

strenuously against early Western anti-Soviet policies. He learned, partly under the tutelage of his friend and sometime-lover Margaret Sanger, the importance of feminism to any vision claiming to be humanistic. To the end of his life, he identified himself as a socialist, but his brand of socialism was rather like the Protestantism of another great Englishman, John Milton—a church of one. In most undoctinaire fashion, he identified America, not Russia, as the country that held the best hope for a humane society. The evils of capitalism, he allowed, could never be as awful as those of Marxist communism.

Wells dies halfway through the book. The second half begins with a detailed account of his father's parents, their cramped working-class life in Bromley, England, and the struggles of young H. G. to enter the literary-intellectual world. This break with straightforward narrative does not jar. Indeed, it helps West contrast the public man, "Wells," who did so many things and influenced so many people, with the private man, "my father," the driven and sometimes confused individual whose internal conflicts make such a compelling story.

The immensely readable business of bringing "Wells" and "my father" together—the business of *Aspects of a Life*—involves some diverting, occasionally nasty, bits of biographical revision and chitchat. Henry James, with whom Wells had a famous feud over the political responsibilities of the novelist, is here presented as an autocratic bully quite different from the pure and selfless artist championed by university departments of English. George Bernard Shaw, who promoted and then undermined Wells's influence in the Fabian Society, fares scarcely better.

As interesting as such tidbits are, the whole of this book exceeds the sum of its parts. Its anecdotal style is as carefully and deceptively contrived as that of a novel such as Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760). And what it gives us in the end is a three-dimensional portrait of a man and writer who deserves no less.

—Frank McConnell, '78

**PARTNERS IN
REVOLUTION:
The United Irishmen
and France**

by Marianne Elliott
Yale, 1982
411 pp. \$30

Between the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 and the Easter Rising of the Irish Volunteers in 1916, the supremacy of the London government in the British Isles faced only two serious internal military challenges. The first was the Scottish Jacobite Rebellion of 1745; the second, the Irish Rebellion of 1798. Often ignored among the great political upheavals of the late 18th century, the Irish uprising was, as Elliott, a historian at Swansea's University College, demonstrates, very much a part of the wider international movement of reform.

The rank-and-file Irish insurgents of this rebellion were predominantly Catholics and thought of their struggle as being, at least in part, anti-Protestant. Yet, ironically, most of the leaders were Protestants—and

therefore of the ruling or at least of the politically enfranchised castes of 18th-century Ireland. Inspired by the ideals and examples of the French, American, and (17th-century) English revolutions, the leaders, many of them members of the United Irish Society, actively sought the aid of the French in their fight for independence from Britain. For a short time, it appeared as though Ireland might gain autonomy. To the British and their allies then struggling against Napoleon, it seemed frighteningly possible that Ireland would become an ally of France.

Elliott focuses on the activities of the United Irishmen, an organization founded in 1791 in Belfast by Wolfe Tone and other Protestant lawyers, professionals, and merchants. The society's goal at first was parliamentary reform; their means, writes Elliott, "the union of the Irish people." (Tone had himself penned a brilliantly conciliatory essay aimed at unifying Protestants and Catholics against excessive English influence in Ireland.) The Society quickly became a classic revolutionary leadership, more adept at international intrigue in London, Paris, Hamburg, and Philadelphia than at organizing or leading Irish peasants. Its members were not social revolutionaries seeking land reform but political revolutionaries attempting to restore the principles of the "ancient constitution" abandoned by the English rulers. They preferred moderate liberal thinkers, John Locke or Adam Smith, to such radicals as the French socialist François Babeuf.

Elliott traces the rebellion from its roots in the conspiratorial society gatherings during the early 1790s through the ill-organized explosion of 1798. Her devastating documentation of rebel incompetence and occasional brutality is balanced by her picture of the British government's unfortunate dependence on ill-disciplined local Protestant Irish militias. Perhaps 50,000 Catholic Irishmen—most of them noncombattants—were slain during the brutal uprising that followed the rebellion. The last chapters of Elliott's narrative follow the United Irishmen into exile. The tale is one of "frustration, bitterness, internal bickering, and ultimate disenchantment with French promises. . . ."

Subsequent independence movements in Ireland enjoyed little Protestant support. Today, with Eire free, and Northern Ireland torn by sectarian strife, Irish republicanism is no longer a generous, liberal, or international movement. It has become the narrow, murderous, and chauvinistic Provisional Irish Republican Army of Ulster.

—Tom Garvin