringing novelist Aisling Foster into the line of fire, who turns out to be Roy's other half, fosterishly unfair in her reviews of Alice Taylor, giving too much praise to Kevin Myers (that man again) and not much of a novelist either. Good lively stuff, this. ✓

September 2002 BOOKS IRELAND

Aubane versus Oxford:

a response to Professor Roy Foster and Bernard O'Donoghue

ISBN 1 903497 08 6

Aubane Historical Society,
Aubane, Millstreet, Co. Cork.

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"Aubane versus Oxford: a response to Professor Roy Foster and Bernard O'Donoghue"

We were rather surprised to see a number of references to the Aubane Historical Society in Professor Roy Foster's recent book, "The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making It Up in Ireland." (Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, £20). Foster is the Carroll (builders) Professor of Irish History at Oxford University and the doyen of the revisionist school of Irish history.

None of the references were complimentary and included accusations of us being ***'shadowy', 'eccentric',*** keeping Elizabeth Bowen ***'front North Cork sensibilities',*** misrepresenting her activities during the war when she was, according to Foster, ***"warmly defending neutrality, as an Irishwoman, despite the Aubane Historical Society's accusations of espionage for a foreign power".*** But the main criticism, and what really upsets Foster and others, is that we said Elizabeth Bowen was English in our 'North Cork Anthology' published in 1993.

When it comes to what nationality a person is we take the straightforward view that it is what a person says and does that counts. I think it is the Americans who have a saying that if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, quacks like a duck and does all the things that ducks do then it is almost certainly a duck. That is our approach to Bowen.

It is not for anyone to impose a nationality on a person. Bowen described how she felt she had come home when she moved to England as a young girl and exulted in that feeling. She volunteered to spy for the British Government during the Second World War in Ireland and in a series of secret reports kept the British Government fully informed of feelings in Ireland about the war and how carefully an invasion would have to be handled if it proved necessary. She may have been involved in other activities as well but by the nature of things this is not easy to establish.

To do this work effectively she needed, like all good spies, an effective cover, and she declared herself to be Irish; an Irish writer for the most part but she pretended to be a social worker when she tried to deceive Archbishop John Charles McQuaid.

When the job was done, and she no longer had an interest in the country and putting on a facade, she sold her house, Bowenscourt, knowing it would be destroyed.

She probably believed, like her friend Virginia Woolf, that it was really only ***"a stone box".*** It meant absolutely nothing to her when it had served its purpose. She died expressing her hatred of Ireland and all things Irish. All this is straightforward and perfectly understandable. The only mystery is why so many Irish people today among the chattering classes insist on treating her as Irish.

We did not avoid publicising Ms. Bowen or suppress information about her.. We gave extracts of her writings in the ***Anthology*** and these were probably the first that almost anyone in North Cork had read of her work. Ms. Bowen was a totally unknown quantity in the area of which she is supposed to be representative.

This was confirmed recently in the autobiography of one of her most enthusiastic devotees, Donncha O Dulaing, who comes from within a stone's throw of what was the Bowen demesne but had never heard of her until a Professor in UCC suggested that he, as a mature student, do a postgraduate thesis on her. (Perhaps we will discover the thesis some day).

We went further in enlightening our readers, publishing all her spy reports that we could locate, which none of her admirers have done, even though they are very interesting historical documents written during her finest hour. (Ms. Bowen could write fact and fiction with equal skill). This is hardly the behaviour of people who are preventing people knowing about Ms. Bowen. If we could get more of her reports, possibly hundreds all told, we would

gladly publish them all as useful historical material.

Foster says that during the war she was not working for a foreign government. In other words, according to him, she worked for the real government of Ireland, the British Government. This will come as news to many people who were under the impression that the Irish Government and the Dail were in charge of Ireland before, during and after the war. But Foster knows better. I wonder what he thinks the War of Independence was all about?

We are described as being 'shadowy' yet Foster gives our full, correct, address. We are on the phone, on the Internet and on email and I would say we are at least as easy to contact, and get to know about, as Professor Foster. This is our 36th publication and shadowy people arc not usually so keen to set out their store as often or as fully and as publicly as we have done.

A few years ago Mary Ellen Synon got upset about the same issue regarding Bowen as Professor Foster does and she simply picked up the phone and gave us a piece of her mind. The compliment was returned. If Foster wanted to check up on how 'shadowy' we are, he should have copied Mary Ellen. Whatever her faults, Mary Ellen had that upfront, in-your-face, American style and it was a very refreshing experience in comparison with the Foster style of sneers and snide remarks - which I suppose could be called the Oxford style.

As for misrepresenting Bowen's activities during the war, readers can read her secret reports and see if they constitute spying or not and whether or not she favoured neutrality and whether she included herself in the categories of Irish she described. She was simply describing the reality of the firm conviction of everyone here - except James Dillon and a few others - that neutrality was the right policy for the country.

She reported that hard fact to the Ministry of Information in London. Her job - the job that enabled her to move back and forth freely despite severe wartime restrictions was to provide Whitehall with accurate information about the state of public feeling in Ireland so that it might make a realistic calculation of the risks involved in re-occupying the Irish ports. And that is what she did.

There is nothing in these secret reports that she sent to Whitehall, or in any other published writings, to suggest that she ever wavered in her absolute allegiance to the sovereign authority of the British Government.

At the end of the war, Churchill, her hero, re-asserted Britain's right to occupy Ireland if it needed to. If he had decided during the war that an invasion of Ireland was necessary, and if Bowen had chanced to be in Ireland at the time, can there be any serious doubt about whose side she would have been

The Irish public, quite rightly, did not believe the yarn that Britain had gone to war for the sake of humanity, or to help the Poles (whom they had left in the lurch after leading them on with an offer of military assistance), or the Jews, or anyone else. And Bowen didn't really believe any of these things either. She supported the British Empire at war because it was the British Empire, and it was at war, and she was British.

She had no conscience about the deceptions she practiced in order to find out what various people in Ireland were thinking. Spies don't. People arc aiming to an end for them and their state looks after their conscience for them.

James Dillon was the only TD who advocated an Irish alliance with Britain at war - which in practice would have meant Ireland making itself available to Britain as a base for military operations, because Britain had prevented Ireland from building up an Army during the 1920s and 1930s. But Dillon was rather simple-minded in his understanding of Britain, and many years later was mortified when he discovered that Bowen had befriended him on false pretences and that he had been duped by a British agent.

Are we eccentric? That is a subjective judgment, or just vulgar abuse, and not really subject to rational analysis. A lot of our readers have certainly considered us eccentric for bothering our heads with Foster and the other revisionists and wonder what is the point of doing so. But Foster and his school have overwhelming influence over all that is produced in academia here and in the UK on Irish history and on all the media output

concerning the subject as is shown, for example, by the ecstatic reviews his book received right across the media. For what it matters, this does have an impact even though it may be difficult to quantify, but we regard it as worth noting, at least.

Surprised as we were by the extent of Foster's abusive remarks we were even more surprised, and disappointed, to see Bernard O'Donoghue joining in with the revisionists by praising Foster effusively and saying that:- ***"His greatest scorn (and he can be witheringly scornful) is reserved for those who disqualify writers such as Elizabeth Bowen from 'Irishness'".***

Foster made it very, very plain it was us he was scornful of, but Bernard for some reason does not refer to us by name - even though we are the unmistakable target. Foster treats us with contempt but maybe we are beneath contempt for Bernard and therefore unmentionable.

His review is reprinted in full on page 39 as it is not likely to be generally available having been published in the in-house magazine for Oxford graduates, "Oxford Today, the University magazine", Hilary issue, 2002. This is not sold to the general public, except by subscription. It is odd that, despite his obvious strong feelings about our view of Bowen, it has taken him 9 years to comment on it and then he does so in such an exclusive publication and by such indirect and convoluted means.

I was struck in particular by Bernard's praise for Foster's view of the ***'symbiotic'*** relationship between the English and Irish in Irish history.

For a person who comes from Cullen, the land of the O'Keeffes, close by that of the McCarthys, McAuliffes, O'Callaghans, etc. etc., is he really serious in asking us to believe that the confiscations, terrorising, outlawing and destruction that constituted the real historic English-Irish relationship, illustrated so well by the fate of those clans, was symbiotic, that is, mutually beneficial? - that the relationship was actually good for these Clans and the rest of us? It's the same as trying to claim that there is a symbiotic relationship between the Israelis and the Palestinians to-day. Perhaps he will elaborate his case for this symbiosis, but let's hope he will not confine his elaboration to such a limited audience as that of 'Oxford To-Day'. Let's not be, dare we say, shadowy, when dealing with these matters?

This publication contains contributions from several different authors:-

Julianne Herlihy shows how the revisionist academic cabal puffs up the work of their literary friends in ***"Aisling Foster and her literary efforts",*** which starts this collection. Julianne looks at Mrs. Aisling Foster's literary works, how they are reviewed and the attitudes underlying them.

Brendan Clifford reviewed Roy Foster's book over a period of months in a series of four articles in the Irish Political Review (IPR) and these are put together here for the first time.

Seoirse O Luasa did some detective work in tracking down one of Professor Foster's thoroughly misleading references that sought to discredit the sources of early Irish history by giving the totally opposite interpretation to what was intended by the author that he (Foster) quotes. One could hardly imagine more disreputable behaviour from a Professor of History.

But such behaviour will come as no surprise to anyone who takes a close interest in Mr. Foster's works. After all, he is engaged in propaganda and abuse of the truth therefore comes naturally to him. Seoirse's article is translated by Molly Stack and reprinted from 'Feasta'.

In case readers feel we are a little biased when it comes to the Oxford-led literary set - or to academia in general - we have reproduced a review of Foster's book for The Times Literary Supplement by Thomas Bartlett, an UCD academic who is an authentic historian. Readers can compare it with Bernard O'Donoghue's laudatory, sycophantic review in 'Oxford Today'.

Finally, I should add that since Foster drew his readers' attention to us we have been surprised - as I am sure he would be - by the people who have been in touch with us with views and information about him and his work and for this we are most grateful to him.

Jack Lane, June 2002.
Email: ***jacklaneaubane@hotmail.com***

AISLING FOSTER AND HER LITERARY EFFORTS

In many ways the Irish revisionists are conducting a war against Irish culture. They have constituted history and literature into a battlefield where, as in any war, the tendency is not to be too critical of fellow combatants. The important thing is the comradeship within and a deadly hostility without. Because many positions of influence have been obtained, an intellectual closed circle has been created, which means that those who would feel some unease at some of their dogmatic and prejudiced conclusions have no choice but to condone them, that is, if they are interested in keeping their places in the academic and literary rat-race.

Thus we have Professor Roy Foster's glib dismissal of the books of the McCourt brothers and of Alice Taylor with hardly a whimper from the Irish literati. Indeed, Owen Dudley Edwards describes Foster as "... an Irishman radiating learning, challenge and glee." (The Scotsman 12.11.01).

In this battle of ideas the revisionists are very clear as to who their friends and enemies are. The latter are those who want to abstract Ireland from the globalist imperial mindset, or even those who describe sympathetically aspects of the Irish story which have run counter to that outlook. And, if the latter are mercilessly trashed on any excuse, the friends are puffed up with seemingly objective analysis.

In the Scotsman review of Foster's The Irish Story quoted above, Edwards rubbishes the unassuming autobiographies of the non-academic McCourts as "black spots", whilst boosting the writing of Mrs. Foster. Speaking of the McCourts, he says:-"There are infinitely better novels of mid-century Ireland, certainly, as Foster well knows since his wife Aisling, wrote one: Safe In The Kitchen (urgently in need of reprint and as true in its resonance as the McCourts are doubtful)" (ibid).

A Conference And An Interview

If the work of Aisling Foster represents the 'right' way to approach Irish literary life, it is worth having a closer look at it, in the context of a lecture she gave at the Centenary Kate O'Brien Weekend in 1997. The event was entitled, 'Secret Histories; Hidden Lives', and was opened on 21st February by Her Excellency, (the then) President Mary Robinson, and it ran till the 23rd.

Mrs. Foster titled her paper (delivered in the Limerick City Gallery), 'Missing From The Picture: Family Memories And fictional History'. Taking questions afterwards, a very nervous Foster was questioned about her thesis. A man in the audience, stating himself to be a professional from Cork, and the son of a professional, thereby approximating to the stated professional background of Aisling Foster's parents, declared that the Ireland that he experienced in no way equated with the impressions reported by the speaker. Others agreed. Then, a well-known academic from Cork University bluntly told Mrs. Foster that her Ireland was "pure caricature" and effectively demolished her arguments. At that point, the Chairperson stopped the proceedings and the audience was invited to break for coffee.

I came across Safe In The Kitchen, purely by accident in the remaindered section of a bookshop (a location so jeered at by Foster himself). It was published in 1993 and dedicated 'to Roy'. But I cannot, unlike a mischievous Dudley Edwards, advise readers to obtain a copy. I couldn't read it, it was so abysmal, derivative and cliched.

Later I came across an interview Mrs. Foster gave to Patricia Deevey in the Sunday Independent. In it, Aisling Foster acknowledged that her 'novel' is part memoir, part history. The character Rita O'Fiaich is married to Frank, "Dev's right hand, ensuring that Holy Mother Church and the Irish language are the foundation stones of the new state".

Deevey tells us that:- "From the mid 50s through the 60s Aisling O'Connor-Donelan went to school and art college, and 'benefited' from the work of men such as Frank O'Fiaich. Her parents, Dermot and Nuala, both doctors, didn't approve of narrow nationalism. The nuns pumped it into their girls: what would you be doing with that auld classical music when we have our own fine music? Like in the old Eastern Europe".

Foster outrageously went on to "muse":- "So you just knew what to say and to whom, and you knew not to confuse that boundary. Over the archway, at the entrance to her primary school in Templeogue, there was a statue of the Blessed Virgin set in concrete. The girls were meant to genuflect when they went under the arch. And, if the nuns saw her not genuflecting, she'd spend "the rest of the morning in the chapel begging for forgiveness as a punishment".

I challenge Aisling Foster on this nonsense, as she was so authoritatively challenged in Limerick. I put it to readers that the nuns, in common with other religious orders, insisted in schools all over Ireland on deference and respect for statues, but genuflection? Such an idolatrous practice would never have been tolerated, and it says a lot about Foster that she would make such a ludicrous claim. Of course, it also says a lot about the quality of reporting in this newspaper, but then Sir Anthony's Independent has become synonymous with such tabloid standards.

Mrs. Foster goes on to tell us that she dropped out of her art college and went to UCD, and met Roy, a student in Trinity and "it went on from there ... there was no looking back".

There follows some fluff about wanting to live together, but "there was such upset in the family that we just said: 'Oh sod it. We'll get married. Fine. If that's what you want!'" And this after just telling us of her liberal-minded parents who suffered under the diktat of Mr. de Valera! Mrs. Foster said that, even though she didn't believe in marriage, she did it for her family, even though "it was on its way out". She and Roy have two children.

While researching for the book, she "started to engage" with her historian husband. To be fair to her, she claimed she was "a complete ignoramus", but then destroys her admission by saying that this is in comparison to Roy. He also, she tells us, "once started a novel but now says he couldn't write one". She thinks he could, saying loyally, "I hope he does because he'd be very good".

I contend that anyone reading Roy Foster's history would also regard fiction to be his metier.

Aisling As Reviewer

Aisling Foster reviewed Across The River, a novel by Alice Taylor (who got an undeserved drubbing from husband Roy in The Story Of Ireland) on 22nd July 2000 in the Irish Times. For sheer arrogant patronising, it would be hard to beat her opening sentence: "Alice Taylor's readers may not look for guidance on the literary pages of major newspapers". And this is under the headline: 'The Good, The Bad, And The Simple'.

In her review, Ms Foster's lack of decency is again driven home when she reminds her Irish audience of the meaning of "simple", explaining that it, "after all, has another meaning in Ireland: mildly retarded". This is offensiveness of the

basest kind, and what perplexes me is that she got away with it while Mary Ellen Synon lost her journalistic career on similar grounds. Could it be that it was because the latter wasn't writing for the Irish Times?

I would invite any interested readers to contrast Mrs. Foster's treatment of Alice Taylor with her review of Banks Of Green Willow, by Kevin Myers. This appeared in the Irish Times, 10th November 2001, and readers were apprised of Myers's "thoughtful arguments about race, identity and personal responsibility", which helped to produce a "gratifyingly unpredictable, roller-coaster compulsive and haunting novel".

In venerating the Myers' effort, Aisling Foster was consonant with the verdict of the rest of the West British coterie in Ireland. Indeed, the Irish Times, which hosts the Myers' column, not only gave Myers the uncritical Aisling Foster review, it carried a news report strengthened with a photo on 31st October 2001, and an illustrated Weekend story on 3rd November, with a photo-interview in the magazine section on the same date. For good measure, Myers was also give a book to review on that day, which carried the customary plug for the latest book of the reviewer! Anyone working for the Irish Times can expect privileged access to publicity for their extra-curricular efforts, but I have never seen the boat pushed out so far for anyone else. But then, Myers has a special role in promoting the Irish Times outlook on life.

It might be argued that Myers' work deserved all this positive attention, whilst Alice Taylor's did not. But that is a naive view. Taylor is popular and sells huge quantities of books because she is recalling a past which is not long gone, a North Cork in which communities were vibrant, and lived with a strong cultural inheritance which she is particularly good at recalling. But how should we assess Myers? My view might be dismissed as prejudiced, so let*s look to a British review for an assessment of his first novel. It was in The Spectator of 17th November 2001:

"TOO MANY SHOCKS FOR COMFORT. The best-written newspaper in the Republic of Ireland is the Irish Times and one of its brightest ornaments is Kevin Myers.....As a writer of fiction, however, he is unexpectedly reproachable. In Banks of Green Willow, his first novel, there are grievous excesses. Like many other first novelists, he seems to strain to exhibit cleverness. He overloads the story with shocks."

After wittily summarising and trashing the melodramatic plot, the reviewer, Patrick Skene Catling, says:-

"Love is shown to endure the slow agony of cancer. There is a lengthy passage of scatological comedy about noises heard from a loo, described without Rabelais' subtle delicacy. The dialogue is a series of caricatures. Americans keep saying 'sure' and 'real' as an adverb; the Irish say 'eejit' and 'at all at all'. If 'fuck' and 'fucking' were deleted most of the characters would be tongue-tied and the novel would be reduced to a novella. The only person who gives an impression of civilisation is a lesbian professor of French who lives in a mansion in Louisiana and drinks Grand Marnier. Overall, as in a wartime Bosnian village, the novels' air is sweet with the scents of decay', in which 'flies joyously chant their busy anthems'. I predict success on both sides of the Atlantic."

If anyone doubts that a closed circle dominates Irish literary and academic life which is pursuing an alien political agenda, I suggest that they read over this review of Kevin Myers' novel in The Spectator and compare it with the treatment the same book is given in Irish papers. The facts speak for themselves.

Julianne Herlihy (IPR, May 2002)

1. DIFFERENT WORLDS

"The Irish Story: Telling Tales And Making It Up In Ireland"
by Roy F. Foster (Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 2001)

We were not sent a review copy of this book, on its publication in October 2001. Fortunately we were able to buy it cheap, when it was remaindered at Waterstones in Cork in November 2001.

This is the first book of Foster's that I have read. Reading his comments on Young Ireland in his general history a few years ago, I got the impression that he was a storm-in-a-teacup controversialist and that a body of material had somehow come into his possession, which he did not know how to make worthwhile use of. I bracketed him with the hit-and-run history-writers that I wasted a lot of time on thirty years ago, before realising what they were. Reading an entire book has confirmed that impression.

But there is one piece of writing here which is heartfelt. It is the chapter called Selling Irish Childhoods, which is a tirade against Alice Taylor and Frank McCourt. It is extended to include a book of reminiscences by Gerry Adams, but loses authenticity there. Adams' book belongs to a different order of things, being a minor item in a major piece of statesmanship.

When writing about Adams, Foster describes the Republic as a "stable, homogeneous and politically sophisticated society", which has discarded its traditional concerns. But, when writing about Taylor and McCourt, he describes it as having an insatiable appetite for pap and bilge about its past.

The overkill in his treatment of these memories of childhood is so extravagant that I felt it could not be explained by even the most overweening attitude of intellectual or aesthetic disdain for mass culture. There is a powerful feeling of resentment or envy about it. And that is what gives it its authenticity and fluency and carries it beyond the hit-and-run style of the rest of the book. Smart-Alec is given a rest in these pages and we encounter the real person—the author who has been massively outsold.

But there was more than that. So I asked around and found that Mrs. Professor Foster, who had unrealised literary ambitions, regarded herself (being a well-off middle-class Catholic) as an authority on the awfulness of rural Ireland, where life was scarcely worth living (See Chapter 1). And along comes "little Alice Taylor... saving the hay and milking the cows and quenching the lamp"—and exuding a smug sense of bourgeois well-being about it all—and the book buyers of modern Ireland lap it up. I can well understand how it was more than pampered flesh could bear.

But more was in store—the "jawdropping success" of "Angela's Ashes", its paperback edition "garlanded with pages and pages of ecstatic review-quotes"— "It may seem rather like party-pooping to ask what this kind of bilge actually means (which is less than nothing)". And this dreadful best seller is about the awfulness of life in urban Ireland. Foster's language here is highly personal and intentionally offensive. We are told, for example, that McCourt's brother published "a much touted" autobiography. Tipsters with inside knowledge tout, as do prostitutes' agents, police informers, and black marketeers who corner the market in tickets for football finals.

The tout is a form of low life who sells above their value things that ought not to be sold, that ought to have no commercial value placed upon them, or that should be

sold directly to enthusiasts with the minimum of commercial mediation. The chapter is entitled, Selling Irish Childhoods.

The selling of childhood is a time-honoured English activity, both sexual and literary. I suppose it is something new in Ireland, at least for the Irish. I have read many English memoirs of childhood, but none of these Irish ones.

When I made a selection of Cork Free Press articles for Aubane many years ago, I remarked in the Introduction that North Cork was not an autobiographical sort of place. Alice Taylor has proved me wrong. But she comes from ten miles to the east of me, on the eastern side of Newmarket I think, which is just beyond the fringe of Sliabh Luachra. It was always my impression that, when you went east of Newmarket, you went into a different country.

Nevertheless, judging by a newspaper extract from To School Through The Fields that I read, the cultural egalitarianism that I took for granted extended into her area. And what she described—detail and atmosphere—was accurate as far as it went. But, then, De Valera's much ridiculed vision of Irish life never struck me as ridiculous. The philosophical and sexual dimensions of Sliabh Luachra life are missing from both of them but, insofar as they go, I wouldn't quibble about them.

Foster comments:- "Alice Taylor deliberately ignores the bitter after-taste that pervades, for instance, Brian Friel's play, Dancing at Lughnasa, ostensibly set in that prelapsarian world" (pl65). (It must be impossible to think, if you must always sneer as well.)

I saw Friel's play. It did not depict the world I lived in. Nor did Patrick Kavanagh's Tarry Flynn. Nor the Squinting Windows. But, then, I lived in the open sociability of the townlands. And, when I left, it was not because I found rural life constricting, but because I could not stand the intrusion of the city form of religion—modernisation?—in the early fifties.

I did not see Dublin until seven or eight years after I had left Sliabh Luachra. It was as I imagined it, only more so. I would have stifled there—and no doubt acquired the bitter after-taste that is Foster's litmus test of Irish authenticity.

I have not read even an extract of Angela's Ashes. But it has been told to me. (I got the habit in Sliabh Luachra of having books told to me by people who were well able to tell them.) Nor have I read the controversy about it. But I have heard people arguing about it. I know it is about life in the Limerick slums, and that some people find that it is told in an uplifting kind of way, while others just find it depressing.

Foster quotes a paragraph, and comments:- "Simultaneously, in a parallel universe, little Alice Taylor is out there in the countryside saving the hay and milking the cows and quenching the lamp. It would all come as something of a surprise to her. Yet for the reader, the slum is as unsatisfactory as the farm, and for similar reasons: equally played on one note, without depth or nuance, and with a beady eye fixed on the audience throughout" (p.168). I wonder where Foster's eye is fixed while he is producing *his* commodities?

I have no doubt that Angela's Ashes did come as a surprise to Alice Taylor, with her experience of the life of the townlands, and of the villages and small towns hegemonised by the townlands. So what? She described her life and McCourt described his—and they did it with a literary/commercial success that infuriates Foster.

I was briefly in Limerick when I was twelve or thirteen and it gave me a horror of city life. I went back there many years

later (early 1970s) to do a series of meetings and debates for Jim Kemmy on the 'two nations' theme, and to try to get through to the blindly nationalistic middle class of those years (Eoghan Harris being one I remember debating with) that the Ulster Protestants would not roll over in the face of a display of force, and that an alternative approach required the repeal of Articles 2 & 3 of the constitution as a preliminary step. That second acquaintance with Limerick confirmed the impression made by the first—that city life was barren. I am told that Limerick has changed greatly in the past twenty years, but I only know it as it was then, and I have not read Angela's Ashes because I feel I know enough about it as it was then.

West Belfast and the 'ethnic' region of London, where I have found life tolerable, are exceptions to Anglo-Irish city life (the Irish form of city life being only the English form). The word "bourgeois" is misapplied to the English city and its Irish offspring. The Reformation and the Puritan Revolution destroyed bourgeois life in England, making socialist development problematical. (English socialists, looking at some German towns in the early 1900s, had difficulty in warding off the conclusion that they were socialist already, even though the governing parties were bourgeois, the arrangements for living being so sociable.)

The English, and Irish, bourgeois is only middle class. It is an ersatz-bourgeoisie—a term I suppose that will only have meaning for people who remember the pretend-tea made from dried hawthorn leaves that was devised during World War 2: it was called ersatz tea. And the ersatz-bourgeois is no closer to the real thing than the ersatz-tea was.

In England the middle class still has at least the semblance of an aristocracy to make sense of it. But what sense does a middle class make in Ireland, where it has nothing socially different from itself above it? Foster uses the word 'bourgeois', but if there is any substance at all behind his affectations he must know that it is misused.

Could it be that what galls him about Alice Taylor is the smug self-satisfaction she exudes, the total absence of any feeling of social inadequacy—the sheer bourgeois quality of it? And the fact that it comes from rural Ireland, from the culture of the townlands which shrugged off the imposed gentry four generations ago and which have never since felt that there was anything missing.

The townland is the Irish counterpart of the classical Continental town. Throughout most of the twentieth century there was a daily assembly of the citizens of the townlands in the form of a visit to the Co-op Creamery. Until very recently the republican spirit of the townlands hegemonised the urban middle class. But now some elements have broken free of rural influence. They have become a "politically sophisticated society" (in Foster's words). And their inherent sense of inadequacy (as a mere middle class) is driving them to seek another hegemon to confer value on them. And who else is there but the Queen?

"...the McCourt oeuvre, apparently trading on misery, actually sells on synthetic moral uplift... As with Alice Taylor, this partly relies on a determinedly unreal approach to present-day Ireland, and an oddly distanced view of the Northern troubles" (p174). Which brings us to the Aubane Historical Society. "Why Angela's Ashes is not and never will be [!!] 'a classic memoir' (pace the New York times) is because the author lacks an internal self-editor" (p168).

And pace Foster's story-telling, why was there not a sub-editor to advise him that he was making a fool of himself over the Aubane Historical Society when his internal editor fell down on the job? This obsession does Aubane no harm at all—au contraire, mon ami—but surely it is infra dig for a famous Oxford Professor.

Aubane would have taken no notice of him if he had not taken notice of it. If his affectations were not affectations, it would surely have been beneath his notice. And he knows this, because he admits that "it might seem parochial to raise the matter at all" (p149). Sub-parochial in fact. Aubane, a townland at the foot of a mountain, is a small fragment of a parish which you will not find on any map. But he can't help it. He knows we're rubbish, but he can't let go. It's like the Puritan and the slut.

*

He says of the North Cork Anthology:- "Bowen excluded from north Cork sensibility because of her ancestry, her part-English residence and her work for the British government during the Second World War".

In an extensively referenced book no reference is given for these assertions, all of which are groundless. She is not excluded. People from all strands of the thoroughly mixed ancestry of North Cork are in the Anthology. Her being a spy would have been a reason for giving an extra-large helping of her, if her Irish posture had been anything more than a pose adopted for espionage purposes during the war.

In the autobiography she wrote towards the end of her life she described herself as English. We included her nevertheless to let people find out whether they had a taste for her kind of literature, knowing that she was unknown beyond the immediate confines of the former Big House that she had owned. We were ourselves entirely unaware of the Bowen industry that was developing and that we touched on a sore spot.

The Bowen industry peaked a year or two ago with various commemorations and with a film of The Last September that flopped. One of the main items on display in the Dublin commemoration was facsimiles of her spy reports provided by Aubane. We were surprised—or were we?—that Professor Foster took no part in that commemoration.

We assume that Aubane was taken up by Foster as the horrible example of rural Ireland, and perhaps as a whipping boy for some professional colleague whom it would be injudicious to name. The outcome is that he enhanced the prestige of the horrible example beyond anything it had ever aspired to. And we gather that it was fear of Aubane that decided him not to have a launch of his present book in Dublin—because you never knew where they would turn up next. Professor Foster turns out to be a controversialist who cannot stand being controverted.

I was given a vivid account of an exclusive Bowen meeting which he addressed in Dublin a couple of years ago. Time was allowed for compliments and questions. David Alvey, whose way of speaking is neither culchie nor gurrier, began by thanking him for his address. Foster came forward from the lectern, opening himself up for the reception of praise. (The description I was given put me in mind of a line in Tennyson about the ocean baring its bosom to the moon).

But, when Alvey went on to question him about Bowen's espionage activities and his dismissal of Corkery, he retreated behind his lectern, his arms crossed defensively in front of his body in a physical warding off of ideas. And the Chairman closed the meeting on the plea that the Carroll Professor had a pressing engagement elsewhere.

I went to a weekend conference on Hubert Butler in Kilkenny a year ago. Foster gave an opening address, not followed by a discussion period, and then disappeared from the Conference. There was one memorable moment in his Address—the relish with which he described Mrs. Butler's ruling class put down of an uppity native who had come around collecting for a political party:- *"I know who you are, Jim Connell. Take that*

cigarette out of your mouth when you are speaking to me."

Sinn Fein included the Big House in its political rounds, and the Big House rebuffed it in the way it felt appropriate for preserving the social chasm between Ascendancy and natives. The incident shows how the Ascendancy remained true to itself in the era of democracy. (The onset of democracy in the form of the 1918 election is something which readers of Foster's histories might easily miss). And seeing the relish with which Foster related the incident told me more about him than I could ever have gathered from his books.

Foster describes the Aubane Historical Society as "shadowy", and yet he gives its address. He says the membership is "allegedly in single figures", which means he has read the article about it by Mary Ellen Synon, the Bowen enthusiast whose journalistic career fell apart very quickly after she decided to put Aubane in its place. And he says, "the anthologist also describes Bowen's biographer Patricia Craig as English, though she was born and bred in Belfast". He doesn't say where in the Anthology Patricia Craig is described as English, or as anything else. In fact she is not mentioned in it at all. But, if she was, the detail of her being born in Belfast would not necessarily make her Irish, unless the word is used in a purely geographical sense.

Jack Lane and myself are named by Foster as members of the Aubane Historical Society. Over thirty years ago we went against the stream of things in the Republic (Dublin 4 included) by making out a case for the Ulster Protestants. We published the 'two nations theory' in September 1969, it being specified that both nations were Irish. We were not trying to tell the Ulster Protestants what they were. We were saying what we understood them to be in their own view. And we took the politically operative definition of a nation to be Renan's.

When Mary Ellen Synon, in her investigative reporting of Aubane, encountered Jack Lane, she was appalled by his Renanism—not that she knew that's what it was. Renan's view was that people are what they think they are in this respect. If Bowen, when she no longer had an axe to grind, said she was English, and described how on her first visit home she soaked England into herself like a dry sponge immersed in water, and gave a litany of her sacred place names a la T.S. Eliott—Hythe, New Romney, Dungeness etc.—that was good enough for us. She had played her part as an Irish writer in the service of Churchill's war, but she never lost track of what she was.

But this was not enough for Mary Ellen. It seemed that in her view there had to be an objective nationality, (otherwise there was anarchy), and that an individual therefore might be entirely mistaken about his nationality. She declared that Aubane was motivated by racism when it said Bowen was English—and her newspaper column disappeared within a couple of weeks—but I wondered how the idea of objective nationality, regardless of the opinion of the individual, could be sustained, if something like race was not posited as its ground.

In any case, we operated with Renan's voluntaristic test of nationality, and not with Herder's (whose name is frequently dropped by revisionists who are otherwise perfectly innocent of German philosophy). Renan was writing mid-way through the process by which the miscellany of peoples in France was integrated into a functional nation. The nation developed through willing participation in it by peoples whose antecedents were diverse, even in the matter of language. Renan therefore stressed the voluntary character of the nation.

The case in Germany was altogether different. The Germans were there already. German culture flourished across the forty petty kingdoms. Traditional German life

was endangered by the growth of powerful Imperialist states in Britain and France. The German national movement had the purpose of forming the Germans into a state capable of resisting the pressures of the powerful states by which it was surrounded. Herder and Fichte therefore saw the nation in terms of things which already existed, and which had been there for many centuries.

In 1969, applying Renan's standard, we said that an all-Ireland nation did not exist. The prevailing view in the Republic —the view of everybody but ourselves—was that an all-Ireland nation did exist, even though some of its members had the mistaken idea that it didn't. If, in those days, we had known that somebody called Patricia Craig had been born in Belfast, I suppose we would have assumed that she was Irish, but of the other Irish nation. These days I would not be so presumptuous. The two Irish nations theory was rejected in the most decisive manner by the other nation. I suppose it must be twenty years since elaborate and skillfully executed murals appeared in East Belfast, proclaiming, "No Irish Here!"

When the most vigorous elements of the Protestant community, those who determined its social conduct, declared that they weren't Irish, I wasn't going to argue with them. They also declined to be British, when we tried to democratise Northern political life within the politics of the state.

Perhaps it is because Aubane does not share Alice Taylor's "oddly distanced view of the Northern troubles" that it appears shadowy to Foster. I never noticed that he, or any of the other establishment academic revisionists of the South, had any more engagement with the problem of establishing a basis of settlement in the North than Alice Taylor had.

They exploited a growing uneasiness in the South about the North for the purpose of subverting national history in the South, but they had no engagement at all with the actual situation in the North, and I cannot recall a single gesture of support that we ever got from them when we were being caricatured as Orange Unionists. Our engagement with the North must therefore have appeared bizarre to them. "Little Alice Taylor's" oddly distanced view was the norm for all of them. We certainly thought they were all odd in that respect.

When I first heard, from Professor Bew, that an extensive re-writing of Irish history was being undertaken, I assumed that the political history of the overthrow of Redmondism in Co. Cork long before 1918 (on the grounds that it was set on establishing Catholic Ascendancy in the name of nationality) would finally be written. If it had been written, the engagement of a North-west Cork townland with Belfast politics would not have appeared bizarre. But it wasn't written. It didn't suit the revisionist agenda of glorifying Redmondism and glossing over his sectarianising of the national movement.

The methodology of the revisionist operation is invention. If the facts don't fit the agenda—as they usually don't—suitable facts are invented.

"It was an axiom of the Catholic Bulletin that in ancient Gaelic society, the poorest rural families sat around the fire discussing scholastic philosophy", Foster says on page 43. So you ferret out the reference for this interesting statement, and it says, "See my Paddy and Mr. Punch, page 15". So you get Paddy etc. and find on page 15:- "Thus the Catholic Bulletin, bemoaning modern times in 1925, reflected Mrs. Green's vision when it remarked, 'It is very different in Ireland now to those old days when the poorest Catholic family would, on assembling in the evenings, discuss scholastic philosophy and such subjects'. And in the same year the same journal recommended Daniel Corkery's Hidden Ireland to 'G.W. Russell and his clique'..."

A single reference number is given for both of these quotations. It says, "Catholic Bulletin, February and June 1925, quoted in Margaret O'Callaghan, Language and Religion... M.A. Thesis UCD... 1981". This indicates that the quote about scholastic philosophy is in the February 1925 issue of the Catholic Bulletin. I have looked through that issue and failed to find it, though I found the quote about Russell, which Foster allocates to the June issue.

I thought it was a strange procedure not to give the reference for the Catholic Bulletin's "axiom" in the book in which the statement about it was made. But I was not surprised that it was Foster's procedure, as I had followed up some things he had said about Young Ireland in another book.* It appears that Foster had not read the Catholic Bulletin which he ridicules, since he quotes it from a Thesis. That Thesis is not available to me at present, but hopefully it will become so. Meanwhile, here is an item from the Catholic Bulletin containing the reference to Russell, which Foster quotes at second-hand. It is from that same editorial, and provides the ground for a realistic comparison of English and Irish opinion in 1925.

The Catholic Bulletin gives an extract from a letter in the London Times by the Anglican Bishop of Gloucester on 12th January 1925. I have looked it up in the Times and found it accurately referenced. The Letter is prominently displayed, under the headline, 'Population Of The Empire: Maintaining British Stock'.

The Bishop dissented from alarmism about the world becoming too full. There was still plenty of room:- "Nature is quite capable of taking care of herself. The real problem is whether the nations that survive will be the superior or inferior races. That is the important thing for the future of the human race. Probably the set-backs in civilization which have occurred have been through the gradual dying out of the superior races like the Greek and Roman. I venture to believe that the English Race, judging by its history and its performances, is one of the superior races of the world: at any rate as an Englishman I am concerned with the English race and the well-being of the British Empire, and so far as I can judge the failure of the English race and Empire would be a grave disaster."

He cited Canada as an instance of the danger presented by the greater fertility of inferior races. The English stock there was only holding its own with the help of topping up by immigration, and the natural tendency was for the inferior French race to increase at the expense of the superior English. The Bishop called on the Government to do something to ensure that, "those who are most fitted to survive" did not decline. He said that, "unless the present tendencies are corrected, the result will be disastrous to the English race and the English Empire". There was a "Christian duty of care for the well-being of the race".

Hitler's Mein Kampf had not yet appeared when this Christian Imperialist racism was published in London. And the Bishop was perfectly in tune with mainstream English opinion.

*

Foster gives an account of the intellectual origins of revisionism which I had not known about. I was greatly surprised by his suggestion that its origins were intellectual. I will take a look at them in the next chapter.

* "Spotlights on Irish History"

Brendan Clifford (IPR, Dec. 2001)

2. REVISIONISM - ITS ORIGINS?

Lady Antonia Fraser, an offspring of the Longford stable, is one of the heavyweight English intellectual writers of the past generation. She has written biographies of Cromwell and Mary Queen of Scots. She contributed to The Irish Times "Books of the Year" feature on 1st December 2001 and said: ***"I admire R.F. Foster's*** The Irish Story... ***enormously... I cowered at the memory of enjoying—if that's the right word***—Angela's Ashes ***as a result of Foster's essay on the subject".***

Since it is all-important to feel the correct feelings, rather than merely feel the feelings that you feel, I assume she will read Angela's Ashes again with an instructed sensibility and will feel contempt for it.

I knew about the instructed conscience through having read a great deal of Ascendancy Protestant ideology of the 18th and 19th centuries. It was held to be a justification of the Penal Laws that Catholics allowed their consciences to be instructed by priests, instead of having them spring out of the Bible without human mediation. Catholics could not be trusted to be subjects of the Crown because they were subjects of the Papacy.

But, when the Crown formed an alliance with the Papacy, the contrary complaint was made—that Irish Catholics did not see right and wrong in accordance with Papal instruction to be good subjects of the Crown, but acted in accordance with some wild conscience of their own.

As I became more familiar with English life, I saw that the instructed conscience was a phenomenon of Protestant conduct much more than of Catholic conduct, and that the famous Nonconformist Conscience was stereotyped, hidebound and authoritatively induced, while the Whiteboy or Fenian was a free spirit whose conscience sprang directly from his existence.

Still, I do not dismiss the instructed conscience as contemptible. It is necessary to the formation and operation of powerful states. Such states are the keepers of conscience for their individual agents. It is only when a state is destroyed in war, and its servants are held accountable before the victorious enemy state, that they acquire a bad conscience about having had an instructed conscience. Therefore the instructed conscience still flourishes in the English state.

Instructed aesthetic sensibility is an entirely different matter. Lady Antonia's taking of instruction from Foster, and denying her own authentic response on the strength of it, ***is*** contemptible in a person of her pretensions. I have heard her chattering pleasantly on the radio and thought I might read one of her books. She has now saved me the trouble. If her palate needs instruction on how to taste ***Angela's Ashes,*** how could it possibly cope with that intimate blend of art and politics called Mary Queen of Scots?

Foster gives an account of the origins of revisionism. (I was preoccupied during the 1970s and 1980s with an attempt to shift the ground of Northern politics towards the British party structure, so I missed the rise of Revisionism, and cannot say whether Foster is making it up):

"...revisionism 'began', or was identified... somewhere between the death of the Pope and Thin Lizzy's first LP: We were the generation of Irish historians formed by that intellectual development, and also excited by the advances in historical analysis in France and America, especially during that decade. We wanted to apply them to Ireland. Could approaches to Irish history be illuminated by Eugene Genovese's reconstruction of American slave culture, or Theodore Zeldin's ***petit histoire,*** or Eric Hobsbawm's political reading of Sicilian banditti, or Eugene

Weber's analysis of how peasants turned into Frenchmen..." (p27)

No hint is given as to the Irish relevance of any of these writers, and it is far from obvious. Genovese, for instance, wrote on the difference between British and American slavery. The difference itself is self-evident at first glance, but Genovese wrote an interesting, jargon-free book about it: ***Roll, Jordan, Roll.*** British slavery was conducted in great slave-labour camps with overseers, on islands where the slaves constituted the great majority of the population. If a Nazi slave-labour system had got going, it would have been of the British kind. The British slaves did not participate in a common society with the slave-owners—although Maria Edgeworth made up a truly dreadful story in which they did. But, in the American South, the slaves were distributed in small units throughout a society in which slave-owners constituted the great majority of the population. In the British slave colonies, neither the slave-owning minority nor the slave majority reproduced themselves. Both had to be continuously topped up, from Britain and Africa. In America both the slave-owning majority and the slave minority reproduced themselves.

There is no British ***Uncle Tom*** literature that I know of—apart from Maria Edgeworth's story about ***The Grateful Negro.***

But it is evident, even from the anti-slavery novel about Uncle Tom, that the slaves formed part of a common society with the slave-owners and that their conduct was heavily influenced by inter-relationship with the slave-owners. Genovese, as far as I recall, presented this as a practical example of what Gramsci meant by cultural hegemony, and it is one of the very few pieces of Gramscian writing that I have ever found interesting. (An extract from it will be found in a historical comment on Eoghan Ruadh O'Suilleabhain and his times, which I wrote for the collection of his ***Aislings*** to be published recently by the Aubane Historical Society. Eoghan Ruadh joined the British Navy to escape chastisement for a seduction, and his ship took part in Admiral Rodney's defence of British slave-labour camps).

Foster gives no reference for Genovese, though I doubt that one in a hundred of his devoted readers would have any ideas associated with the name. And I cannot see much scope for a cultural hegemony history of landlord/tenant relations in Ireland. O'Connell may have approved of landlordism as an element in an economic system, but, by his campaigns, he scotched whatever possibility there was of developing the rural population as a peasantry hegemonised by the gentry.

"Theodore Zeldin's ***petite histoire"*** was no more appropriate as a model for Irish Revisionism than Genovese's book. It is the kind of thing that might have been produced in Ireland if there had been a literary tradition deriving from Canon Sheehan, or George Moore, or Gogarty. Zeldin wrote, with a light touch and no methodological display, about the history of conversation, love, sex and individuality. In short, he wrote about life as it is experienced through the forms developed in France and Italy. This kind of writing is possible only through a merging of information and experience in a reflective style. It is the kind of thing that our revisionists could not even aspire to. And, judging by some eminent revisionists that I knew at the outset of their careers, they ***would not*** aspire to it. They were methodological eggheads, who set aside experience theoretically and could only think of culture as an ideological state apparatus. Life, as written about by Zeldin, existed out there in the great beyond of popular illusion as far as they were concerned.

Gogarty and George Moore have been all but forgotten. I assumed until recently that Gogarty's "red-headed whore from Ringsend", which I knew in Sliabh Luachra, was part of Dublin culture, but I

find that it is virtually unknown there, and that Gogarty is only a remote name. And Moore seems hardly better known, though he is mentioned more. Whether they were interesting conversationalists I do not know, but both of them were superb writers in conversational style, with no limits on what was grist to the mill.

I grew up in a conversational culture. Maybe, when I was trying to figure out what enabled native Ireland to survive all that was done to it, I should have added conversation to music as a vital element. But there are things which you take so much for granted that they escape your notice.

I took no particular heed of Gogarty until I found he wasn't there any more. His removal must be chalked up to Revisionism. Likewise that of George Moore, both in his conversational writings and his novels. And Canon Sheehan, of course. So forget about Zeldin.

Weber's ***Peasants Into Frenchmen*** tells a story of how rural, provincial France was forged into a nation by the state between the Revolution and the Great War, and how savages were civilised in the process. It is a true enough story, provided that you don't quibble about the equating of civilisation with the uniformity of the capitalist nation state. But I don't see what use it has as a model for a history of Ireland. Everything is reversed in the Irish development. The nation developed against the state. The state, unable to develop the sense of uniformity which it required for Imperial purposes, tried to thwart the sense of nationality that was developing against it. The dynamic of Irish national development was popular, not statist, and was rural rather than urban.

But perhaps I am missing the point. Foster maintains that Elizabeth Bowen was not a spy, even though she was a secret gatherer of information about Ireland for the British Government during the War, because Ireland was a member of the Empire and Commonwealth and was therefore under the authority of the British Crown. It is certainly the case that Churchill asserted in 1939-40 that the Irish state was not sovereign, and was not lawfully entitled to remain at peace with states with which the Crown was at war. On Foster's neo-Churchillian view, the set-up in Ireland could be treated as a region of backward provincialism which the sovereign British state is still in the process of assimilating. Certain Irish illusions have been humoured as a holding operation. But the time has now come to say frankly that Irish history, insofar as it relates to the formation of an Irish state, is bilge: that is Foster's message.

A Weberite history of Ireland would, presumably, be called, ***Culshies To Britishers.*** But it would be counter-productive to write it just yet.

(There is, of course, British Ireland. The Six Counties, freed from the burden of Southern backwardness, have been alone with the British state for eighty years. And the British state has failed undraw them into its political and cultural life, in the way the French state did with half-a-dozen difficult regions in the 19th century. Indeed, it repelled them from its inner life, and they are undoubtedly less British today than they were in 1914. If the French state had treated the regions of Brittany, Oc, Savoy etc. as the British state treated the Six Counties—governing them, but excluding them from its political life—then the story of ***Peasants Into Frenchmen*** would not be there to be written).

Which leaves us with Eric Hobsbawm, the bright star of British Communism, the brilliant intellectual survivor of the Marxism that led nowhere. Over 20 years ago he wrote a famous article called, ***The Forward March Of Labour Halted,*** in which he did not reveal that his party had played an important, perhaps decisive, part in halting it. He reprinted it ten years later in a collection entitled, ***Politics For A Rational Left: Political***

Writing 1977-1988, but still did not mention the event which halted the forward march of Labour. Anybody reading it today in the hope of discovering what went wrong would not find out from it that a Royal Commission proposed in 1977 that a system of Workers' Control should be established in the management of economic enterprises. The proposal was that the workers in an enterprise should, in the first instance, have equal representation with the shareholders in the Board of Management. The Communist Party, which had immense influence in the Trade Unions, collaborated with the representatives of the shareholders and the Left of the Labour Party, led by Neil Kinnock, to oppose that scheme as a sell-out, and it was stifled at birth.

But the existing state of affairs could not continue. Trade Union power was too great to continue as an obstructive force in the production process. Two years after the Trade Unions refused to become the equals of the shareholders in management, Thatcher was elected on a programme of breaking their power. And the socialist movement collapsed at her touch.

What parallel universe was Hobsbawm living in, that led him to omit this event from his account of the halting of Labour? The dead-end world of omniscient Marxism, which knew what its manifest destiny was and would tolerate no other.

Having fallen down on his proper job, he turned to displacement activity, and has written extensively about peasant bandits and nations. His main book about bandits, ***Primitive Rebels,*** has a number of chapters on Millenarianism. The greatest outbreak of Millenarian hysteria in the 20th century happened in England in 1914, its adherents being the cream of the Liberal intelligentsia, almost all of whom saw the vision of "the war that will end war". It cost about ten million lives straight off, and led to the situation which the first post-war Italian Prime Minister, Nitti, called ***Peaceless Europe.*** Hobsbawm doesn't mention it.

Hobsbawm has also written extensively about nations and nationalism. About 30 years ago, naturally enough, he addressed a meeting about Northern Ireland. It would have looked odd if the leading Communist intellectual, whose life had been spent in theorising revolution, had not spoken about an actual war going on within the state where he had become part of the Establishment. His approach was refreshingly frank. He said he was a cosmopolitan European intellectual and that nations were a mystery to him. It put me in mind of Kant's admission that nature appeared to him as "a chasm in thought".

Kant was saved from systematic ahumanity by Rousseau, who led him to a fruitful imaginative engagement with the human condition. But Rousseau, the spoiler of Enlightenment simple-mindedness, has been conjured into the great obscurantist ogre of modern times (denunciations of him by Conor Cruise O'Brien, Eoghan Harris and David Trimble being merely echoes of a British fashion). And, to an overdeveloped and streamlined Marxist, Kant could not appear much better. So Eric Hobsbawm and the world parted company. And he has kept on expressing his bewilderment in learned volumes, which are greatly admired by former students whose influence on the world is nil.

Our policy in Northern Ireland during the 1970s and 1980s did not require any sense of affinity with nationality. It was to establish common ground between Protestant and Catholic by drawing them into the party-politics through which the democracy of the state functioned. Why did Hobsbawm not support that movement (whose presence at British Labour Party Conferences over a period of 15 years nobody could fail to notice)? Because it would have put him out of court with the Left, which insisted that Northern Ireland should be maintained as a place apart, and have moderation preached at it while it was made to stew in its own juices. And not a single revisionist that I know of supported the attempt to establish a ground of

settlement in the North within the politics of the state. So forget about Genovese, Zeldin and Weber. Hobsbawm is the man.

*

An alternative origin of Revisionism is suggested by Foster:- "While the Northern nightmare was at its bloodiest, there was an imperative to turn a searchlight upon various disputed versions of our national past, and to investigate the supposed verities in the name of which both sides were conducting the war. This produced, for instance, a self-conscious but wholly admirable and productive attempt among intellectuals in the Republic to try to understand the roots of the unionist view" (p34).

From August 1969 to the mid 1970s I spoke at a great many meetings around the Republic, many of them at academic venues, about nationalist misconceptions of the Ulster Protestants. If the intellectuals Foster refers to actually existed, they must have kept a very low profile indeed, because I never met one of them. I also looked in the academic journals, ***Irish Historical Studies*** in particular, for material that would help me to make my case, but I never found any. I had, as a political propagandist, to become my own historian. If I had come across an academic historian who was doing what Foster now claims was done I would have seized him and given him political currency.

I gather that the originator, at least precursor, of academic Revisionism was somebody called Leland Lyons, who:- "...had made his early name by writing political studies which implicitly subscribed to the generally accepted notion that Irish national independence, achieved constitutionally but with the implicit threat of insurrection, was an inevitable if not always productive process in Irish history; that the nationalist tradition was the predominant and, in a sense, predetermined one; and that the achievement of the independent Free State and, later, Republic was a successful and by and large admirable enterprise. Much of this is of course true". But later "a certain saturnine doubt creeps in" (p-39).

I have no idea what that means. It strikes me as a mere gabble of words. Does it say that independence was achieved constitutionally without the actual use of force?

In any case, Lyons progressed from saturnine doubt to pointed thoughts. "In a book review of 1976 he permitted himself a sharp reflection" on the notion that Unionists and Nationalists shared a genuine love of Ireland. He said:- "...we still do not sufficiently realise the depth and intensity of the feelings by which, already at that date [circa 1900] men were divided rather than united".

And Foster comments:-"The emphasis of his thought was already falling on division rather than unity" (p.40). ***"Already"!*** in ***1976!!***

Here we have perhaps a glimmer of wisdom long after the event. I could never see much use for the Owl of Minerva that flew at dusk, when the events of the day were over. But 1976 wasn't dusk. It was the morning after the night before.

In September 1969, within weeks of the August pogrom which threw the North into flux, (and after we had done what we could to counter the pogrom on the ground) Jack Lane and myself had published the 'two nations theory', which instantly became both notorious and influential. It was set out in a historical survey of the division called ***The Economics Of Partition,*** which by 1976 had sold about ten thousand copies. It played some part in shaping the positions that were formed in the flux of 1969-70. It is impossible to tell how much it influenced conduct—whether it was dozens or hundreds who did not engage in military activity because, without denying the authenticity of their experience of life in the Northern statelet, it developed a kind of

understanding which led to a different kind of action.

By 1976 the malleable flux of 1969-70 was ancient history. Positions had been established and were working themselves out in conflict. I never saw that the belated revisionist historiography—even when it went beyond sharp reflections in book reviews—exerted the slightest influence of the course of the nationalist campaign in the North: a campaign which was always more extensive than the Republican movement. And it appears to me that the Provos made their own way from their origins in the pogroms of August 1969 to their present occupation of the corridors of power, despising such 'revisionists' as they encountered and having their motivation entirely undisturbed by them.

And the effect of the broadcasting censorship, introduced by the revisionist-in-power, Conor Cruise O'Brien, and enforced by his 'official Republican' allies who ran RTE for a generation, was entirely to the advantage of the Provos. It made them the guardians of mainstream national culture—the culture of Young Ireland, the Fenians, Easter Week and the War of Independence.

If revisionist history had arisen from a concern that false history was the source of the trouble in the North, one would have expected coherent versions of what the revisionists imagined to be true history to make their appearance in popular form within the arena of the conflict. But they never did. I can only conclude from this that the professed concern for the North was spurious, and served as camouflage for Anglicising the history of the South.

If their concern had been the North, I take it that they would have seen that the constitutional structure imposed on the Six Counties in 1921 was a travesty of democracy, unique among the states of the world, and that the ***prima facie*** case against it as a permanent source of disturbance should be dealt with before there was recourse to the theory that mistaken views of history were the de-stabilising factor. (Or has ***Occam's Razor,*** the thousand year-old maxim that theories are not to be invented unnecessarily, fallen into disuse in modern academia?).

I gather from Foster that the ideology of revisionist history rejects the "narrative mode". And I can see why. The great object of an Anglicised history of Ireland is to remove the British black spot of 1918 to 1922. And that cannot be done by replacing what is held to be a false narrative with a true one. In England itself narrative history abounds, and the idea that history is anything other than a causally connected sequence of events to be told in narrative form is met with only in obscure holes and corners.

But an Anglicised narrative history of Ireland, from which the black spots were removed, would fly in the face of too many basic facts which are still well known to be a realistic project. The English history of Ireland must therefore be a kaleidoscope of images, rather than a statement of a connected sequence of events.

Foster is "struck again and again by the importance of the narrative mode: the idea that Irish history is a 'story', and the implications that this carries about a beginning, a middle and a sense of ending. Not to mention heroes, villains, donors, helpers, guests, plots, revelations, and all the other elements of the story form" (p2). And he sees that this is the form of the fairy tale, whose structure was analysed by Vladimir Propp in 1928.

English reviewers were delighted with Foster's message that there was no truth in Irish history, which was a made-up story. And, for all the qualifications in sub-clauses, that ***is*** his message. Of course the pedantic implication is that ***all*** narrative history is fairy tale, but the book is written to be read with prejudice.

Brendan Clifford (IPR, Jan. 2002)

3. WHERE ARE WE GOING?

A number of pretentious words currently in fashion are scattered around by Foster as makeweights in a gossipy discourse, admiringly described as ***catty*** by Ruth Dudley Edwards (using the Latin version, ***feline—bitchy*** would be an even better description of it). One might say that these words—***"predetermined", "solipsist'% "teleological", "manifest destiny", "apostolic succession"***—are dotted around like currants in a cake, except that, when currants go into your stomach, they release something in the way of nourishment, while I cannot see that these words as used by Foster have any meaning to release when they go into your head.

For example: Lyons, in his pre-revisionist phase, went along with the generally accepted notion "that the nationalist tradition was the predominant and, in a sense, predetermined one". And Foster asks: "What is the evidence for predetermined 'collision' between the culture of an Irish Ireland and that of an English England?" (p39).

The word "determinism" is used disparagingly throughout, and apparently in connection with "solipsism". We are told that Joyce conjured up:-"...a parody of Yeats, A.E. and solipsistic national culture. And it would be Joyce who would, in the end, subvert the idea of the novel as the story of nations. As for the accepted story, in a partly independent Ireland, determinism ruled: the wonder tale shadowed out by Sullivan, where a virtuous Ireland finally reached the desired destination, fulfilling the final function delineated by Vladimir Propp" (p20).

And, "...the limitations of the old manifest-destiny notion of Irish nationalism have been exposed as mercilessly as the bankruptcy of old-Marxist historical theories about 'logical positions' and 'inevitable contradictions'. Here the revisionist historians have played their part, if only in trying to indicate that Ireland is a complicated place, characterised by diversity as much as by uniformity; and, more broadly, that history is not about manifest destinies, but about unexpected and unforeseen futures" (p53).

The jibe about "Old Marxism" here is cheap-jack, as is so much else in the book. Marxism, Old or New, now exists perhaps as a residue of the dominance which it exerted in British and Irish academia a quarter of a century ago, but I can see it nowhere else. When I took it on in the 1970s, it was ruling the roost. And the **Variety** of it that I took on, because it was dominant, was the New Marxism of Professor Hobsbawm, the Althusserian Marxism of which Professor Bew was an acolyte. I found that it was absolutely determinist and that it removed the last vestiges of freedom from the ideology.

But determinism is not a peculiarly Marxist idea, or an Irish nationalist idea, and it is least of all an Irish nationalist idea derived from Marxism. I think that temperament must decide whether or not one conceives—that is, imagines—the world in a deterministic way. I am temperamentally unsuited to holding a determinist understanding of things, and time was when the learned determinists viewed me suspiciously as a "voluntarist" or opportunist. But one of the first philosophers I read was Spinoza—that was when I was living among Mrs. Professor Foster's rural idiots—and I saw the force of his intellectual position. Another philosopher I read in Sliabh Luachra was Schopenhauer. I also saw the force of his argument, which was a kind of incitement towards passive contentment in defiance of the will. And I never dreamed of disputing Sophocles's contention that, "The best thing is never to have been born at all". But I could never reason myself into a determinist understanding of things, any more than I could find intellectual merit in voluntarist

philosophies—Bergson's being the one I read in Sliabh Luachra. So, in the end, I made do with Kant and his antinomies, which enabled me to have it both ways. (Strange goings on amongst the rural idiots, eh, Mrs. Professor Foster?).

Let's dwell for a moment on the contrast of "manifest destinies" and "unexpected and unforeseen futures". The world is tightly gripped by ***the*** manifest destiny just now, the USA, and nothing else is allowed to breathe in it. (As for teleology, the world always comes to an end for the time being. It is called the present. The way it reaches this end can be told as a story, and can't really be told in any other way. And the story of how the world came to be where it is today is the story of a manifest destiny. The words ***teleology*** and ***solipsism*** are further explained later in this chapter).

Nationalist Ireland—or "Irish nationalism" might put it more accurately—certainly had some part in this story of manifest destiny, but I'm not sure whether it had any responsibility for the inspirational name. It was coined by John L. O'Sullivan in the remarkable magazine he published in connection with the annexation of Texas by the United States around 1840, but I don't know how closely O'Sullivan's name connects him to Ireland. In ***The United States Magazine*** for July 1845 he wrote of "our manifest destiny to overspread the continent allotted by Providence".

The thing was there before O'Sullivan, but it was a thing without a name. And Shakespeare had it all wrong about names.

I suppose the thing began with Jefferson—with his Lewis and Clarke Expedition and his dispassionate, matter-of-fact genocidal policy towards the Indian nations - which Conor Cruise O'Brien takes no account of in his genocide indictment of Jefferson, which he bases on a flourish in one of Jefferson's letters about the French Revolution, see ***The Long Affair,*** 1996. I suppose O'Brien judged genocide to be the right Indian policy, but did not consider it expedient to say so.

Many things have come and gone in the world since the early 19th century. If those things were the "unexpected and unforeseen futures" they were also .brief, transitory futures. The main thing has been the relentlessly grinding progress of that manifest destiny. Carrying the United States to the Pacific, obliterating everything human on the way, was only the first step. Then it became manifest to Admiral Mahan that destiny called the United States across the Pacific etc. etc.

In the 1820s America decided that its own domestic law was universal in application—was the only authentic international law. And now, at this momentary end of history, that is how the matter stands.

What kind of idea is manifest destiny? It is pre-determinist, teleological and solipsist in the most extreme degree—these three things being facets of one and the same thing. But is it not also voluntarist in the most extreme degree?

(Solipsism is misused in this usage. But, since the revisionists insist on using it, misuse is minimised in its application to the USA. America has arrived at the position, to which it was led by manifest destiny, of being alone in the world).

Predeterminist, teleological views of a particular kind are conducive to energetic action to accomplish what is conceived as inevitable. English Puritan disruption was driven by the most absolute teleological conviction. And, if Cromwell said that nobody goes as far as a man who doesn't know where he's going, that was because power unbalanced him and regressed him into a mere gentleman. In the days of his achievement he was the leader of those who knew where they were going, who knew that their arrival there was pre-determined

because it was written in the ***Book,*** and who acted freely to accomplish what was inevitable.

The Puritans across the ocean were likewise driven by destiny. But thus far they have never been disconcerted by success in the way that Cromwell was. They appear to have been designed for solipsism. They are happy to fill the world with themselves. And they eagerly hail the shooting of fish in barrels as feats of military glory.

Manifest destiny has been operative in Ireland too, though on a smaller scale, and Irish manifest destiny has also fed into that of the United States. Martha M'Tier, William Drennan's sister, was, around Christmas 1803, struck by the awful thought that the Catholics, miserable remnant though they were then, were destined to get their country back. She had that inkling of the future when some hot news from Europe came to Belfast by way of Chapel Lane (at what is now the city end of the Falls Road). She found that event ominous. And is it now deniable that it was an omen?

The Irish had an idea of themselves which involved them in getting back what had been taken from them. If they had not had that idea, would they have got back so much of it already?

Was there a predetermined collision, or an inevitable contradiction, "between the culture of an Irish Ireland and that of an English England"? It is a strange question. I am only aware that there was ever conflict between England and Ireland in the context of the English occupation of Ireland. The conflict was between English Ireland and Irish Ireland.

Was it pre-determined? If one assumes the existence of the Christian God, I suppose the answer must be ***"Yes"***—or, at the very least, ***"Possibly".*** Protestant theology is predestinationist for the good reason that nothing else is logically derivable from the three great attributes of God: Omniscience, Omnipotence and Omnipresence. Calvin was no fool. Catholics, on the other hand, have tended to take God with a pinch of salt, so as to leave room for other things. If the existence of God is not assumed, what can be meant by being pre-determined? It could mean that only one outcome is possible if certain specified forces are set in operation. But that is a figurative extension of the term. But, if one adds that the outcome can be calculated in advance of the event, I suppose that comes close to the full sense of being pre-determined.

In human affairs, however, the forces in motion are purposeful. Purposeful activity is teleological activity, activity directed towards an end. Human conflicts are conflicts of different destinies which are manifest to the different forces in conflict. This means that they are malleable. But, assuming that English Ireland and Irish Ireland each held to its purpose, then a collision between them was unavoidable—and in that sense predetermined. Both were expressions of manifest destiny. Both were teleological. And, if purposeful activity is to be described as solipsistic, then both were solipsistic. It was as manifestly evident to England that it was destined to determine Irish affairs, as it was to the Irish nationalist movement that it was not.

If ideas of manifest destiny and purpose are bad history, then they are bad everywhere—and they are operative everywhere. But I don't see the ground for judging them as good or bad history. They are historical forces, and are effective or ineffective in realising their ends. And it was not British purpose that proved to be effective in the conflict in Ireland.

Foster says that revisionist historians "exposed" the Irish manifest destiny notion (by which he seems to mean that they refuted or undermined it), by showing that Ireland is "a complicated place, characterised by diversity as much as by uniformity".

There is diversity everywhere. If Ireland had wallowed in its diversity under the Act of Union, it would not be what it is now—and, if it had not thwarted British manifest destiny right alongside the heart of the Empire, the world would possibly not be what it is now. (It is arguable that Britain would have acted differently in its world role in July-August 1914, if it had not become desperate for a means of escape from the rupture of its internal political life brought about the Home Rule conflict).

But Ireland was quite obviously not characterised by diversity as much as by uniformity. The national movement set about establishing, amidst the diversity, enough uniformity to make purposeful political action possible. The British administration, as the power in place, sought to protect its dominance by fostering the diversity. Major Street's ***Administration Of Ireland In 1921*** (recently re-issued by Athol Books) was an appeal to the diversity of interests in Irish life to break the uniformity established by Sinn Fein—and rest content, as private interests, under the British uniformity. But the Sinn Fein hegemonising influence contained the diversity of particular interests within the national consensus, the national uniformity. British manifest destiny in Ireland gave up the ghost, and the unravelling of the Empire began.

If the revisionists were to show that Ireland was as diverse as it was uniform, they would have to show that what happened in Ireland between 1916 and 1921—which they obviously regard as a mistake—was also an event which did not happen.

The only politically functional diversity which Britain succeeded in activating in Ireland during the critical period was the division between the two great uniformities—two manifest destinies, two solipsisms, two teleologies.

Over thirty years ago I made out a case for Ulster Unionism on different ground than the ground it had taken its stand on, and tried to shift it over onto that ground. It refused to shift, even though its chosen ground has been crumbling under it ever since. Manifest destinies are not easily discarded in actual human affairs. The destiny that gripped Protestant Ulster when it closed the gates of Derry to King James still holds it fast, in fine disregard of the advantage this gives to the Jacobites, now that the greater Imperial teleology to which "Ulster" was dedicated has fallen into confusion. It puts one in mind of the maxim of an obscure English philosopher, who is more interesting than the famous ones, about ***"the instability of the homogeneous"*** (Howard Collins in ***The Epitome Of The Synthetic Philosophy,*** 1894).

The manifest destiny which, belatedly, is being refuted and undermined by the revisionists within their university cocoons, is forging ahead out there in the world. Will it, like a cartoon character, suddenly realise that it has run out of ground and collapse? I doubt it.

(Teleology is the theological doctrine that the world moves towards an end set for it by God in the moment of its creation, and that what happens in it has the purpose of accomplishing that pre-determined end. Literally it means knowledge of an end ***(telos).*** Purposeful action, action towards the accomplishment of an end, is teleological. And progress is a teleological concept. Since, in Western civilisation only purposeful action is reputable, I take the use of the word "teleological", as Foster and others use it, to be an unfailing sign of charlatanism. If they were conscientious Buddhists, they would not be charlatans. But they are far removed from Buddhism. And, when they condemn Republicanism as teleological, it is in the service of another teleology, another destiny, which cannot yet be asserted openly).

Solipsism—***solus*** (alone) plus ***ipse*** (self)—is the philosophical position that one is alone in the world with one's idea of other people and things. It is a deduction from

\

Locke's philosophy made during the Penal Laws by the English Bishop of Cloyne (Co. Cork), George Berkeley. I first came across its bizarre use by revisionists in an article in ***Irish Historical Studies,*** where Richard English described the adoption by Republicans in the 1930s of a policy which did not have popular support at the moment of its adoption, as a solipsist action. The only sense I could make of it was that adoption of a policy with the purpose of realising it through political action, as distinct from making a survey of established opinion and agreeing with it, was to isolate oneself from the ***status quo*** and was therefore solipsist. But, if the word is to be used that way, it must be said that Churchill retreated into solipsism in the mid-thirties, that De Gaulle did in June 1940, and that Britain was lost in solipsism from June 1940 until a significant other pulled it out of itself in June 1941.

It might be said with much less abuse of language that Unionism, tcleologically guided into ever-decreasing circles under the influence of a failed destiny, has reduced itself to solipsism. We warned it that this is where it was heading, and tried to show it an alternative. But the revisionists (I am thinking of Professors Bcw and Patcrson, and Eoghan Harris) encouraged it into the fugue of solipsism.

PS. Radio Eircann broadcast on 23rd February a discussion of Foster's book by Professor Declan Kiberd and John Boland, compered by Andy O'Mahony and produced by Michael Campion, in which I had the honour of being described as a nutter by the Professor:-

"The Professor: And the later Yeats got caught up in that argument—Was he Irish, was he Anglo-Irish, does it matter? I find it is all a hit old fashioned now, just reading it. I cannot feel as excited about these debates as Roy Foster manages to get.

"O 'Mahony: Yes, I have the same—

"The Professor: Nobody here except one or two nutters*—he quotes someone from the Aubane Historical Society denying that Elizabeth Bowen was Irish and suggesting she might actually have been spying when he makes the perfectly decent point that she actually supported Irish neutrality in the war and was simply giving a read to English people of what was going on—I find these debates, you know, incredibly old-fashioned now, that we'd still be putting labels on writers in that way. I don 't find the Irishness of Bowen or Yeats problematical.

"Boland: I don't find it a problem—Well, I never have and I don't find it really of any interest or not. I mean, you're asked, Cecil Day Lewis, is he really an Irish poet? I mean, who cares? Or Robert Graves is claimed as an Irish poet or an English poet. I mean, I honestly don't think that these kind of straitjackets matter at all."

Suddenly it doesn't matter, while a few years ago it was a matter of vital importance. I wonder why? We included Bowen in ***The North Cork Anthology,*** knowing that she was entirely unknown in North Cork, and that in the autobiography written towards the end of her life, when the role-playing was over, she described how essentially English she was, and how her essence blossomed when, as a girl, she was removed from Anglo-Irish Dublin to Kent. We knew nothing then of the Bowcn industry that was about to take off under the auspices of the British Council. Boland forced it on our attention with a denunciation of us as ***racist*** in ***The Irish Times.*** It was then a vital matter that Bowen should be acknowledged to be fully Irish. By merely responding to Boland's denunciation, and to another denunciation in the ***Sunday Business Post*** (edited by the Professor's brother, Damien Kiberd, at the time), we seemed to knock the wheels off the Bowen bandwagon. That's how brittle revisionist intellect is. The Professor's suggestion that Bowen ***"was simply giving a read to English people of what was going on"*** in Ireland during the war needs further development, seeing that her reports didn't become available to the English people until Aubane published them. And some of them have not yet been released from the secret files in Whitehall.

Brendan Clifford (IPR, March 2002)

* See RTE apology, page 43.

4. ENTER BERNARD O'DONOGHUE

A review of Foster's book appeared in ***Oxford Today,*** the house magazine of Oxford * University, ***Varieties Of Irishness. Bernard O'Donoghue Enjoys A Retelling Of Irish History.*** O'Donoghue is a tutor in an Oxford College, so perhaps it would be unreasonable—and would certainly be unrealistic—to expect him to be in any way critical when reviewing a book by a fashionable professor for the University house magazine. (I have seen only one other issue of that magazine. Its function appeared to be that of any company magazine: to make propaganda in favour of the business).

But I gather that he derives from Sliabh Luachra, and that, having left it in his early teens, he has re-established a kind of connection with it. That being so, I think that, however unrealistic it may be, it is reasonable to expect something more from him than would be expected from a mere Oxford tutor, and to read what he has written more closely than would be warranted in the case of somebody who only knew the situation through the writings of Foster and other Oxford propagandists.

(I discovered Oxford University as a propaganda apparatus when I was investigating the initial phase of the Great War about twenty years ago. In the Oxford War Pamphlets written by the Professors, and even by tutors, everything European was "revised" on the instant, and stood on its head, with no concern for consistency with what had been presented as academic knowledge until the end of July 1914 and no fear that anybody who counted would remember what had been said until yesterday and confront what was being said today with it.

Until I read the premier University's contribution to an understanding of the war, I had thought that Hitler's statement that he had learned the art of propaganda from Britain was a slight exaggeration).

O'Donoghue tells us that Foster's ***The Irish Story:-*** "is a pretty sustained attack on the monolithic version of Irish history, which Foster sees as most destructive of his pluralist ideal: a version in which Irish-English relations are not at all symbiotic and according to which Irish history is a long struggle to remove English influence altogether".

Over thirty years ago, before there was any 'revisionism', Jack Lane and myself, in an immediate response to the events of August 1969 in Derry and Belfast, set about removing certain nationalist blind spots, making ourselves very unpopular by doing so. And we spent twenty years trying to get the Six Counties included within the political system of the British state so that Protestants and Catholics would have a realistic political alternative to the communal antagonism into which the 1921 arrangement had locked them. I would have been content to find that the historic relationship between England and Ireland was ***"symbiotic"*** in fact and had been misrepresented in political propaganda. But it was something I could not find. And, having searched for it with a predisposition towards finding it, I was more aware of its non-existence than I would be if I had never looked for it.

Even though this led me to accept what O'Donoghue calls "the monolithic version of Irish history" as being substantially sound, but with a couple of blind spots, I continued with the attempt to get the North included in the British political system until venomous opposition by Ulster Unionism in all its tendencies reduced the project to hopelessness.

O'Donoghue gives no instance of the mutually beneficial relationship, the symbiosis. Nor does Foster. I found one

event in three centuries which might pass muster on a foggy day as expressing a symbiotic relationship, and I was so impressed by it that I began to gather materials for a book about the English politician who contrived it, A.J. Balfour. That event was the subsidised land purchase scheme of 1903.

I would say that the only period of good government that Ireland experienced under English rule was the ten years of government by the Unionist Party after Gladstone's retirement, following the defeat of his second Home Rule Bill. What the 'Unionist Party' meant in those days was the combination of Lord Salisbury's Tory Party with Joseph Chamberlain's radical Liberals. This spasm of good government had an ulterior motive—to "kill Home rule with kindness". When that Unionist Government fell in 1905 the power of landlordism in Irish affairs had been broken—by the Local Government reform of the late 1890s and land reform provided for by the 1903 Act.

When the revisionism which now dominates academic life and publishing in Ireland was being established in its positions of power in the 1980s, I was preoccupied with Belfast politics from a position which was then caricatured as Unionist by many of those who have since become Unionists in earnest. When I heard about this revisionism, I assumed that it would make that decade of reforming Unionist rule (1895-1905) the core of its revised history. But, when I got around to reading Foster and others, and found that they were even more dismissive of the politics of that era than the nationalist historians of the preceding generations had been, it was evident to me that their object was ***not*** to write a better history, a history more in accordance with what actually happened, than the nationalist historians had done, but to lose Irish history in an Anglo-Irish fog.

I can understand why this unique ***"symbiotic"*** event in the history of English government in Ireland is of no use to the revisionists. Balfour's first action on being appointed Irish Secretary was to suppress the land agitation. His next action was to see if he could settle the land question. For this purpose he escaped from his minders and, to the chagrin of the Home Rule party, went off to the North-West to talk directly to the tenant farmers about the matter. Some time later, when he was Prime Minister, he gave the go-ahead to his successor as Irish Secretary, George Wyndham, to make a deal with William O'Brien (who Balfour in his ***"Bloody"*** phase had imprisoned) to settle the land question through a comprehensive scheme of subsidised buy-out of the landlords by the tenant-farmers. Redmond's Home Rule Party, believing (like Balfour) that the national grievance was only a shadow cast by the land grievance, did its utmost to prevent actual land-purchase from being conducted under the 1903 Act. That led to the overthrow of Redmondism in Co. Cork in the 1910 General Elections. And, in the second of those Elections, the Redmondites did not even field a candidate in North Cork.

The Redmondites feared that the national movement would wither if it was deprived of the landlord grievance. They discouraged land purchase by representing it as an attempt to swindle the tenants out of their hard-earned money, and encouraged their Liberal allies (who returned to Office in 1906) to let the financing of land purchase run into difficulties. And they whipped up religious passions at the same time, so that the Home Rule Party took on the appearance of a lay institution of the Catholic Church. The independent national movement, which arose against Redmondism throughout County Cork and spread into the adjacent Counties, took an opposite course, accelerating the buy-out of the landlords and then cultivating good relations with them as Protestant country gentlemen. There were fierce disputes throughout the region between the "Conciliators", led by William O'Brien and D.D. Sheehan, under the powerful influence

of Canon Sheehan, and the Redmondite Home Rulers. The 'Conciliators' broke the grip of the Redmondite party in 1910, and they were largely responsible for the crushing victory of Sinn Fein at the following election, in 1918. And, when Britain decided to carry on governing Ireland in defiance of that election result, it was the region where the Conciliators had triumphed in 1910 that gave the lead in meeting force with force, and carried the main burden of the War of Independence.

That piece of history, influential though it was in determining the actual course of events, does not meet the requirements of the revisionist history agenda. It subverts that agenda, which requires the more assertive nationalists to be bigots and the Redmondites to be tolerant pluralists. The great pluralist revolt of the Conciliators against Redmondite bigotry is therefore cut out of their history. "It remains the historians task to reconstruct earlier history in all its untidiness", O'Donoghue says, But I suppose that piece of history goes beyond untidiness and becomes perversity, and they are subject to a moral imperative with regard to it, "to reconstruct the past as we would like it to have been".

When that episode is consigned to the waste-paper basket, along with the books in which William O'Brien described it with a rare combination of involvement and detachment, I cannot imagine where else an instance of symbiosis is to be found in all the three centuries of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, or the five centuries of Reformation England, or even the eight centuries since England conquered Ireland in the name of the Papacy. The pre-Reformation Normans became Irish, but that hardly qualifies as symbiosis, since England punished them for it. After the Reformation gave the English state a totalitarian aspect through merging it with the Church, the great object of English policy was to settle a colony in Ireland which religious fanaticism would deter from becoming Irish, and which would in the course of time displace the Irish or melt them down and remake them into something else. And the prophet of totalitarian English policy in Ireland was ***"the gentle, murderous poet, Spenser",*** as Sean Moylan put it in his typically succinct way.

When, on my only visit to Cork University, I heard a heart-felt account of a pious literary pilgrimage to the ruins of Spenser's Castle at Kilcolman, the only equivalent for self-hatred I could think of was if the Czechs had erected a memorial in gratitude to the Reich Protector of Bohemia, the cultivated and artistic Reinhard Tristan Heydrich, organiser of extermination. On that visit to Cork University, the most interesting thing I heard was an explanation by Tom McCarthy (a great admirer of Elizabeth Bowen) of the usefulness of a touch of Irishness in giving one an ***"edge"*** on the competition in the English literary market. And I suspect that it is this, rather than a concern with historical matters of substance, which concerns O'Donoghue.

He writes:- "His [Foster's] greatest scorn (and he can be witheringly scornful) is reserved for those who disqualify writers such as Elizabeth Bowen from 'Irishness'. Foster is passionate in his defence of the right of such Anglo-Irish writers to say, in the words of Iris Murdoch when she was 'struggling in the tragic grip of Alzheimer's disease', 'Who am I? Well, I'm Irish anyway—***that's something.***..Foster sees his project as writing back into Irish history the events, and more importantly the people, that the more streamlined nationalist story has cut out.

"A major figure is the historian F.S. L. Lyons...Other heroes of this tradition are Hubert Butler and Bowen again. The double-dyed anti-heroes are Frank McCourt and Gerry Adams, both of whose versions of Irish childhood are seen as selective and... 'made up', deleting elements of the past at will. Amongst the literary heroes Trollope is pre-eminent,..."

If there is a difference between expressing scorn and sneering—and there is a great difference in general usage—then what Foster does is sneer. I first looked at his History to check up on some basic fact about Young Ireland. I found that nothing resembling a history of Young Ireland was in it, only a series of sneers combined with factual misrepresentations which struck me as coming from honest, malevolent ignorance. (I have listed some of these in an introduction to ***The Nation*** reprints.) And the only time I saw Foster perform—at the Hubert Butler Centenary Conference—what was memorable was his sneer at a couple of local Republicans at Bennetsbridge who—at least by his account—were put back in their proper place by Mrs. Butler when they tried to act "inclusively" towards her following the Sinn Fein electoral victory of 1918 (an event which readers of Foster's History might easily miss).

There is a curious omission from O'Donoghue's list of Foster's "anti-heroes": "little Alice Taylor, out there saving the hay and milking the cows and quenching the lamp". I gather that O'Donoghue spent some of his youth in the region of Cullen and more recently has acquired a holiday home there. Cullen is a few miles north of Aubane, where Jack Lane comes from, and a few miles south of Gneeves where I come from. Since I know about Alice Taylor, even though I have little interest in childhood memoirs, or, indeed, in literature, I take it to be a certainty that O'Donoghue knows about her.

Foster hates Gerry Adams, who is altogether beyond his reach. He is envious of Frank McCourt, and only affects to despise him. But he seems to feel a genuine contempt for Alice Taylor. But she is equally beyond the reach of his "withering scorn" as Gerry Adams is. The overlap between people who read her and people who read Foster is minuscule—which I suppose is also the case with the others, raising the question of who is withered by his scorn. But the scorn which would wither, if it could reach, is more genuinely felt in her case than in the case of the others.

(What is one to make of this withering scorn which has no purchase on the object scorned? Some pre-revolutionary French writer described the "cascade of scorn", which poured down the various layers of the Old Regime. That scorn was felt by its objects, who responded with the Great Fear in which feudalism was dissolved, and the Reign of Terror, through which republican virtue built itself into the social structure of France. "Withering scorn" can be dangerous if it is felt by its object, on which the initially withering effect is likely to be a long-term stimulus. Withering scorn of which the object of it is oblivious is much safer—and the Oxford University house magazine which is not on public sale is a very safe place for it. But what is its use? The word that came to mind when I saw some of Foster's media hype for his book was ***"pixillated".*** But we no longer believe in leprechauns—and I cannot recall that in Sliabh Luachra we ever did. Cliona was much more fetching).

I wonder where O'Donoghue's expertise on West Belfast comes from? Jack Lane and myself spent a great deal of effort in 1969 and the early 1970s trying to head off the war by opening an alternative course of action to the Catholic community, whose position actually was intolerable, and we did not notice that O'Donoghue had any involvement at all.

I took an opposite course to Adams in 1969 and persisted in it for over twenty years. It was not Adams who prevented that alternative course from being realised, but the communal Protestant addiction to the routine of "provincial" ascendancy. (And the bizarre arrangement made in 1921 for the governing of Northern Ireland—its exclusion from party structures by which the rest of the state was governed, a thing which is unique among the states of the world—is something else that is missing from Foster's History).

And how does he come by the intimate knowledge of working class life in Limerick city half a century ago, which enables him to pass judgment on Frank McCourt?

It might be said, in a simple-minded way, that he only reports what Foster said. But that isn't so. What Foster says is soul-food to him, and he praises Foster for saying it. And, in his reportage, he makes a deletion from Foster's list of anti-heroes. He deletes the anti-hero whom he certainly knows something about, while mentioning the two that are beyond his experience. Why did he not complete the list with Alice Taylor? Or disagree with Foster about her? I suppose that, with his position in Oxford and his foothold in Sliabh Luachra, the reason why he could do neither is obvious.

As to the "heroes" of Irish literature, the "pre-eminent" one, Trollope, was a Londoner who wrote the fictional history of middle- to upper-class English society in the mid-19th century. In a book on Mangan that I wrote many years ago I said that, by the way things were going, any famous English writer who set foot in Ireland would be claimed as Irish. I thought I was exaggerating, but I know better now. Trollope was an English civil servant who happened to be posted to Ireland for a few years. His Irish posting is not even mentioned in Chambers Biographical Dictionary.

As to Iris Murdoch, it so happened that I read a couple of her novels soon after they were published. I joined a Book Club advertised in the ***News Of The World*** and got, as far as I can recall, ***The Bell*** and ***Under The Net.*** The Book Club was English and it did not present her as Irish.

English literature is thick with writers born in the colonies. The initial phase of removal gives a vantage point on the whole, which is not available to somebody who is immersed within the English homeland from the start, and appears to lead to a more powerful identification with it when the colonial comes home. That was certainly the case with Bowen. As Kipling (an Indian writer?) put it: "What can they know of England who only England know?"

Jack Lane experienced the Irish educational system to the top level, whereas I was scarcely touched by it and lived within a segment of a parish into my twenties, but it struck both of us as equally absurd when a writer in the ***Cork Examiner*** proclaimed Bowen a North Cork writer. And, despite the massive propaganda of recent years, I have yet to meet anybody in Ireland, outside a specialised sliver of academia, who has read her novels.

Bowen's Ireland was Anglo-Ireland, as Orwell's India was Anglo-India, or its Burmese adjunct. Orwell had a much greater sense of affinity with Burmese life than Bowen had with Irish life—she hardly pretends that her Ireland existed outside the walls of the Big Houses of the racially exclusive English colony, which had carefully segregated itself from the natives for a quarter of a millennium. And yet I never saw Orwell described as a Burmese writer. Why not? Because Anglo-Burma became a hopelessly lost cause after the British secret service organised the murder of the Burmese Cabinet in 1947.

If there was the slightest hope of recovering Anglo-Burma, I'm sure the British Council would have no difficulty in finding literary critics who would reveal Orwell's essential Burmeseness. As it is, he is merely one of the classic literary figures of English jingoism. Bowen is no less an English jingo than Orwell, but her usefulness lies in other directions.

The Bowen industry is part of a wider project to put Irish literature on a proper footing by excluding from it everything that is incompatible with its re-acquiring the status of a provincial English literature which it once held. A book called ***Irish Fiction*** was published in London in

1999. The selection was made by Colm Toibin. Missing from its 1089 large pages of small print is the most influential writer of Irish fiction there has ever been: Canon Sheehan. Sheehan is also missing from the ***Oxford Companion To Irish History*** (1998), neither having an entry in his own right, nor being mentioned in an article by Patrick Maume on Literature and the historian. And he is not mentioned in Foster's ***Irish Story.*** (And I find that there is a book of ***Oxford Irish Quotations,*** edited by O'Donoghue (1999) from which he is also missing). He is unmentionable, even to the extent of saying why he is not worth mentioning. He is simply to be deleted. Why? Because, though he was the inspiration behind the "Conciliation" movement around 1910, his general orientation was un-English. Not anti-English, but genuinely and unaffectedly European. I grew up within the remnant of that European culture in the recesses of Sliabh Luachra, and I assume that is why I could be as conciliationist of Protestant Ulster in the 1970s as Sheehan had been towards Irish Protestantism sixty years earlier.

O'Donoghue sees "a new self-consciously cosmopolitan Ireland", but it has somehow escaped my notice. I suppose what he means is that Ireland now takes its lead from Oxford. And who knows but we will yet see North Cork accepting the "gentle, murderous" Spenser as its premier poet!

O'Donoghue bestows a curious accolade on Foster's writing, describing it as "Grub Street at its finest". Grub Street is the street of literary hacks who cut each other's throats in the jungle world of commercial periodical publishing. I believe the term dates from the 18th century. In Gissing's late-19th century representation of it, ***New Grub Street,*** it is as far as I recall—it is close on half-a-century since I read it—a soul-destroying world set among the quality Reviews. (And I might remark that, if somebody devised a claim on Gissing as being Irish, I would not be inclined to quibble about facts.) When I observed it, almost a century after Gissing, it was a world in which souls were readily re-made to meet commercial opportunity. I was invited to participate in it at a reasonably high level, but since I knew more interesting ways to waste a life I kept clear of it.

Since everything else in O'Donoghue's uncritical review is adulatory, his intention can hardly have been to disparage. Is it that Foster is envied for being out there in the commercial world among the hacks, even though as an amateur, while so many others, perhaps with greater talents, remain confined within academic cloisters? It would certainly be in accordance with the spirit of the age if academics who remain merely professional should envy and admire those who become commercial, even in Oxford.

(I looked to see if O'Donoghue himself had a book out amongst the ***hoi polloi,*** and saw he had a ***Literary Guide To Ireland*** in the book lists, published three years ago. When I couldn't find it in the bookshops, I contacted the publisher, who said it had not actually been published and that there is no immediate intention to publish it).

There ***is*** a strong flavour of hack writing in Foster's ***Irish Story***—even a flavour of desperation. Since he knows where his next dinner is coming from, I assumed the reason was that he sensed that he had almost run his course as the universally-admired historian of Ireland, and that he was hitting out wildly in all directions in order to ward off the feeling that the ground was shifting under him. But even though Dublin 4 imitates London, London is a very different proposition indeed from Dublin 4. It is the difference between the organ grinder and the monkey.

A review of Foster's book, by Thomas Bartlett of UCD, was published in the ***Times Literary Supplement*** on 25th January 2002. Bartlett is an authentic historian, while Foster is a kind of media

performer. The review leaves Foster without a shred of credibility. Nothing like it has been, or perhaps could be, carried by an Irish literary publication. It shows the vast difference, which has always existed, between England itself and hand-me-down West Britishness. The media performer, the mountebank, the Oxford propagandist—was taken apart by an authentic historian.

It was an act of great cruelty—as any genuine review of such stuff had to be. And I gather that Foster tried to put the law on Bartlett and the TLS. Grub Street's finest scurried back to the cloisters and tried to restore his professorial dignity with a writ. Although he loved the kitchen he couldn't stand the heat. (See next page).

Brendan Clifford (IPR, April 2002)

STICKING TO THE PAST

by Thomas Bartlett, Professor of Irish History, UCD.

This latest work from the "most brilliant and courageous Irish historian of his generation" (as the blurb has it) consists of twelve essays, thematically linked "by a preoccupation with the way Irish history, biography and memoir are refracted through narratives of one kind or another". Eight of the essays have been published elsewhere since 1995; the remaining four are lectures. In sum, they provide an arresting, though ultimately disheartening, meditation on the current state of Irish history-writing, and they offer a sardonic comment on the role of the Irish historian in the recent commemorations of the Famine and the 1798 Rebellion.

In "The Story of Ireland", Foster's inaugural lecture as Carroll Professor of Irish History at Oxford University, he focuses on the Irish narrative as revealed in the nineteenth century, notably in the work of A. M. Sullivan, who published his ***Story of Ireland*** in 1867, but also in the books of Standish O'Grady, who wrote his rival ***Story of Ireland*** in 1894. Sullivan's rendition was essentially a morality tale - suffering, bondage, resistance, betrayal, resurrection and triumph pass the baton from one to the other - and the book, Foster writes, "supplied the canon of Irish history as taught for generations by the Christian Brothers".

Foster has much fun ticking off the various canonical episodes in this work - the victim deceived, the hero returns, the hero betrayed, and so on - and measuring them against the criteria identified by the Russian structuralist, Vladimir Propp, as constituting the morphology of the fairy tale. O'Grady's ***Story*** was, if anything, even more bizarre, being virulently anti-nationalist as if to atone for any encouragement his earlier work may have given to "the cause", and arguing that what would now be labelled the "catastrophic dimension" to Irish history was, in fact, not severe enough for the Irish. Typically, Foster has some sympathy with the latter view; alternative viewpoints are to be encouraged, if only for their provocative impact.

Oddly, what is missing from this essay is, first, any sense of a historic narrative shape to Irish history, and second any reference to any historiography other than to that of Ireland. One would like to see, for example, how the hugely influential ***Foras Feasa ar Eirinn*** (Compendium of Wisdom about Ireland) by the seventeenth-century Irish historian Geoffrey Keating was adapted to fit the needs of nineteenth century writers such as Sullivan and O'Grady.

And what of the historiographies of other new states such as Poland and Czechoslovakia?

Irish history-writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries looks exceptional only because the silent comparison is always with British historiography, and this comparison is wholly invalid. That said, Foster's main argument is a good one: all national narratives necessarily involve elements of occlusion, elision and, of course, amnesia, but what he calls the "Irish propensity to therapeutic forgetting" is surely an optical illusion produced by too insular a perspective.

These general points on memory, myth and imagination are pursued throughout the rest of the pieces in this volume: three on Yeats, one on Elizabeth Bowen, one on Foster's mentor, F. S. L. Lyons, one on Hubert Butler, and one on Trollope. Each of them demonstrates Foster's mastery of the literary/historical essay: close attention to text and context, careful reading of the subjects' autobiographies and forensic interrogation

of their creative writings in order to reveal the competing fictional narratives constructed by them to meet present needs.

It is when Foster moves into present-day Ireland that his touch deserts him; regrettably, the measured tone of the scholar yields to the stridency of the polemicist. Thus, the "supposed secularisation of Irish society", claims Foster, is shown as bogus, because last year an unidentified "confessionally-minded Dublin history lecturer" at an unidentified "Dublin institution of higher education" had his first-year students study extracts from history textbooks and asked them to guess the religion of the author, "and therefore their supposed bias". None of this is footnoted or even loosely sourced; and this reviewer has never heard of such an experiment (however interesting it might prove).

Foster's next target is those, yet again unnamed; "born-again, newly-Irish, Eng. Lit. academics" whom he attacks for having "got in on the act" of Famine commemoration. So much for "Ireland of the Welcomes". So far as the Northern Troubles are concerned, we are soberly informed that "the nightmare has receded... hopes are raised again and again, we are no longer looking over the brink", an assertion that serves as a salutary reminder that historians should stick to the past and leave the present to journalists.

Foster next turns his attention to atrocities during the 1798 Rebellion, and to what he sees as the willingness of certain Irish historians - "commemorationists" - to airbrush sectarian killings, such as the massacre of over 100 government supporters by rebels at Scullabogue, Co Wexford, from the new narrative of the events of the summer of that year. Foster's concerns about the rage for commemoration and the historian's role in it are signalled earlier in the book when he contemplates the 150th anniversary of the Irish Famine. Commemoration, he feels, is a "marketing and packaging" exercise from which the "complexities and paradoxes" of Irish history are elided, and the Famine anniversary in 1995-7 has confirmed his fears. This was a time, he tells us, when "post-traumatic stress disorder stalked the land and buried memories were indiscriminately exhumed". There was much talk of "survivor guilt", "coffin ships" were reconstructed, and Tony Blair was made to apologise.

Worse, in response to the "big business" of commemoration, some "Irish historians have been increasingly presenting their wares for a popular audience", and some "who had written judicious theses on the Famine, turned their findings into books for the popular market, often turning up the blame to a markedly strident level". All of this elicits "a faint shiver"' from the fastidious Foster (editor of the successful ***Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland).*** Similarly, American politicians "in search of the ethnic Vote" had the Famine "defined as genocide" in certain states and put on the curriculum of "Holocaust Studies".

Here, Foster's derision may be rather mis-placed. In his ***Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*** (1988), the Irish Famine is explicitly referred to as a "holocaust" (page 324); in the subsequent American and paperback editions, no doubt for very good reasons, the h-word was silently excised and replaced by "catastrophe". In the volume under review, the Famine is referred to as "an unparalleled and apocalyptic catastrophe".

It is, however, the commemoration of the 1798 Rebellion which attracts Professor Foster's most withering remarks. The essay entitled "Remembering 1798" is an unwieldy one. Part of it is a discussion about the impact of the 1898 anniversary of the Rebellion on W. B. Yeats and others. His point here is a good one, though scarcely novel: in large measure, the roots of Easter Week 1916 can be traced to the groups and organisations that came together in 1898 to remember 1798.

Another part of the essay is a narrative of the 1798 Rebellion itself which will add little to our knowledge of that event. This segment is surprisingly marred by a string of cliches (dogs bark early, late or don't bark at all), and, worse, by inaccuracy and inconsistency.

Someone called David Baillie Fox, we are told, wrote a "first-hand description" of the impact of the "pacification" of Ulster in 1797 which is "worth remembering". In fact, what is worth remembering is that this account was written by David Baillie Warden (his ***nom de guerre*** was William Fox) and also that he has nothing whatsoever to say about the results of government actions in 1797; and though Foster states that Warden is "not much quoted" by "commemorationists", this reviewer in 1996 cited the precise passage that Foster cites.

There is a further puzzle here in Foster's use of this text. Warden wrote his account in the United States, whither he had fled after the Rebellion. He dedicated it to the "brave republican", while attacking the "cringing loyalist" and the "neutral time-server". There is no hint of regret or repentance, much less remorse, in his apologia for his actions in 1798. His account provides no support for any of Foster's remarks about the centrality of sectarianism: so why is he praising it?

From inaccuracy to inconsistency. Those historians who cite Miles Byrne's version of the rebellion in Wexford are rebuked for doing so, even though, a few pages earlier, Foster praises Byrne's writings as "perhaps the most useful first-hand account of all". For the most part, however, this essay is taken up with a denunciation of fellow Irish historians for having anything to do with '' commercialised theme-park history ". Foster quotes from a rather bland, platitude-filled, six-point "Mission statement on 1798", a briefing document allegedly put out (once again, no source is given) by a government committee in 1997, and delivered to "relevant civil servants and diplomats". Foster gleefully claims that he was tempted to add a seventh point: "Don't talk about the war", and he concludes: "Certainly the historians retained by the government for the purposes of commemoration, and sent forth on mission, acted up to the mark."

To this sad charge, I can only echo Standish O' Grady's "were you momentarily mad, or living in London, when you wrote this?" As one of those historians "retained" by the Irish Government, my explicit remit was to deliver a lecture on the express subject of "the war" in the summer of 1798. True, I did not spend my twenty minutes discussing the sectarian atrocity at Scullabogue. but I did mention it; and I did not dismiss the incident by reference to collective suicide or spontaneous combustion. Instead, I suggested that in a sectarian state, in a fevered sectarianised atmosphere, and in the aftermath of a calamitous military defeat for the rebels at the Battle of New Ross, such appalling things were all too likely to occur.

I also suggested that the sectarian nature of the rebellion in Antrim and Down might repay examination - not just Catholic versus Protestant, but Presbyterian against Anglican. It is simply nonsense to say that sectarianism was deliberately ignored. In 1998, as in 1798, reliance on second-hand reports, gossip and hearsay has proved to be not the best way to gain accurate information.

It is the duty of the historian of Ireland, whether Irish or of any other nationality, to explain to audiences of all types, not just academic but "popular" and "newly Irish" as well, what he or she is about, and to enter into discussion with them. It is simply not good enough for Professor Foster to assail those Irish historians who attempt to reach out beyond the ivory tower in order to inform and educate the wider public. For Irish historians to fail to do so would mean

inevitably conceding "Irish history" and "commemoration" to the crank, to the monomaniac and to those who are agenda-driven and politically engaged. So far as 1798 and 1998 are concerned, what this means in practice is contemplating the meaning of a sectarian attack such as the petrol bombing of a Catholic house in south Belfast which occurred in August 1976 and which is never noticed in the literature of the "Troubles" or, for that matter, of the 1798 Rebellion. In March 1977, five young men were sentenced for their part in that act of "criminal, religious bigotry", as the judge described it. The names of four of the five youths are not significant: the fifth, however, bore the name of the Presbyterian United Irish leader: Henry Joy McCracken. That is the Irish story; and I'm not making it up.

(From The Times Literary Supplement, 25.1.2002)

*

V A R I E T I E S O F I R I S H N E S S

Bernard O'Donoghue enjoys a retelling of Irish history

Foster's arrival at Hertford ten years ago as the inaugural holder of the Carroll Professorship of Irish history is one of the University's most rejoiced-over triumphs in recent times. As one might hope from a writer active in literary as well as historical fields, Foster is also a brilliant essayist whose elegant acerbity of style and forceful views make him an unfailingly compelling controversialist, in the best historian's tradition. His much praised 1993 collection ***Paddy and Mr. Punch: Connections in Irish and English History*** included an essay called 'Varieties of Irishness', encapsulating the pluralism he is committed to. His greatest scorn (and he can be withcringly scornful) is reserved for those who disqualify writers such as Elizabeth Bowcn from 'Irishness'. Foster is passionate in his defence of the right of such Anglo-Irish writers to say, in the words of Iris Murdoch when she was 'struggling in the tragic grip of Alzheimer's disease', 'Who am I? Well, I'm Irish anyway - ***that's something.'***

The Irish Story is a pretty sustained attack on the monolithic version of Irish history, which Foster sees as most destructive of his pluralist ideal: a version in which Irish-English relations are not at all symbiotic and according to which Irish history is a long struggle to remove English influence altogether. In the new self-consciously cosmopolitan Ireland this is something of a dead issue, as Foster acknowledges, but it remains the historian's task to reconstruct earlier history in all its untidiness, rather than to reconstruct the past as we would like it to have been. Foster sees his project as writing back into Irish history the events, and more importantly the people, that the more streamlined nationalist story has cut out.

A major figure is the historian F S L Lyons, upon whose early death Foster succeeded as Yeats's biographer. Other heroes of this tradition are Hubert Butler and Bowen, again. The double-dyed antiheroes are Frank McCourt and Gerry Adams, both of whose versions of Irish childhood are seen as selective and - in the terms of Foster's subtitle - 'made up', deleting elements of the past at will. Amongst the literary heroes, Trollope is pre-eminent, though it must be said that Foster's attempt to justify his intolerable view of the Irish Famine betrays 'Matilda's aunt' syndrome: the effort nearly kills him. The writing has brilliance and acidic wit. This is Grub Street at its finest, and enormously illuminating history. The reader is borne along by the style and force of the polemic, and only at the end do you realise just how much you have learned that you didn't know before. It is another sparkling Foster success, provoking thought and protest and amusement in a finely controlled amalgam.

Bernard O'Donoghue in Tutor in English at Wadham College

(From 'Oxford Today', Hilary Term, 2002)

ROY FOSTER,

FEAR NA MÉARACÁN, (THIMBLERIGGER).

An earlier version of this item first appeared in 'Feasta', August 1996; translation by Molly Stack and published with permission of the editor.

I was reading the February 1995 issue of ***Netguide*** and I came across this:-

"The Reich Stuff.

'The Holocaust never happened!'

'Yes, it did, and here's proof.'

The decades-old fight against the hate and lies of the Nazis has found fertile ground on the Internet. A dedicated cadre of researchers and scholars, led by Vancouver, Canada, resident Ken McVay, compiles and posts proof against the wild claims of the online neo-Nazis and anti-Semites.

Three years ago, the 52 year old McVay began collecting facts that disproved the revisionists' claims for his own use. Recently, he made the information available via a listserv-an automatic mailer that responds to requests sent via e-mail. He also posts the information to the alt.revisionist Usernet newsgroup, where many of these neo-Nazi congregate.

McVay calls his enemies inept researchers and incompetent liars. 'One of them posted a message that he'd found a news story in this old magazine about some Jewish politician making claims of a mass extermination of Jews after World War 1. The guy claimed this was a lie the Jews pulled out of their hat after each war.

It took us months to track done this magazine and when we found it - it'd been out of print for 50-60 years - the article said nothing of the sort."

That reminded me of Roy Foster and his book ***Paddy and Mr. Punch,*** (London, 1993), where I had noticed the following. At the start of the book he is attacking the independent Irish historians and, on the page 15, his attack on Alice Stopford Green includes the following scntence:-

"If, however, Mrs. Green was fooled by what a later historian has crisply called 'the concoctions of the Annals', she had a real and immediate reason for being thus fooled; the desire to establish a legitimate continuity for Irish separatism."

And for the reference, the reader is directed to note 75 on page 313 which says:-

"J. V. Kelleher, 'Irish History and Pseudo-History', pp. 120-22, for the case against the 'Book of Rights' and other sources as twelfth-century creations. 'So extensive was the revision of historical evidence that we have, I would say, about as much chance of recovering the truth about early Christian Ireland as a historian five hundred years from now would have if he were trying the reconstruct the history of Russia in the twentieth century from broken sets of different editions of the Soviet Encyclopedia."

This is a comprehensive condemnation of the sources for early Irish history and of the writers who have used these sources.

But it is not easy to check the reference. I think this is the only note in the book where Foster does not give place and date of publication. If it were an article in a journal the name of the periodical and the volume reference would be given. So, if you look for this book, you won't find it.

Kelleher never wrote a book or an article with the title "Irish History and Pseudo-History", a title which implies a deep and wide-ranging critical analysis of Irish historians and historiography.

The student will have to give up and accept Foster's word for it that Kelleher showed that the sources for early Irish history are mostly invention.

But hold a while! In 1963 John V. Kelleher published an article "Early Irish History and Pseudo-History" in ***Studia Hibernica,*** vol. 3, pp. 113-127. This is the source Foster is abusing.

John V. Kelleher was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, in 1916 and he was for a long time professor of Irish studies in Harvard University. He is a gentleman who is highly respected as a scholar and a poet. Dolmen published a collection of his work in 1979, ***Too small for stove wood, too big for kindling - collected verse and translations.***

Kelleher thinks - 'my own belief - that Brian Boru was the first High King of Ireland and that there is not a strong historical basis for the proposition that there were High Kings before Brian Boru. He thinks that there was political re-writing in the evidence for the early High Kings and it is to this alone he refers when he says '...most of you are familiar with that concocted tradition...' This is a historical question which is not yet settled and Kelleher is simply laying out his own theory, as he makes quite clear.

In the other sentence, Kelleher did not write 'about as much chance of recovering the truth' but 'about as much chance of recovering the whole truth' and he continues, in the same paragraph:-
"Not that the historian's task would be quite hopeless. Eighty or ninety percent of the information in the encyclopedias would be sound enough. In the annals too we shall find that most of the information, at least from the early seventh century on, is reliable, because it is about matters with which the revisionists were not concerned. But everything that deals with the kingship of Tara, particularly in the early centuries, or with the rise or the identity of the Ui Neill, or with the two chief ecclesiastical centres in Ireland, Armagh and Clonmacnoise, can only be regarded with wary suspicion. No doubt even a large portion of this information is genuine. It will, however, be a long while before we shall be able to say with confidence what is reliable and what has been tampered with or falsified."

Far from 'crisply' dismissing the Annals as 'concoctions' Kelleher is saying the opposite,that they are mostly reliable 'at least from the early seventh century on.' No wonder it is difficult to track down Foster's 'source' when what he is doing is using Kelleher's name to give false authority to his own propaganda.

The revisionists say that these are but small points and that no notice should be taken of them. But in my opinion, if Foster misrepresents a scholar's work and fumbles the references, then it is important for Irish people to correct him. Throughout the world, Foster's books, published by the Oxford University Press, Allen Lane and Penguin press, are presented as reliable works on the history of Ireland. As an Englishman said in the 16th century 'it were better that we had the exposition of our quarrel with these people'. That was then, it is the same now, and will it be always so?

The Carroll Foundation made money available to fund a professorship of Irish history in Oxford, England, and in 1991 Foster was appointed the first professor. But his cavalier approach to Irish history is astonishing. Someone who uses these methods is not concerned with writing history, he is up to something else.

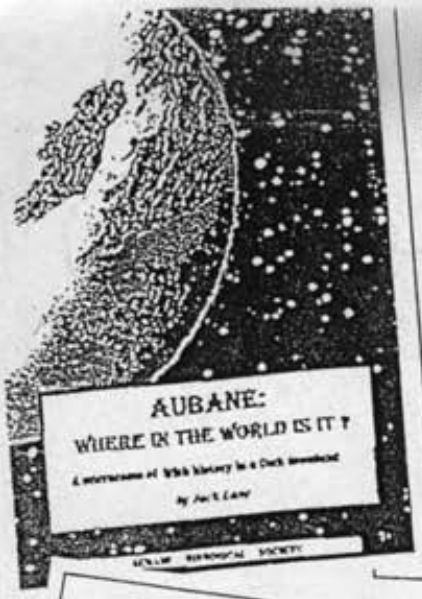
Seoirse O Luasa

I N D E X

RTE APOLOGY, 9th MARCH 2002.

"RTE and Declan Kiberd regret that a comment made on the 'Off the Shelf' programme was broadcast on the 23 rd of February 2002 caused offence to the Aubane Historical Society in North Cork. This was not our intention and we sincerely apologise.

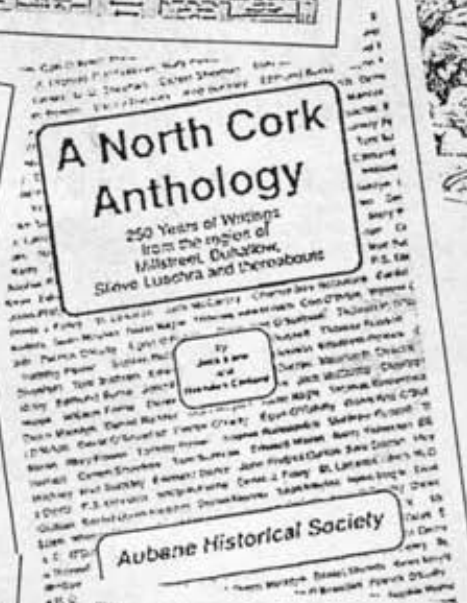
The Aubane Historical Society has published a wide range of material on national and local history including material on major historical figures like Parnell and Thomas Davis and writers Canon Sheehan and Elizabeth Bowen."


AUBANE:
WHERE IN THE WORLD IS IT ?


Cork Free Press
In the context of the Parnell Split
restructuring of Ireland 1890-1910

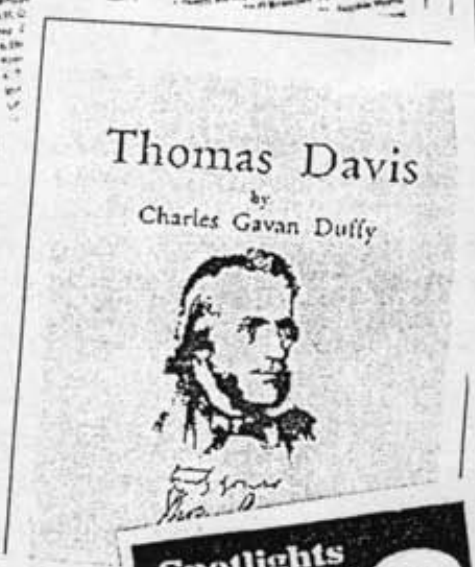

"Millstreet -
the cockpit of Ireland"
God save Ireland

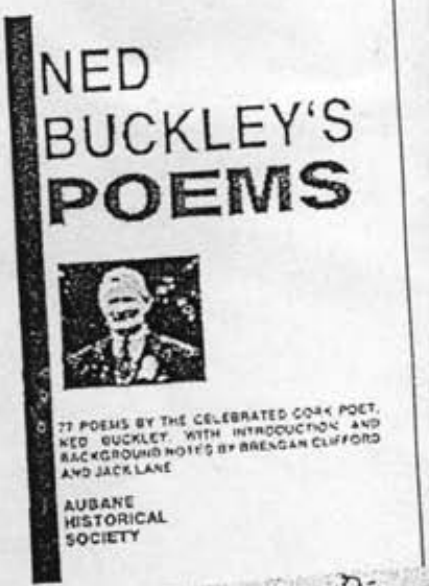

NOTES ON
THE HISTORY
OF MILLSTREET


A North Cork
Anthology
250 Years of Writing
from the region of
Millstreet, Duhallow,
Slieve Luachra and thereabouts
Aubane Historical Society


Elizabeth Bowen
"Notes On Eire"


RED NATION
Selections: 1842-1844
Reprints from the paper that
created Modern Ireland
Aubane Historical Society


Thomas Davis
by
Charles Gavan Duffy


NED
BUCKLEY'S
POEMS
77 POEMS BY THE CELEBRATED CORK POET,
NED BUCKLEY, WITH INTRODUCTION AND
BACKGROUND NOTES BY BRENDAN CLIFFORD
AND JACK LANE
AUBANE
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY


Kilmichael:
The False Surrender
a discussion by
with
Why The Ballot Was Followed
By The Bullet
by


Canon Sheehan:
A Turbulent Priest
Brendan Clifford


Spotlights
on
Irish History
by
Brendan Clifford
Talks Given At
Duhallow Heritage Centre
Aubane Historical Society


Dánta
Piarais
Feiritéir
Poems