*"We are the young Europeans," boasts Ireland's Industrial Development Authority. When this Kerryman was photographed a century ago, continuing emigration threatened to make Ireland a country populated chiefly by old people and children. Today's young Irish adults are staying home.*

# The Irish

Mention Bolivia or Belgium to the average American adult, and the conversation will soon flag. Bring up Ireland, and the talk will always find a focus. Yeats? Killarney? Guinness? Associations generously tumble forth. Some 40 million Americans have Irish blood in their veins; five times that many, it seems, believe they can imitate an Irish brogue. Often overlooked—veiled, perhaps, by an assumed familiarity—is how *un*familiar to most Americans the Republic of Ireland really is. The Republic is, today, a Common Market member with some 20th-century problems, some 21st-century industries, and some abiding (if eroding) 19th-century attitudes. As Britain's Prime Minister William Gladstone noted a century ago, the behavior of the English toward the Irish constituted the darkest stain upon the history of a splendid people. As continued strife in Northern Ireland attests, old passions remain. Our contributors here focus on the Republic of Ireland—on its past and its present—and on the peculiar Irish immigrant experience in America.

# TROUBLES

## *by Thomas C. Garvin*

Nature placed Ireland exactly the wrong distance from Great Britain.

Had the island been somewhat closer to its larger sister, the Irish people might well have become more fully assimilated into the British family, much as the Scots and Welsh have been. Had Ireland been placed farther out in the Atlantic, it might have been allowed to develop in relative peace, as Iceland was, without the incessant interference of a powerful neighbor.

As it happened, Ireland was just close enough to keep London obsessed with the island's potential in wartime as a back door to the British Isles, a door that the Spanish, French, and Germans, in succession, sought to open. On the other hand, Ire-

land was always remote enough to sustain its people's sense of separation, just far enough away to ensure that strong nationalist sentiment, once rooted, would survive. As Dominic Behan put it:

> The Sea, oh the sea, *is a gradh geal mo chroi**
> Long may it stay between England and me;
> It's a sure guarantee that some hour we'll be free,
> Oh! thank God we're surrounded by water!

This may be bad poetry, but it is fairly decent political science.

For eight centuries, Ireland has been half in and half out of British affairs, much as England has always been half in and half out of Europe. While the Irish may sometimes be loath to admit it, the fact is that the British, from Tudor times forward, created modern Ireland. If Northern Ireland's peculiar status and sectarian violence are both legacies of British rule, so too is the political unity among the 26 counties that today constitute the Republic of Ireland.

Ireland was originally settled by various peoples who sailed over from Britain (the place of origin emphasized by anglophile archaeologists) and the European mainland (according to Irish scholars of a more nationalist bent) beginning around 7,000 B.C. They found a green, heavily forested island ringed by coastal mountains of spectacular beauty. The climate, though undeniably wet, was nevertheless mild, warmed by the tail of the Gulf Stream.

During the first millennium B.C., the arrival of the aggressive, inventive, Gaelic-speaking Celts, warriors and skilled craftsmen, gave the island a new set of masters. From the mixing of peoples ensued Ireland's first golden age, which survives in the form of powerful epic poetry and intricate, abstract designs wrought in stone and precious metals.

While Rome extended its sway over the rest of Europe, the Irish remained on the periphery. Unlike the Franks, the Goths, and even the Huns, they were never tutored by the Romans in the arts of government. It was an important lesson to have

*Roughly translated from the Irish, "bright love of my heart."

*Thomas C. Garvin, 41, a former Wilson Center Fellow, is professor of political science at the National University of Ireland at University College, Dublin. Born in Dublin, he received his B.A. in history and politics from University College (1964) and his Ph.D. in political science from the University of Georgia (1974). He is the author of* The Irish Senate *(1969) and* The Evolution of Irish Nationalist Politics *(1981).*

missed. Ireland for centuries remained the domain of dozens of petty local kings, each presiding over a *tuath*, or tribe. Because kingship was elective, Ireland's tribal monarchies were continually rent by factional strife. They also warred among themselves, frequently over the possession of cows, the basic unit of wealth. The greatest epic of the so-called Heroic Age is the anonymous *Táin Bó Cúailnge*—in English, *The Cattle Raid of Cooley*—which recounts a protracted dispute between the rival courts of Ulster and Connaught.

Ireland was Christianized during the fifth century A.D., mainly by missionaries from Britain, one of whom may have been named Patrick. As barbarian hordes overran the Roman Empire, Irish Christianity was left on Europe's edge to develop in its own peculiar way, with strong pagan undertones.

The conversion of Ireland turned out to have been a decisive event in the history of the West. In that unlikely haven, safe from the depredations visited on Italy and Gaul, Irish monks tended the embers of civilization. When relative peace returned to Europe, during the sixth and seventh centuries, Irish monks such as Columcille and Columban fanned out across Britain and the Continent, spurring the revival of both Christianity and learning. Back home, the Catholic Church continued to foster the arts: This is the age that produced the silver Ardagh chalice, the carved high cross at Ahenny, the brilliantly illuminated *Book of Kells*.

## Invaders

The Irish monasteries, virtually sovereign within their vast domains, became quite wealthy. They were also quite defenseless and, hence, an irresistible target. Sailing their dragon ships out of the fjords of Scandinavia, the pagan Northmen plundered and burned their first Irish monastery in A.D. 795. The sporadic Viking raids of the early years would grow by the mid-ninth century into a savage, sustained assault. Wrote a ninth-century monk with relief at the prospect of a reprieve: "Bitter is the wind tonight, / White the tresses of the sea; / I have no fear the Viking hordes / Will sail the seas on such a night."

Even in the face of Viking invasion, the Gaelic chieftains rarely put aside their differences. Once, late in the 10th century, a Munster tribal king, Brian Boru (the surname means "tribute of cows"), managed to array most of the other Irish kings behind him. He engaged the Northmen and defeated them decisively at Clontarf, north of the Viking city-state of Dublin, on Good Friday, 1014. Even then, it was a less-than-pure victory: Two-thirds of the Viking force consisted of disgruntled Irish Leinstermen.

**IRELAND**

RATHLIN ISLAND

North Channel

Atlantic Ocean

Letterkenny

DONEGAL

Lifford

NORTHERN IRELAND (U.K.)

Donegal

ULSTER

Belfast

Sligo

SLIGO

MAYO

LEITRIM

MONAGHAN

Dundalk

ACHILL ISLAND

Cavan

CAVAN

LOUTH

Castlebar

ROSCOMMON

LONG FORD

Longford

Drogheda

Irish Sea

CONNAUGHT

Mullingar

MEATH

Dublin

GALWAY

Athlone

WESTMEATH

Galway

OFFALY

Tullamore

DUBLIN

ARAN ISLANDS

KILDARE

Wicklow

CLARE

LAOIS

WICKLOW

Ennis

TIPPERARY

CARLOW

Kilkenny

LEINSTER

Limerick

KIL-KENNY

LIMERICK

WEXFORD

Wexford

Tralee

MUNSTER

Waterford

Killarney

WATERFORD

KERRY

CORK

Kenmare

Cork

Bantry

0   miles   50

Nor did Brian's achievement endure. He was slain at Clontarf and his jerrybuilt Kingdom of Ireland died with him. Thereafter, Ireland remained fragmented, with the most powerful families—such as the O'Briens of Munster, the O'Neills of Ulster, the O'Connors of Connaught—vying for possession of the mainly symbolic title *árd rí* (high king).

In retrospect, the most fateful invasion of the island was not that of the Vikings, who eventually settled down, but that of their cousins, the Normans. The Vikings had their good points: They founded most of Ireland's major cities, introduced coinage,

and turned the island's eastern ports into key junctions in the web of West European trade. What the Normans did was to bind Ireland, for the first time in history, to Britain. It was an ill-fated relationship.

From France, the Normans—Gallicized Norsemen—had steadily worked their way across England and Wales during the century after William the Conqueror's victory at the Battle of Hastings in 1066. In 1169, a small Anglo-Norman expedition landed in County Wexford, in response to an invitation from the King of Leinster, Dermot MacMurrough, to take his side in a local, factional squabble. Led by an adventurer named Richard FitzGilbert de Clare—better known as Strongbow—the Normans with their longbows and their steel body armor soon conquered large areas of Ireland.

Today, outside of Ulster (where distance and native Gaelic resolve proved too formidable), the conquest is marked by the hundreds of square stone castles built by Norman earls to consolidate their rule—picturesque redoubts atop grassy hills, now awaiting capture by Ireland's latest invader, the American tourist, on film.

## Beyond the Pale

Ireland became an Anglo-Norman dominion. England's King Henry II spent Christmas in Dublin in 1171, asserting his right, and that of his English successors, to the "lordship of Ireland." The principle, at least, was established. But Ireland was separated from England by a turbulent sea. Many Gaelic chieftains refused to submit. Copying Norman weaponry and tactics, they retained considerable autonomy. Aristocratic Normans, for their part, displayed a tendency to "go native." They adopted the Irish language and often married the daughters of prominent Gaelic nobles. The area effectively controlled by London's viceroys shrank over the centuries to a small, semicircular region around Dublin, called "the Pale." In a broad swath "beyond the Pale" lay the estates of the Gaelicized Norman lords, many having little real allegiance to the king of England. Beyond that, especially in the provinces of Connaught and Ulster, the Normanized Gaelic chieftains held sway. Late-medieval Ireland was a confusing amalgam of dozens of jurisdictions, languages, laws, and loyalties.

All of that was to change, abruptly, with the consolidation of the Tudor state in England during the 16th century. Henry VIII and his heirs launched a vigorous "reconquest" of Ireland. By the end of Elizabeth I's reign, Ireland had been vanquished

militarily after a long series of ferocious campaigns. Ulster was the last to succumb, in 1603. London systematically set out to "de-Gaelicize" Ireland—to impose English law, an English landlord system, and (this being the era of the Reformation) English Protestantism. Henry VIII had broken with the Church of Rome in 1534. Because both the Gaels and the "Old English" aristocrats resisted the Reformation, they shared a common disaster as Ireland's farmland was transferred gradually during the 17th century from mostly Catholic to mostly Protestant hands. In Ulster, reliable colonists from England and Scotland settled on confiscated acreage. Across the country, empty Catholic churches and monasteries slowly collapsed into rubble.

### The 'Ascendancy'

During the next four centuries, the Irish attempted repeatedly to reverse the verdict of history. Plagued by disunity and indiscipline they failed every time, often at horrific cost.

A protracted rebellion during the 1640s was put down in 1649 by Oliver Cromwell, who ravaged the island for nine months. He began his campaign with the massacre of more than 2,000 civilians in Drogheda's Saint Peter's Church. "I am persuaded," he wrote, "that this is a righteous judgement of God upon those barbarous wretches." From Drogheda, Cromwell marched around the island, putting towns to the torch and Catholics to the sword. Between the outbreak of the uprising and Cromwell's departure, one-third of Ireland's population fell victim to bloodshed, disease, or starvation.

The English renewed their resettlement efforts. Thousands of new colonists from Scotland were transported to Ireland's northern province. These Ulster Protestants put down permanent roots, and their descendants today dominate the modern substate of Northern Ireland, a latter-day British Pale on the island. The Cromwellian settlements in the rest of Ireland never achieved such permanence.

The elevation of James II to the throne of England in 1685 offered Irish Catholics a last glimmer of hope. But the unpopular James, an avowed Catholic, was driven from England three years later. His attempted return, via Ireland, was thwarted by his Protestant son-in-law, William of Orange, who had been installed in Britain as King William III. In the hearts of Irish Catholics, the defeat of James's cause at the Battle of the Boyne, in 1690, would symbolize for centuries the final collapse of Irish medieval society, the political and cultural impotence of Catholic Ireland, and the domination by a new, landed Protestant "as-
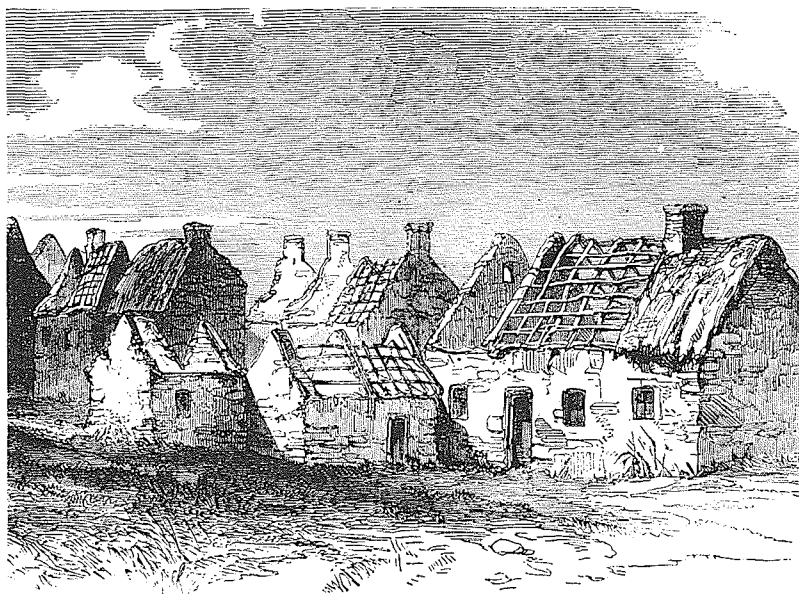
*The Famine's aftermath: Death and emigration emptied whole villages. "It is my opinion," concluded Sir Charles Trevelyan, head of Britain's Treasury, in 1847, "that too much has been done for the [Irish] people."*

cendancy" backed by British power.

Yet, between 1690 and 1800, Ireland experienced a second great cultural renaissance. It stemmed from the island's new elite—the few hundred thousand English-speaking Protestants and their dependents who now owned virtually all of Ireland's land. By the early 19th century, this ascendancy presided over an Irish-speaking, Catholic rural proletariat of four to five million, which lived in a virtual state of serfdom. A battery of Penal Laws was enacted by an Irish Parliament (subsidiary to Westminster's) between 1695 and 1727, creating, in effect, a system of ethnic-sectarian apartheid. Catholics were stripped of most civil rights. They were barred from elective office, the military, the civil service, and the legal profession. A Catholic could not acquire land from a Protestant, nor dispose of it as he wished at death. "Popish priests," ordained abroad, faced intermittent persecution.

The 18th century was a Protestant century in Ireland. Dublin, the old Viking trading center, became a great Georgian city, the second largest in the British Isles. The Anglo-Irish community produced an extraordinary group of writers and thinkers, including Bishop Berkeley, Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith,

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and Jonathan Swift. In the country-side, Palladian villas rose amid acres of formal gardens. Irish craftsmen became adept at blowing glass, weaving linen, hammering silver—still important industries in Ireland. The privileged few were cultured, content, all-powerful. In 1776, English visitor Arthur Young wrote that an Irish landlord "can scarcely invent an order which a servant, labourer, or cottier dares to refuse to execute."

Many Protestants came to feel they could run Ireland on their own, without England's support. A new kind of Irish nationalism—a Protestant nationalism—evolved during the 18th century. By 1782, in the wake of Britain's vain attempt to keep her American colonies, the Irish Parliament in Dublin had won more leeway from Westminster than it had ever before enjoyed. Inspired by the French Revolution, the United Irishmen society made its appearance during the 1790s, led by Protestants but supported by many (Catholic) agrarian secret societies and committed to breaking the connection with England.

### Courting Disaster

In 1798, a series of fierce but badly coordinated uprisings briefly shook the foundations of British rule. The upheaval was especially bloody in County Wexford, where a Catholic peasant army briefly overran Ireland's southeastern corner. Several hundred local Protestants were murdered before the rebels were themselves slaughtered by government troops. By the time order was restored, perhaps 50,000 people had perished, the bulk of them innocent civilians. Also gone was any hope that Protestants and Catholics in Ireland would ever again make common cause.

London, meanwhile, had by now had enough of Irish autonomy. In 1801, under the Westminster Parliament's Act of Union, Ireland became part of a British unitary state, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. The Irish Parliament was abolished. Henceforward, Ireland would send about 100 members of Parliament to the House of Commons in London. London would govern Ireland directly. The Catholic clergy and the small Catholic middle class of the period, horrified by the revolutionary excesses of the Catholic peasantry a few years earlier, acceded to the Act of Union. They hoped that Westminster would treat their religion more tolerantly than the propertied Protestants at home, galvanized into antipapist extremism by the terrors of 1798, were ever likely to do.

The Union endured from 1801 until 1922 and represented

the last and longest attempt by Britain to assimilate Ireland to itself. But Ireland never developed into a peaceful province of the United Kingdom.

For one thing, most of Ireland experienced no industrial revolution.* British businessmen were loath to invest money in the troubled isle. Much of Ireland was given over instead to grazing, producing beef and lamb for export to Britain. Most Irish people continued to live off the land. Many roamed the countryside, as itinerant laborers. The luckier ones farmed small plots leased from (often absentee) Protestant landlords. Meanwhile, the island's population grew and grew, doubling every generation, becoming ever more reliant for sustenance on a single crop, the potato. As population increased, rents rose, and the size of the average farm plot shrank. A tragedy was in the making, as one royal commission after another pointed out. But remedial steps were not taken.

## The 'Great Hunger'

Religion remained a divisive issue; that is a second reason why Union did not "take." Despite Westminster's promises, civil rights for Catholics did not follow from the Act of Union. Once Ireland had been subdued, London essentially forgot about the country. It required extended, nonviolent political campaigns by Daniel O'Connell and the Catholic clergy to pry even minor concessions out of Westminster.

A Catholic member of the Irish gentry, and a gifted orator, O'Connell led his countrymen in a Gandhi-esque crusade against the Penal Laws. Supported financially by the "Catholic rent"—a penny-a-month levy collected by priests from parishioners—O'Connell organized mass meetings in the countryside, terrifying landowners and mobilizing public opinion on behalf of Catholic emancipation. Britain's home secretary (later prime minister), Sir Robert Peel, commented on the "fearful exhibition of sobered and desperate enthusiasm" that O'Connell's followers displayed. In 1829, London gave O'Connell what he wanted. Henceforth, Catholics could be elected to Parliament; increasingly they were, as O'Connell taught the peasants how electoral politics was played. It was an extraordinary achievement.

O'Connell died in 1847, as Ireland was suffering a calamity that suddenly made politics seem irrelevant. The Great Famine is a third reason why Ireland never became another Scotland or

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*Only in Protestant Ulster did industrialization occur, mainly around the growing city of Belfast. The fact that it did helped to make most of the province's people, then as now, firm proponents of Union.

Wales. Beginning in 1845, and continuing for five years, the Irish potato crop failed, owing to a blight—*Phytophthora infestans*—that Victorian science was powerless to overcome. Eyewitness accounts of the Famine's horrors can be compared only to those of Hitler's Final Solution. At least 1.5 million Irish peasants died. Another million emigrated, mostly to the United States. In short order, between 1845 and 1855, Ireland lost about one-quarter of its population. Ireland's demographic history during the 19th century is truly catastrophic. In 1800, the population of the island was about 4.5 million. By 1845, it was nearly nine million. But by 1900, it was down to 4.7 million, and it declined further—to about 4.4 million—during the next half century.

While landlords and local authorities tried desperately to alleviate "the great hunger," the British government dragged its heels. The government of Lord John Russell failed to appreciate the magnitude of the disaster on what seemed still a remote and ever-troubled island. Wedded to laissez-faire economic policies, the British were, in any event, reluctant to tamper with the free operation of market forces. "It is not the intention at all to import food for the use of the people of Ireland," asserted the chancellor of the Exchequer in 1846. Ironically, despite the failure of the potato crop, there was always plenty of food in Ireland. The peasants simply could not afford to buy it. Ireland remained a net *exporter* of foodstuffs—mostly grain—throughout the Famine years.

### An Irish Nation?

The Holocaust was indirectly responsible for the creation of Israel; the Famine made possible an independent Irish state. It kindled a new and deeper form of Irish nationalism. It revived the ancient hatred of Great Britain. Finally, it transformed the character of Irish society. Post-Famine Ireland was very different from pre-Famine Ireland. The huge rural proletariat was gone. It was replaced by a peasantry that, thanks to the severe shortage of labor, soon acquired control of much of the land. Under the leadership of Paul Cardinal Cullen, Catholicism became a more highly bureaucratized, pietistic institution than ever before: The beads and scapulars, the holy pictures and statues, the pilgrimages—the whole public display of Irish Catholicism was introduced at this time.

The mainstay of the Catholic Church was now an expanding class of conservative, politically able, literate, and English-speaking independent farmers. Led by Charles Stewart Parnell (who fought in Parliament for Home Rule) and Michael Davitt

(whose Land League successfully agitated for fair rents and a curb on evictions), the Irish Catholics broke the Protestant ascendancy's monopoly on power and shattered many of its legal supports. One tactic employed by Davitt was passive resistance; tenants would refuse, en masse, to pay landlords their rent or provide essential services. (This approach was tried, successfully, on a certain Captain Charles Boycott, in County Mayo in 1880, enriching the English language in the process.) Irish-Americans generously supported such efforts—and others, including attempts by the clandestine Irish Republican Brotherhood to foment violent revolution.

In London's view, Irish-American involvement spelled trouble. Observed Sir William Harcourt, Britain's home secretary during the 1880s: "In former Irish rebellions the Irish were in Ireland. . . . We could reach their forces, cut off their reserves in men and money and then to subjugate was comparatively easy. Now there is an Irish nation in the United States, equally hostile, with plenty of money, absolutely beyond our reach and yet within ten days' sail of our shores."

By the turn of the century, Irish Catholics in Ireland had achieved substantial political and economic control of the island, excepting eastern Ulster. For the first time, the country



*The 1921 settlement between Dublin and London left much unresolved. Fifty years later, sectarian strife would flare in Northern Ireland. Above: Bloody Sunday, in Derry, January 1972. It ended with 13 civilians dead.*

possessed a cadre of politicians, clergy, labor leaders, and intel-
lectuals capable of leading Ireland to independence. A literary
revival was under way (see Background Books, pages 94–97). In
1912, the House of Commons passed a Home Rule Bill for Ire-
land, subject to approval by the House of Lords by the end of
1914 and bitterly opposed by Ulster Protestants. "Home Rule,"
they argued, was tantamount to "Rome Rule."

### Divisions and Resentments

The accident of World War I accelerated the pace of events.
Home Rule was put off indefinitely, angering the more extreme
Irish nationalists. In 1916, during Easter week, a paramilitary
nationalist group, the Irish Volunteers, staged a dramatic upris-
ing in Dublin and proclaimed a provisional government. British
troops restored order after a week of fierce fighting that left 450
dead, 2,600 wounded, and downtown Dublin badly battered.
The rebellion enjoyed relatively little popular support.

But Major General Sir John Maxwell's decision to execute 15
of the rebel leaders, over a period of nine days and after secret
trials, radically altered Irish opinion. Even as the victorious Allies
met at Versailles in 1919 to redraw the map of Europe, the British
found themselves fighting a nasty guerrilla war in Ireland against
the resurgent Irish Volunteers, now known popularly as the Irish
Republican Army (IRA). With deadly effectiveness, IRA gunmen
and "flying columns" targeted British soldiers, police agents, and
detectives. London responded by bolstering its forces with the no-
torious "Black and Tans"—mercenaries culled from the ranks of
British Army veterans—whose behavior the authorities in Lon-
don found it impossible to restrain.

"The troubles" dragged on until 1921, when London finally
agreed to partition. The provinces of Munster, Leinster, and
Connaught, and three of the Ulster province's nine counties—26
counties in all—became the effectively sovereign, and over-
whelmingly Catholic, Irish Free State, later renamed the Repub-
lic of Ireland. The rest of Ulster, its population predominantly
Protestant, remained part of the United Kingdom but acquired
its own Parliament.

A short but bitter civil war ensued, in which the forces of Ar-
thur Griffith's Free State government defeated the "fundamen-
talist" elements of the IRA, led by Eamon De Valera, who
opposed partition and any lingering constitutional association
with Britain. The Free State arrangement was ratified, in effect,
in 1923, when Irish voters gave Free State proponents a major-
ity of seats in the Dáil (Parliament).

The first truly independent government of Ireland, the first attempt ever on the island to forge something like a nation-state, was off to a very shaky start. On the plus side, owing to Britain's efforts during the preceding century, Irish leaders inherited a ready-made, well-developed administrative system. And the Irish people were highly literate, thanks both to the church and to a system of national schools that, 100 years earlier, Daniel O'Connell had pressed the British to create. But the population was also poor and deeply divided politically. The people's energies had been drained by a decade of war, reprisals, and executions that left few families untouched; the IRA continued to perpetrate occasional acts of terrorism.

"When all the shooting was finished, and all the dead were buried, and the politicians took over, what had you got left? A lost cause!" So reflected an old IRA partisan in 1980. Perhaps in one sense he was right. Ireland remains a divided isle; sectarian violence continues to flare; and in Ulster, Britain's long retreat from Ireland continues. At the same time, however, an independent, democratic Irish state in the rest of Ireland has managed to survive, even to prosper.

The Republic of Ireland today is not the kind of country most Americans think it is. Neither is it the kind of country its founders hoped it would be. It is English, not Irish, in language. Culturally and economically, its citizens still look to England in many ways. Ireland is an urbanized country; the society and values of the countryside, long a source of cohesion and strength, are unfamiliar to large numbers of Irish young people. Ireland is even somewhat less Catholic than it used to be.

Irish unity has never been achieved and can never be achieved on the basis of a Gaelic or Catholic national identity. The increasingly permanent look of the partition of Ireland raises the question of whether there is *any* Irish identity that can encompass both Irish Catholic and Ulster Protestant. Some Irishmen insist loudly in words, and occasionally assert violently in deeds, that there is. Others quietly believe that there is not.

# A MATTER OF CHARACTER

*by William V. Shannon and Cullen Murphy*

The Republic of Ireland is a small place. Its economic output is dwarfed by that of Connecticut. There are more Irish missionary priests abroad than policemen at home, and in all of Ireland, there are fewer than 2,000 lawyers. The members of the Irish Army, Navy, and Air Force, together with their spouses, could sit comfortably inside Dublin's 50,000-seat Croke Park, where the national hurling and Gaelic football matches are played every autumn. There are more sheep in Ireland than people, and twice as many cows, and both enjoy the right of way on rural Irish roads. Life in Ireland is played on a very small stage—one reason, perhaps, why Irish newspapers feature no gossip columns, and why journalists have no tradition of investigative reporting. No one wants to pry too deeply into another fellow's affairs, lest the other fellow turn out to be the son-in-law of one's closest friend.

But if Ireland is small in size, it looms large in the chronicles of Britain and America. Here, on the outermost edge of Europe, the Celtic people made their last stand. They wrested a living from an ungenerous land and a history out of a long, bitter struggle against a powerful neighbor. Time and again, it looked as if that struggle would be a losing one.

When Ireland was partitioned in 1922 and the British departed from the five-sixths of the country that had opted for independence, they left behind a nation that was an odd mixture of Western Europe and what we now call the Third World.

The new Irish Free State had inherited a first-rate railroad system, adequate roads, a distinguished legal profession, an honest and efficient civil service, and several good universities (including Trinity College, Dublin, founded by Queen Elizabeth I in 1591) and teaching hospitals.

But Ireland at independence also suffered from the low standard of living, high birthrate, and meager industrial base that one associates with the underdeveloped world. Most of the houses in the countryside lacked plumbing and electricity, and Dublin's slums rivaled those of Naples as the worst in Europe. Tuberculosis was endemic. So great was emigration that Ireland's population showed a net decline, year after year.

Beginning in these mixed circumstances, the Irish slowly— and then with a rush during the 1960s and '70s—sought to over-
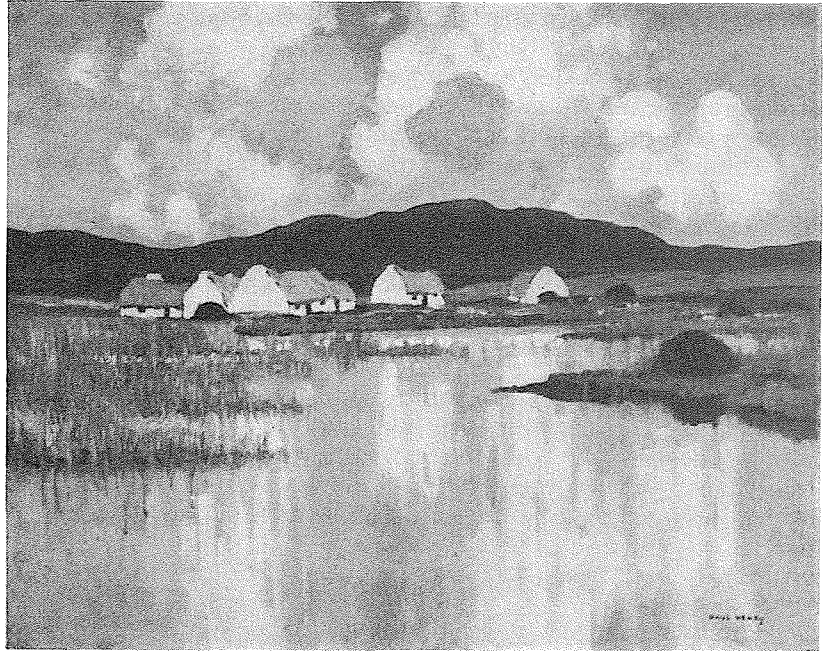
*Irish painter Paul Henry depicted the Ireland of the tourist—also, as it happens, the Ireland of the poor. Conservative, inward-looking, familial, the Republic at birth was deemed the Sicily of Western Europe.*

come their country's many deficiencies.

The early administrations focused their efforts on a few basic economic and social objectives. Thus, during the 1920s Irish engineers began throwing dams across the Shannon, harnessing the longest river in the British Isles. Hydroelectricity was soon powering new steel and textile mills, shoe and fertilizer factories, sugar beet processing plants. All of these industries, protected by high tariff walls, were encouraged by Eamon De Valera's government during the 1930s, in a drive toward economic self-sufficiency.

Successive Irish governments, meanwhile, invested heavily in providing shelter for the needy. Whole slums were razed and their inhabitants resettled, sometimes in ugly apartment blocks, more often in modest, two-story row houses that government subsidies eventually enabled the occupants to buy.* One big government success came in the field of public health. Shortly

*Today, an astonishing 70 percent of all housing units in Ireland are *owned* by the household head (versus 64.7 percent in the United States).

after World War II, the minister of health, Dr. Noel Browne, persuaded his cabinet colleagues to underwrite a major campaign against the scourge of tuberculosis. With new drugs such as streptomycin and isoniazid just becoming available, the investment in hospitals and clinics paid off quickly.

The achievements of the Free State's first three decades were substantial. But they were by no means sufficient. The legendary De Valera, onetime mathematics teacher and hero of the 1916 Easter Rising, who held the post of *taoiseach* ("chieftain," or prime minister) for most of the period between 1932 and 1959, was almost grateful that the Industrial Revolution had passed Ireland by. He cherished a static, bucolic, romantic vision of the kind of nation Ireland should become. It would be, he declared in a famous speech in 1943, "a land whose countryside would be bright with cozy homesteads, . . . with the romping of sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths, the laughter of comely maidens, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age."

### Stanching the Hemorrhage

This was not, to say the least, a recipe for robust economic growth. Unable to find work, an average of 40,000 people—most of them young—left the country *every year* during the 1950s for Britain and the United States. Few would return. As postwar Britain constructed a welfare state, Ireland became known as the "farewell state."

Sean Lemass, who succeeded De Valera in 1959, did much to turn the situation around. Lemass had for two decades been De Valera's principal deputy in domestic affairs. As a Number Two man, he had shown himself to be canny, discreet, loyal, reserved, and forceful. He was an executive who followed orders. But when he stepped up to the Number One job, Lemass, no sentimentalist, scrapped many of De Valera's policies.

Lemass saw industrialization as the only way to stanch the hemorrhage of emigration. Those athletic Irish youths and comely maidens would have to find well-paying jobs in the factories of what Lemass, in businessman's terms, conceived of as "Ireland, Inc." The Lemass government launched a concerted campaign to

*William V. Shannon, 57, is University Professor and professor of history at Boston University. A native of Worcester, Mass., he served as a member of the editorial board of* The New York Times *from 1964 until 1977 and was U.S. ambassador to the Republic of Ireland during the Carter administration. He is the author of* The American Irish *(1964). Cullen Murphy, 32, is a senior editor of* The Wilson Quarterly.

attract foreign investment. Overseen by an Industrial Development Authority, it offered a wide range of subsidies, including factories built to specification, free training of workers, and a "tax holiday" on profits from all products sold abroad.

The first big catch, in 1962, was General Electric (GE), which now operates four plants in Ireland. Lemass welcomed the new facility, which was built in a special industrial park near Shannon Airport, but not GE's proposed name for it: Emerald Isle Electric. "Emerald Isle!" he protested, "That is precisely the image I am trying to get away from." A compromise was reached, and the plant today is known simply as E. I. Electric.

## Sorry, Wrong Number

During the 1960s and '70s, corporations from around the world responded favorably to the Irish sales pitch. Why? Apart from subsidies, it turned out that Ireland has a lot to offer. It is one of the few places left in Europe with undeveloped land. It has abundant water. Its climate is mild. Its government is aggressively sympathetic to capitalism, while its Communist Party is minuscule and politically irrelevant. Wage scales in manufacturing are relatively low—about $5.48 per hour in 1983 (versus $10.41 in West Germany, $12.26 in the United States).

For American and British investors, moreover, Ireland has the added attractions of a familiar culture and a work force that is universally literate in English. Businessmen also foresaw that Ireland, while remaining aloof from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, would one day join the European Economic Community (which the Republic did in 1973). Ireland now offers duty-free access to nine other Common Market nations, with a combined population of some 270 million.

Of course, Ireland has its drawbacks, too. Irish trade unions share the worst attributes—including arrogance, selfishness, and insatiability—of their British counterparts. (In 1979, sanitation workers in Dublin went on strike because the raincoats they were given to wear on wet days made them perspire.) There are few American-style industrial unions, such as the United Steel Workers, that can speak for all employees in a single industry. Instead, most Irish workers are organized into small craft unions. Factory managers may have to deal with a dozen unions under a single roof, a strike by any one of which may shut down the whole place. In Ireland in 1982, for every 1,000 non-agricultural workers, 526 man-days were lost to strikes (compared with 254 in Britain, 102 in the United States). So far, however, labor actions against foreign manufacturers have been

few—perhaps out of fear of frightening away the goose that lays the golden eggs.

"Infrastructure" is perhaps a more serious problem. Especially in the impoverished west, where Dublin has been anxious to establish new industries, many country roads, narrow and pitted with potholes, are virtually impassable by truck. Guemael Trahan, French owner of a fish-processing plant in Rossaveal, County Galway, recently refused to pay the annual road tax until the local Connemara roads were improved. (When a judge slapped him with a £100 fine, he refused to pay that, too, and went to jail to publicize his cause.) The telephone system in Ireland is notorious. Households must wait for up to two years to have a phone installed. Every day in the back-page "Personals" columns of the *Irish Times*, the frantic managers of companies whose telephones have inexplicably ceased to function seek to alert clients and customers that they have not, appearances to the contrary, gone out of business.

## Youth Culture

Despite such nuisances, Ireland today is home to more than 300 American-owned factories. U.S. investment in plant and machinery on the island now totals more than $4 billion. Fully half of all manufacturing jobs in Ireland depend on American dollars. The chief industries: computers (Digital, Amdahl, Prime, Documatics), electronics (GE, Westinghouse), and pharmaceuticals and other medical supplies (Pfizer, Abbott, Travenol). Sherwin Williams paint products are manufactured in Ireland, as are Hallmark greeting cards and Nike running shoes. In addition, there are more than 100 West German plants on the island and a significant number of British, Dutch, and Japanese factories. In 1978, for the first time in Irish history, the number of persons engaged in making their living from industry surpassed the number of those working in agriculture.

The beginnings of the Irish industrial boom coincided with a sharp tightening of U.S. immigration law (1965). Emigration, as a result, has declined dramatically. By 1980, the Republic's population had climbed to 3.5 million (up from 2.8 million two decades earlier); the populations of all but one of the 26 counties had grown over the previous decade. While the worldwide 1981–83 recession hit Ireland severely—unemployment almost doubled, reaching about 16 percent—the quiet despair of the "hungry '50s" has not reappeared. With the majority of its young folk staying home despite the recession, the Republic of Ireland has become the most youthful country in Europe. Fully

half of the population today is under the age of 25 (versus 35 percent in Britain, 39 percent in the United States).

Downtown Dublin shows evidence of a youth culture in full bloom. "Punk rockers," their hair dyed purple or bleached white with peroxide, roam the shopping districts, where McDonald's and Burger King have gradually displaced many of the old tea shops. Rock and country-and-western music blares from the record stores. Dublin has its "yuppies" too, the smartly dressed young professionals who jog at lunchtime through Saint Stephen's Green, eat quiche, wear designer underwear, and follow the cartoon "Doonesbury" in the *Irish Times*.

Even so, much of the flavor of an older Dublin has remained. Victualers have survived as an urban adornment, the display windows of their shops filled with the muted red hues of butchered meat. Turf accountants (bookies) have their traditional offices scattered across the city. Workmen laying pipes or digging ditches toil in well-worn jackets and ties, as they always have, and the rains still come often enough to dispel, if only for a while, the pall of smoke from turf (peat) fires on a hundred thousand hearths. Dublin is still, essentially, a smallish city (population 525,000) of churches and private residences on the River Liffey, with a low skyline, little industry, and some handsome



"People are to Ireland as oil is to Texas," proclaims this Industrial Development Authority advertisement. On the other hand, oil is to Ireland as people are to Greenland. Several major companies are drilling in Irish waters, but no commercially exploitable deposits have yet been tapped.

18th-century Georgian architecture.

But relative prosperity has made Dublin noisier than it used to be. As recently as 1960, bicycles dominated the capital's streets. Horses pulled the milk wagons. Now, the auto is the reigning status symbol, and Dublin and Cork endure Manhattan-style traffic jams. Because Ireland levies stiff excise and "value-added" taxes, a four-cylinder automobile costs the Irish roughly twice what a comparable car costs Americans. Gas is priced at about $3 per gallon. With Ireland's income per capita of only $5,000 in 1984—down there with that of Greece and Spain—it is a bit mysterious how so many people can afford a car. Yet two-thirds of all households own at least one. Even the "tinkers," who generally beg on the streets or sell cheap rugs from door to door for a living, now have motor vehicles. Descendants of the landless itinerant laborers of pre-Famine times, the tinkers once roamed the country in colorful, barrel-shaped wagons, stopping in slovenly camps on the outskirts of towns. Now most of them have trailers.

### Thirty Acres, a Dozen Cows

Ireland is not as affluent as other Common Market countries. But the key fact is that it is more affluent than it ever has been. Real income has doubled during the last two decades, and Irish horizons have correspondingly widened. Middle-class Irish families now vacation not only in West Cork or Donegal but also in Spain, the Canary Islands, and even Florida's Walt Disney World. The Irish punt, or pound, is now linked to the West German mark rather than (as it was for so many years) to the British pound. Ambitious parents encourage their children to learn French and German, recognizing that the successful Irish entrepreneur of the future must feel at home not only in Ennis or Carlow but in Paris and Frankfurt as well. To be a computer programmer or designer of software is to ply a chic trade in Ireland today. Magazines such as *Computer Weekly* and *Computer News* can be found in the magazine racks of newsagents and tobacconists everywhere.

Perhaps nowhere has the transformation of "traditional" Ireland been so profound as it has been on the farm. Early in this century, in a vain effort to defuse Irish nationalist feeling, the British government bought out most of the English landlords and divided the great estates into a patchwork of small family farms. Deeply cherished though these farms were, they were often incompetently managed and suffered from fragmentation and lack of capital investment. A farmer owning as few as 30 acres would

often have his small holding in several scattered parcels, grazing a dozen cows in one field, raising hay in another, and cutting turf (for fuel) from a bog in a third. Outside the wealthier midland counties, such as Tipperary, with its "golden vale," where the land is more fertile than scenic, it was rare until the 1960s to see a tractor in a field, or a car on a country road.

## Lakes of Milk

Change has come slowly to the countryside, but it has come. Rural electrification was virtually completed by 1960. During the years since then, the ramshackle thatched cottage has either largely disappeared or, as in the picturesque village of Adare, been preserved primarily to please the two million tourists who visit Ireland every year (leaving $524.3 million behind in 1983). Thanks to government subsidies, many farm families have been able to replace their old, look-alike cottages with look-alike modern homes of cinder block and plaster, snug and comfortable, boasting picture windows, indoor plumbing, and modern stoves. Grandfather's old home, usually moldering a few yards beyond the back door, now shelters the cows.

While Ireland remained neutral during World War II—a stance that finally convinced many skeptical Irishmen that their country truly *was* independent from Great Britain—the powerful Irish-American contingent in the U.S. Congress saw to it that Ireland received some Marshall Plan aid (about $147 million) between 1949 and 1952. Dublin wisely invested much of the money in a series of agricultural research stations, of which there now are eight. Almost all of the senior staff members at these centers have done their graduate work at U.S. land-grant universities. The influence of the stations' demonstration classes and model farms has been enormous. Milking machines, for example, are common today on all but the smallest of dairy farms. Across the country, agricultural productivity has increased dramatically during the past 20 years.

Irish farmers, like those in France and Denmark, produce the "lakes of milk and mountains of butter" that bedevil the European Community's so-called Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). They are vulnerable to any shift in that policy of high prices and unrestrained production. But Irish agriculture will never revert to the practices of the bad old days, even if CAP is somehow "reformed." Irish farmers are better educated and more progressive than their fathers were. The current trend to larger and better capitalized farms is irreversible.

Looking back on the past quarter century, the Irish realize
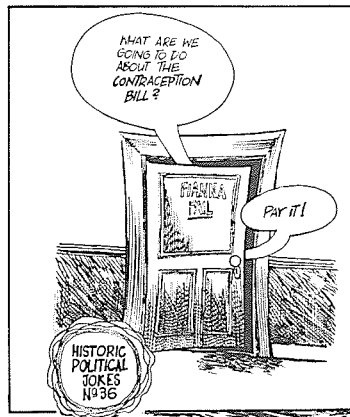
**IRISH PERSPECTIVES:**

*The work of Martyn Turner, Ireland's premier editorial cartoonist, appears in the* Irish Times. *In these drawings, he comments on (clockwise from upper right) labor relations, the 1983 abortion referendum, south and north, and birth-control legislation.*
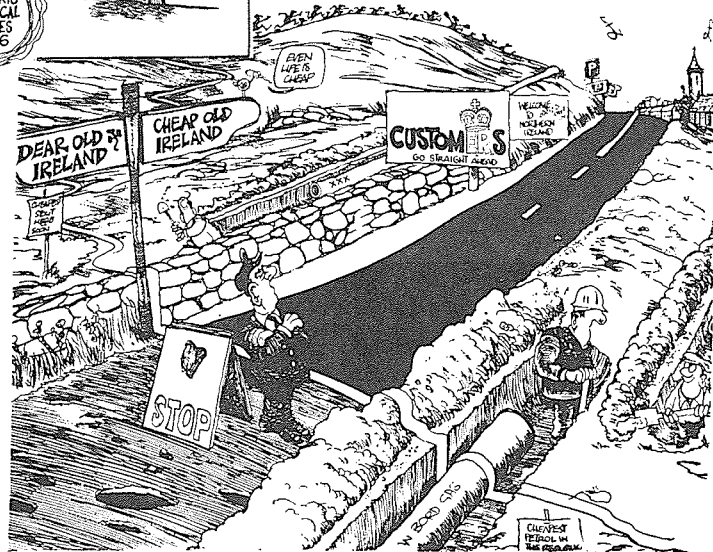
that, in economic terms, they have survived a painful transition, which is still incomplete. Ireland remains vulnerable. The recent recession has certainly stifled the buoyant optimism of the 1970s. Unemployment runs high among youths just out of school. While the dole provides minimum subsistence, television, available in nine out of 10 Irish households and top-heavy with glittery American shows such as "Dallas," offers a picture of how much better life could be. In Dublin, muggings, robberies, and car thefts have become increasingly common—particularly on the north side of the city, where growing numbers of young heroin addicts inhabit what remain of the capital's once densely congested slums.

The Republic, in short, is far from paradise. Even so, the
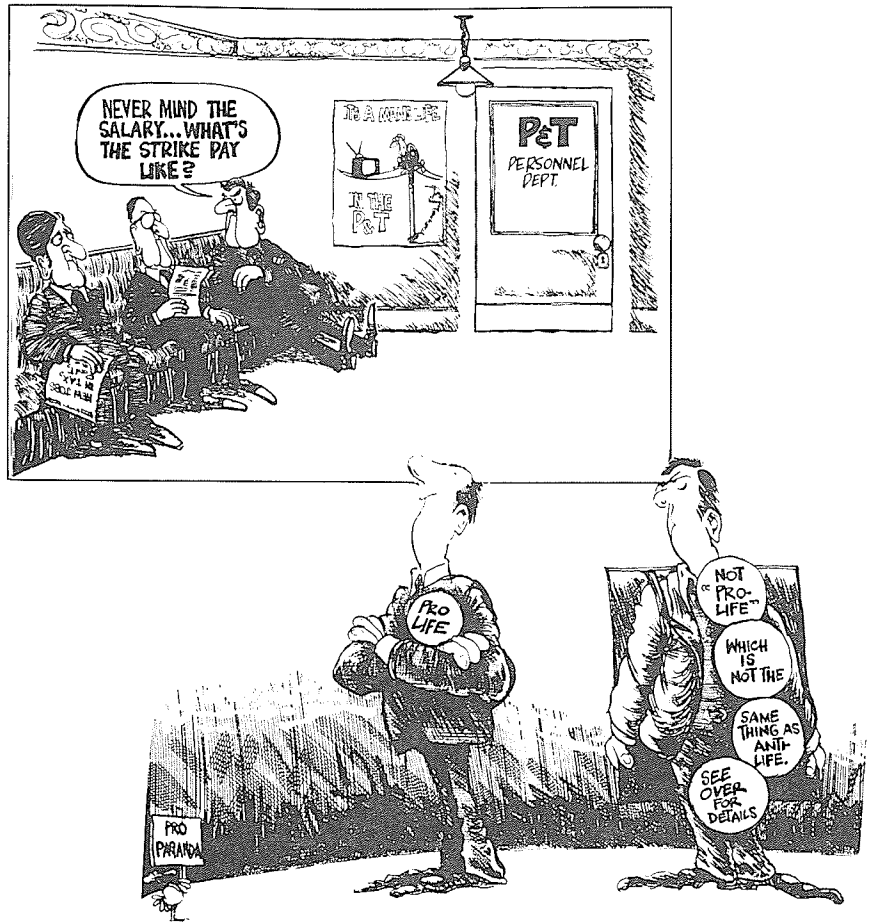
Irish recognize how far they have come. Having long been one of Europe's poorest, most backward societies, Ireland has at last taken its place, in social terms, alongside such prosperous developed countries as Norway, Denmark, and the Netherlands—countries still reliant on what the soil will yield but dependent even more on their ability to sell high-quality manufactured goods in a world market.

At the same time, the *character* of Ireland diverges markedly from that of any Scandinavian or Benelux country. The Irish have always been regarded as an imaginative people, fond of music and storytelling, and brave, even reckless, in battle. To these qualities centuries of servitude added not dourness but a feckless, devil-may-care attitude toward life. To be sure, after

the catastrophe of the Famine, most of the survivors turned inward, became hard, calculating, thrifty people, conservative, suspicious of outsiders. Yet, their manners remained soft, their speech infected still by what Sean O'Faolain called "that most Kerryish form of silence: an excess of volubility."

The easy charm that makes the Irish personality so attractive has a flip side. For one thing, it saps the capacity of the Irish people for sustained public indignation. Every week, it seems, there occurs a major fire or train wreck or industrial explosion. The death rate on highways is appallingly high. The Dublin newspapers are so full of reports of minor freak accidents—a Raheny man, for example, was injured last October when a toilet cistern fell on him in the restroom of his local pub—as to keep a wary visitor continually on his guard.

### An Irish Solution

The Irish take a relaxed attitude toward such mishaps. They are prone to say of "poor Tom" or "good old Mike" that he is, after all, a nice fellow, even though Tom may have been driving while drunk (and killed four children) and Mike may have been off having a smoke when the track signals needed switching (to the detriment of oncoming trains). Arrests for speeding or reckless driving are few. Rare is the school that holds a fire drill. In all of these respects, Ireland is not likely to be mistaken for Norway or West Germany.

Irish complacency in the face of misfortune may be due in part to religious fatalism, the idea, instilled over the centuries, that one's arms are too short to box with God. For better or worse, the pervasive influence of the Roman Catholic Church also sets Ireland apart from the rest of the Common Market crowd. After Poland and Lithuania, Ireland is the most Catholic country in Europe (94 percent of its people profess the faith). And, as in Poland and Lithuania, where the church always provided a psychological bulwark against an occupier's overweening power, Catholicism has long enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with nationalism.

Inevitably, with creation of an Irish Free State in 1922, church doctrine and church preference were enshrined in civil law. The new government moved quickly to ban divorce, outlaw birth control and abortion, and enforce vigorous censorship of books and movies. Pubs could be open only during certain hours, dance halls had to be licensed (and obtain a permit from a local magistrate before holding *any* dance). The Irish constitution, promulgated in 1937, acknowledged not "We the People"

but "the most Holy Trinity" as the ultimate source of all governmental authority.

Not until the 1960s did the fabric of church-sanctioned controls begin to fray. The intellectual and institutional ferment provoked by Vatican II shook the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland as much as it did elsewhere. Fewer young people entered the convent or seminary. Meanwhile, violent and sexually explicit programs on British television, easily received by the eastern third of Ireland, made a farce of government censorship, of which everyone from James Joyce to James Bond had run afoul. In 1973, the electorate approved a constitutional amendment repealing a provision that had recognized "the special position" of the Roman Catholic Church.

That same year, the Irish Supreme Court ruled that the constitution does *not* prohibit the use of contraceptives by married women. The Irish government reluctantly complied with this decision, legalizing contraception for *wives* who obtain a doctor's prescription. Charles Haughey, later prime minister but at the time the minister of health, described the legislation as "an Irish solution to an Irish problem." (The phrase quickly entered the popular vocabulary and is used ironically to describe the bizarre approach of public policy to the management of any aspect of Irish life.) As it happens, even *un*married women have no trouble obtaining "the pill." Last February the Dáil (Parliament), by a narrow margin, approved legislation that may soon make contraceptives legally available to anyone over the age of 18.

### 'We Are Not Swedes'

But divorce is still illegal, and an estimated 70,000 Irish married men and women—about five percent of all husbands and wives—are living apart from their spouses. A recent *Irish Times* poll indicated that two-thirds of those surveyed felt that divorce should be permitted in certain circumstances. In the Dáil, a Joint Committee on Marriage Breakdown has taken up the matter—very, very gingerly.

For despite its somewhat diminished prestige and the weakening of its authority in some spheres of conduct, the Roman Catholic Church, headed by Tomas Cardinal O Fiaich, remains the single most powerful institution in Ireland. Seven people out of 10 attend mass regularly. It is still common for mothers in Ireland to check with their parish priests before making any major family decisions. At noon and at 6:00 P.M. each day, the government-run radio station, Radio Éireann, pauses for 30 seconds and sounds the 12 bells of the Angelus. Saint Patrick's Day
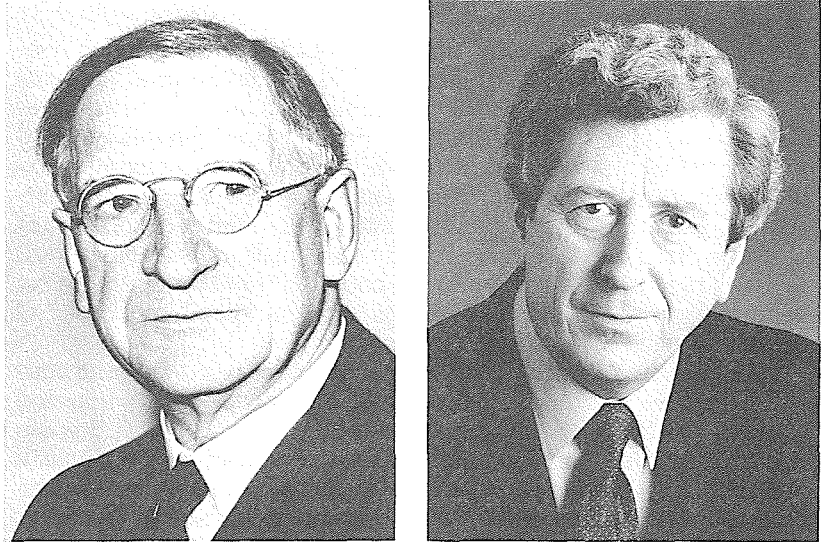
*Generations apart: Eamon De Valera (left), who guided the Free State in its formative years; and Garret FitzGerald, the current prime minister.*

is both a church holiday and a national holiday and until three years ago was the only day of the year on which the pubs were forbidden to open their doors. One unintended effect was to swell attendance at the National Dog Show, held on Saint Patrick's Day on the grounds of the Royal Dublin Society, a venerable Anglo-Irish enclave where the liquor always flowed freely.

The most profound influence of the church remains in education. There are no public schools in Ireland in the American sense. With a few exceptions, the nation's 3,412 state-aided primary schools are run either by the Roman Catholic Church or by various Protestant denominations. Normally, these local "national schools" are administered by a board of management, often chaired by the local parish priest. Of the 282,000 students at the *secondary* level in 1981, more than two-thirds were in church-run institutions.

Yet, even the character of the national schools is changing. For one thing, the government announced last fall that a concerted effort would be made to introduce sex education into the schools—something that would not have been dreamt of 30 years ago. (The Department of Education's decision was spurred by the widely publicized March 1984 case of a 15-year-old country girl, in Granard, County Longford, who went to a grotto out-

side her parish church one night to give birth to a baby no one even suspected her of carrying; both mother and child died of exposure.) While the advent of sex education is denounced by some as an invitation to moral license, Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald has expressed his confidence in the Irish national character. "We are not Swedes," he pointed out recently, "We are not Danes."

FitzGerald has proved to be one of the few major Irish politicians willing to risk the displeasure of the church hierarchy. During the early 1980s, when Ireland's right-to-life movement began pressing for an amendment to the constitution explicitly forbidding abortion—it is already forbidden by statute, and the courts have held that the constitution prohibits it implicitly— the leaders of Ireland's two major political parties, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael, initially endorsed the idea. But FitzGerald, the Fine Gael chief and prime minister, later expressed reservations, on various technical grounds, about the specific wording of the amendment. When his substitute language failed to win church approval, the *taoiseach* decided to oppose the antiabortion amendment. It was approved, nonetheless, in a 1983 referendum. The outcome has no real effect. Irish women who want abortions will do what they have usually done: take the Aer Lingus shuttle to London. It is noteworthy, however, that FitzGerald, whose party holds only a slim majority in the 166-member Dáil, suffered no apparent loss in popularity by breaking with the church hierarchy on the abortion issue.

### Lip Service

Ireland's two chief political parties derive their identities from the civil war of 1922–23. The issue that divides members of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael is, literally, the answer to this question: On which side was your father (or grandfather)? Fianna Fáil (Soldiers of Destiny), organized by Eamon De Valera, is the more nationalist party, which means in practice that it takes a harder, "greener" line toward Northern Ireland, demanding total unification. Fine Gael (Family of the Irish) does not disavow reunification as an ultimate goal but displays more interest in promoting "peace and stability" between the two Irelands as the only attainable objectives for the foreseeable future.

The two parties have been vying for top nationalist credentials for 60 years. It was De Valera's Fianna Fáil that, during the 1930s, unilaterally abolished the British post of governor general and the oath of allegiance to the English king. But it was a coalition government (1948–51) led by Fine Gael that took Ire-

land out of the British Commonwealth altogether and declared the country a republic (again, without London's prior consent).

That same coalition government created the cabinet-level ministry of the Gaeltacht (that is, of the Irish-speaking areas), once more in a bid to shine its nationalist credentials, and subsequent Fianna Fáil governments have felt constrained to keep this ministry in existence. Nevertheless, it has proved impossible to revive the Irish language in everyday usage.

## Rival Visions

The fate of the Irish language, which was decisively overtaken by English a century ago, has political resonance even now because it goes to the heart of the question, What does it mean to be Irish? Through centuries of oppression, their unique language was one thing the Irish could always call their own. The revolutionaries who brought Ireland to independence were Irish-speakers—self-taught. Their sort of nationalism had begun not as a political movement but as a cultural and linguistic one. Eamon De Valera once allowed that "if I had to make a choice between political freedom without the language, and the language without political freedom, I would choose the latter." The constitution established Irish as Ireland's "first" official language, and Irish today is used (along with English) on most government documents and on all street signs. Certain television programs, including one edition of the news, are broadcast in Irish. Courses in Irish are compulsory for students in every grade, from kindergarten through high school. Candidates for civil service jobs and admission to the national universities must demonstrate proficiency in Irish.

Despite such measures, Irish has not caught on; the cultural and economic pull of England, on the one side, and of the United States, on the other, has simply been too great. The Gaeltacht areas, where native Irish-speakers receive generous government subsidies to use Irish in their daily lives, are steadily shrinking in size. Today, they are home to no more than 50,000 people, clustered in remote fishing villages and isolated farmlands along the windswept coastal fringes of western Ireland. In Donegal and Mayo, in Clare and Kerry, and in the Connemara region of Galway, it is still possible to hear Irish spoken by schoolchildren buying sweets in a shop or by farmers chatting in a pub about the price of lambs. But even in these areas, everyone understands English.

If men such as De Valera had hoped to keep Ireland a nation of Catholic, Irish-speaking farmers, there was all along a rival

conception of Ireland's destiny, one first articulated by Daniel O'Connell, the masterful 19th-century Kerry politician who led the campaign for Catholic emancipation. O'Connell had no interest in rescuing the Irish language (knowledge of which, he once pointed out, "will not sell the pig"). He hoped that Ireland would become English-speaking, secular, democratic, and politically mature, a nation of both farmers and businessmen. The Republic of Ireland today is more nearly O'Connell's country than De Valera's, and the trend away from the old nationalist, confessional creed seems to be accelerating.

Membership in the Common Market is one reason for this, but just as important is the situation in Protestant-dominated Northern Ireland. Briefly, it is clear to most in the south that the peaceful unification of the two Irelands can be achieved only if the character of the Republic's constitution—especially as it affects religion—is profoundly altered (and reunification may not be achieved even then). The New Ireland Forum, a blue-ribbon panel consisting of representatives from the major political parties in both the Republic and Northern Ireland, made this point explicitly in a widely read 1984 report.

Prime Minister FitzGerald symbolizes the Republic's current period of transition. On the one hand, he seeks no radical break with the past. He has written a book about the Irish language and is a devout Roman Catholic. But he is also a veteran "technocrat," fluent in French, European in outlook. He has broad appeal to women and younger voters. His willingness to disagree with the bishops on abortion suggests that he is the most likely politician to take on "untouchable" subjects, such as divorce and constitutional revision (though he has not yet done so).

But he is under no illusions about how far or how quickly he can lead. There are deep emotions at play. "Over a period of half-a-century," he observed not long ago, "we have created for ourselves in this part of Ireland a comfortable state, now quite an old garment, which has come to fit our present shape and which many are, subconsciously at least, reluctant to throw off for fear that the new one might pinch at some delicate points or be inconveniently loose at others, requiring a lengthy process of adjustment and adaptation before we could once again feel as comfortable as we have come to feel with our Twenty-Six county suit."

# IRISH AMERICA

## *by Lawrence J. McCaffrey*

The roughly one million peasants who fled to the United States from Ireland's Great Famine of 1845–49 were not the first Irishmen to leave their homeland behind, nor even the first to seek refuge in America. But the Great Famine induced an exodus of unprecedented proportions.

The Famine was a decisive event in modern Irish history. It claimed an estimated 1.5 million lives and established emigration as Ireland's safety valve, relieving the demographic pressures on a primitive agrarian economy. In the Famine's wake, for three-quarters of a century, many Irish families raised most of their children for export. During those 75 years, three million Irish immigrants crossed the Atlantic to the New World.

The Famine also created the northern United States's first major ethnic problem. Not only did the Irish immigrants represent the most miserable, backward class of peasantry in northern Europe; they were also Roman Catholics in an obdurately Protestant land. Perhaps as many as one-third were not fluent in English. Virtually all of them were destitute.

Unlike many Germans and most Scandinavians, the new immigrants shunned the countryside. While the vast majority of them had been farmers, they had also been ignorant farmers. The oppressive Anglo-Irish landlord system back home, under which the Irish worked essentially as serfs, had robbed them of ability and ambition. Psychologically, too, the American farm was uninviting. "If I had [in Ireland] but a sore head I could have a neighbor within every hundred yards of me that would run to see me," one Irishman reflected in a letter home from rural Missouri. "But here everyone gets so much land, and generally has so much, that they calls them neighbors that live two or three miles off."

While some bishops in Ireland and the United States tried to steer immigrants away from the "wicked" cities, it was nevertheless to Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, New Orleans, and other cities that the Irish tended to gravitate. They became pioneers not of the open frontier but of the urban ghetto, blazing a trail that would later be followed, with varying degrees of success, by Italians, Jews, and Eastern Europeans, by blacks migrating to the North from the cottonfields, by Hispanics from Puerto Rico and Mexico.

The transition from the thatched-roof cottages of the Irish

*Shanty Irish: squatters in mid-Manhattan. "The Atlantic works no miracles on them," wrote Thomas D'Arcy McGee. Yet between 1848 and 1861, Irish immigrants sent an estimated $60 million "home" to relatives.*

countryside to the tenements and tarpaper shacks of 19th-century urban America was traumatic. The immigrants were typically exploited first by countrymen who had come earlier. In New York, Irish "runners" would meet the 30 to 40 immigrant ships that arrived every day. They seized the luggage and rushed the newcomers to run-down, Irish-owned boarding houses. What little money the new arrivals had was soon spent on lodging, drink, and counterfeit railway tickets to the interior. Penniless, the immigrants were on their own.

In the crime-ridden Irish neighborhoods, where open sewers drained the streets, tuberculosis, cholera, and alcoholism took their toll. In Boston during the 1840s, the life expectancy after arrival of the typical Irish immigrant was 14 years. In New York, in 1857, a state-government report warned of a new blight on the urban landscape—the corrosive inner-city slum.

Many immigrants turned to crime. Prisons and asylums bulged with Irish occupants. Between 1856 and 1863, according to historian Oscar Handlin, at least half of the inmates in the Boston House of Correction were Irish. Many Irish women drank and brawled like the men. Their children roamed the streets engaging in mischief and petty crime. "Scratch a convict or a pau-

per and the chances are that you tickle the skin of an Irish Catholic at the same time," commented an editorial writer for the *Chicago Evening Post* in 1868.

Native Americans had never before experienced a foreign influx so big and of such distressing quality. To be called "Irish" was not much better than to be called "nigger"; racist commentary made little distinction. In some respects, descriptions of the 19th-century Irish ghetto anticipated those of today's black ghetto. But there was no palliative welfare state, no sense among other Americans of collective responsibility for the plight of the underclass.

To many Anglo-Americans, the antisocial, frequently violent behavior of the Irish was less offensive than their religion. Anti-Catholicism was an essential ingredient in American nativism. Deeming the swarming mass of Irish-Catholic immigrants to be an unassimilable menace to Anglo-Protestant culture and institutions, the American (Know-Nothing) Party during the 1850s pressed for curbs on immigration and exclusion of the foreign-born from political office. Periodically during the 1840s and '50s, mobs attacked and burned Catholic churches and convents.

### Managing Money

Nativist efforts notwithstanding, continued Irish immigration had by 1860 made Roman Catholicism the largest single religious denomination in the United States. Some three million Catholics, in highly visible urban concentrations, were being served by 2,235 priests and many more nuns and brothers. Many members of the clergy were Irish and imported. In short order, Irish clerics wrested control of the hierarchy from the handful of Anglo-Americans and French missionaries who had guided the Catholic Church during the Republic's first half century.

The church aroused Protestant antipathy, but it also served as a bulwark in slum communities that could boast few others. In the Irish ghetto of the 19th century, as in many black neighborhoods today, the local church became the basic social and political unit. Confronted with ethnic and religious prejudice outside their own neighborhoods, Irish Catholics erected an alternative system of schools, hospitals, asylums, and orphanages. They paid

*Lawrence J. McCaffrey, 59, is professor of Irish and Irish-American history at Loyola University of Chicago. Born in Riverdale, Ill., a working-class Chicago suburb, he received his B.A. from Saint Ambrose College (1949) and his Ph.D. from the University of Iowa (1954). His books include* The Irish Question, 1800–1922 *(1968),* The Irish Diaspora in America *(1976), and* Ireland from Colony to Nation State *(1979).*

for it in America the way that they had paid for it in Ireland—with small sums contributed regularly by millions of the faithful. Because the brightest Catholic lads in America became priests, the money was managed well and put to work quickly. (Construction of Saint Patrick's Cathedral in Manhattan was begun in 1858, within a decade of the Famine's end.) In cities such as New York, Boston, and Chicago, the archdiocese eventually became a wealthy property owner, sometimes scandalously so.

### 'Ten Thousand Micks'

As Irish America congregated socially around Saint Mary's, Saint Patrick's, and Saint Bridget's, Irish men and women sought to penetrate the fringes of the U.S. economy. It took time. Lacking marketable skills, Irish men during the mid-19th century had no choice but to take work as menial laborers. In one sense, they were lucky: They arrived in the American metropolis at a time when most jobs required a strong back, not a skilled hand or nimble brain. This was no longer the case a century later, as rural black migrants to northern cities learned to their dismay.

The ravages of alcohol—an imported problem with complex origins—did to Irish men what drugs and alcohol have done to many blacks: first made them unemployable, then killed them. But the able-bodied Irish could at least clean stables, drive horses as draymen or cabbies, load and unload riverboats, and work in construction. Irish men mined coal in Pennsylvania, gold in California, copper in Montana. Because slaves represented a costly capital investment, Irish wage workers were hired to drain the deadly malarial swamps of Louisiana. They dug canals and laid miles of railroad track, their graves edging westward as the country reached for the Pacific. In the words of one southern folk song: "Ten thousand Micks, they swung their picks, / To dig the New Canal. / But the choleray was stronger 'n they, / An' twice it killed them awl."

Professionally, the first big breakthrough made by the Irish was in the military. As it already had done in Great Britain, the lure of adventure, glory, smart uniforms, three square meals a day, and some loose change jingling in the pocket attracted many Irish men into the armed forces. They rose quickly in the ranks. Eventually, the same contradictory combination of physical challenge and economic security that had drawn the Irish into the armed services would draw them into big-city police and fire departments as well. As early as 1854, 98 of the 150 police officers in New Orleans's First District were born in Ireland.

During the Civil War, almost 40 exclusively Irish regiments

saw action on the side of the Union. At Antietam, on October 6, 1862, the Irish Brigade, which included New York's "Fighting Sixty-Ninth," lost 196 of its 317 men. The brigade was reconstituted and then, in December of the same year, decimated again—by the Confederate Irish Brigade—as it sought to scale Marye's Heights at Fredericksburg. After the war, Irish officers and enlisted men helped keep order on the western frontier. The performance of Irish soldiers (and Irish nursing nuns) on the Civil War battlefield had an important secondary consequence: It helped to take the steam out of anti-Irish nativism.

So did the growing demand for cheap labor, as America moved into the Industrial Age. The arrival of increasing numbers of non-English-speaking Italians and Eastern Europeans also helped push the Irish up from the bottom rung, socially and economically.

The progress of Irish-Americans was highly uneven. As the century wore on, Irish men did begin to make some gains, moving into the ranks of skilled labor. They were heavily concentrated in the building trades and dominated plumbing and plastering. The Civil Service, especially the Post Office, became an Irish redoubt. Irish men, along with Jews, claimed a leadership role in the trade-union movement, and union jobs were typically passed from father to son. All of this occurred,



*The pretensions of "lace-curtain" Irish-Americans were ridiculed in the press and on the stage. "There's an organ in the parlor, to give the house a tone / And you're welcome every evening at Maggie Murphy's home."*

however, fully two generations after the initial, famine-induced, wave of immigration.

As historian Hasia Diner makes plain in *Erin's Daughters in America* (1983), Irish women as a group made a better, faster adjustment to American urban life than did their husbands, sons, and brothers. Like the southern black women who migrated to northern cities during the 1950s and '60s, Irish women during the 19th century simply had more to offer the local economy. Like southern black women, too, Irish immigrant women seemed relatively "nonthreatening" to Anglo-Americans.

## Women As Civilizers

In the annals of European emigration, the Irish exodus was unique in that women, most of them single, always outnumbered men. (This anomaly was due in part to the fact that daughters could not expect to inherit the family farm.) Coming from a society with sharp gender segregation and a new, church-encouraged tradition of late marriage or no marriage, Irish women aggressively pursued economic independence.

Not all of them, of course, "made it." Many single Irish women drifted perforce to the ill-paying mills and factories of New England and the Midwest. When American textile and shoe manufacturing shifted from hand to factory production, it was often Biddy who operated the machines. (Not surprisingly, Irish women, like Irish men, became ardent unionists.) But many Irish women enjoyed a happier existence. While women from other ethnic groups scorned domestic service as degrading, the Irish flocked to such jobs, which offered food, shelter, clothing, and a taste of genteel living. Above all, they earned money that was theirs to spend as they pleased. Cartoons from the mid-19th century typically depict Irish maids ostentatiously "wearing their paychecks"—adorning themselves in finery.

Irish women moved more quickly than men into white-collar work. For the intelligent, ambitious Irish female, nursing and teaching were for decades the professions of choice. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, second-generation Irish women constituted the largest single ethnic group in the teaching profession. In 1900, according to the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, their numbers exceeded the "combined total of all female teachers with English and German parents."

A key point should be noted: Working, single Irish women were, for the most part, not working, single Irish *mothers*. This made them a prime economic asset. Married Irish males spent most of their income supporting families, Irish wives tended to

stay at home, and single men squandered substantial sums on drink; single Irish women, on the other hand, typically sent part of their paychecks "home" to Ireland. They paid the way to America for their brothers and sisters and faithfully contributed their tithe to the church. Often they lived with relatives, their wages boosting the household into middle-class, "lace-curtain" comfort.

Irish women looked out for one another. While Irish priests and bishops tended to ignore the problems many Irish women faced—out-of-wedlock births, abusive husbands, the loneliness of spinsterhood—Irish nuns sheltered the poor and afflicted. Three large orders of nuns—the Sisters of Mercy, the Presentation Sisters, and the Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary—had originated in Ireland; these and other orders, which recruited heavily among the Irish in the United States, deliberately focused their educational efforts on women. "Many orders were expressly forbidden by their charters to teach boys or at least boys above a certain age," writes Diner. In 1873, there were 209 Catholic schools for girls in America's cities but only 87 for boys.

There was another important role for Irish women—as mothers. To be sure, marriage was no more attractive an option in America than it had been in Ireland. On both sides of the ocean, many couples were miserable. Male pride suffered when women but not men could find work. In both Ireland and the United States, an emotional coldness existed between the sexes; sexual puritanism without a doubt took much of the zip out of wedlock. However, once wed, and if not deserted or widowed, Irish women in America were *less* likely than those of other nationalities to be in the workplace. As the dominant force in Irish homes, Irish mothers complemented the efforts of their single sisters, leading a slow but tenacious drive toward middle-class respectability.

### The Boston Ghetto

By the turn of the century, humorist Finley Peter Dunne's Mr. Dooley could ridicule the social-climbing pretensions of a Mrs. Donahue, who bought a piano so that her daughter Molly could learn to play "Bootoven and Choochooski" and not "The Rambler from Clare."

If gender was long one of the fault lines in Irish America, another was geography. Just as Hispanics today have found more opportunity in the Sun Belt than in the Frost Belt, so did Irish men and women on the "urban frontier"—in the booming, free-

wheeling cities of the Midwest, where *everyone* was a newcomer—enjoy better prospects than their cousins in the older cities of the Eastern Seaboard. The Heartland's burgeoning factories, mills, stockyards, and railroads were starved for labor. In Detroit between 1850 and 1880, as historian JoEllen McNergney Vinyard points out in *The Irish on the Urban Frontier* (1976), Irish immigrants lived in far less crowded conditions than they did in eastern cities. Proportionately more of the Irish found work as skilled laborers and entered the middle class.

In New England, by contrast, the situation was never encouraging. There, the Irish encountered a highly structured society dominated by Yankee yeomen and an elite Brahmin aristocracy. Physically and psychologically, the Irish in Boston, Newburyport, and Providence were captives of the ghetto. As historians Stephan Thernstrom and David Noel Doyle have noted, the situation in Boston was by far the most dismal. Doyle estimates that, during the late 19th century, an Irishman right off the boat who headed for the Midwest was more likely to blaze a trail from the peasantry into the lower middle class than was a fourth-generation Irish Bostonian. Not only had the Irish in "Southie," Charlestown, and Brighton settled amid an old and stratified society; they remained for decades the only foreign ethnic group of any size in Boston.

### Whites vs. Blacks

It is ironic that America's first Irish-Catholic President, John F. Kennedy, should have been a Boston native. But, tellingly, his father's fortune, which made possible JFK's achievement, came largely from ventures *outside* the city. Despite his Harvard degree, Joseph P. Kennedy was never accepted socially by Boston's Anglo-Protestant elite.

The sense of being left out and left behind has surfaced among Boston Irish in a politics of revenge rather than of purpose. More than other Irish-Americans, those in Boston supported the fascist preachings of Father Charles Coughlin during the 1930s and the Communist-chasing of Senator Joseph McCarthy during the 1950s. During the 1970s, racial violence flared in South Boston over the busing of black children from Roxbury to local white schools. While relations between the two ethnic groups have never been overly warm—the Irish long competed with blacks for housing and jobs, and worked hard to keep blacks out of the American Federation of Labor—the strife in Roxbury reflected more than simple animosity. It represented a clash of two "cultures of poverty," existing side by side, both of

them alienated from America's mainstream.

Except in New England, the acquisition of political power by certain Irish-Americans hastened the social and economic progress of the larger Irish-American community. A knack for politics was the one thing that many Irish, pugnacious yet gregarious by nature, had brought with them from their native land. During the early decades of the 19th century, Daniel O'Connell trained his people in the techniques of mass agitation and the principles of liberal democracy. O'Connell's Catholic and Repeal Associations were sophisticated political machines; no other immigrant group had participated in anything like them. In the United States, the vast majority of Irish immigrants joined the Democratic Party, which was far less nativist than its rivals, controlled the governments of most major cities, welcomed the immigrant vote (especially if the immigrants voted more than once), and rewarded the Irish with patronage jobs. Saloonkeepers and morticians became key Irish political leaders; both had ample opportunity to meet (and

## THE POL

*How did a 19th-century Irish ward boss make his appointed rounds? George Washington Plunkitt (1842–1924), a New York State Senator and Tammany Hall stalwart, left in his diary this description of a typical day:*

2 A.M. Wakened by a boy with message from bartender to bail him out of jail. 3 A.M. Back to bed. 6 A.M. Fire engines, up and off to the scene to see my election district captains tending the burnt-out tenants. Got names for new homes. 8:30 to police court. Six drunken constituents on hand. Got four released by a timely word to the judge. Paid the other's [sic] fines. Nine o'clock to Municipal court. Told an election district captain to act as lawyer for a widow threatened with dispossession. 11 to 3 P.M. Found jobs for four constituents. 3 P.M. an Italian funeral, sat conspicuously up front. 4 P.M. A Jewish funeral—up front again, in the synagogue. 7 P.M. Meeting of district captains and reviewed the list of all voters, who's for us, who's agin. 8 P.M. Church fair. Bought ice cream for the girls; took fathers for a little something around the corner. 9 P.M. Back in the club-house. Heard complaints of a dozen push cart pedlars. 10:30 A Jewish wedding. Had sent handsome present to the bride. Midnight—to bed.

console) their constituents.

Politics gave the Irish opportunities for status and wealth often denied them in business. Building a multi-ethnic coalition of Irish (the largest bloc), Italians, and Eastern Europeans, with Catholic solidarity as the glue, the Irish gradually took command of the urban wing of the Democratic Party. In 1880, William Grace, a shipping magnate, became the first Irish-Catholic mayor of New York. Hugh O'Brien followed suit in Boston in 1885, John Patrick Hopkins in Chicago in 1893. By April 1894, nativist John Paul Bocock was lamenting in the pages of *Forum* magazine that an "Irish Oligarchy controls America's leading cities."

## Machine Politics

What did the Irish do with their power? Sociologist (now Senator) Daniel Patrick Moynihan argued in *Beyond the Melting Pot* (1963) that "the very parochialism and bureaucracy that enabled them to succeed in politics prevented [the Irish] from doing much with government. In a sense, the Irish did not know what to do with power once they got it."

Moynihan was off the mark. No, the Irish did not think of politics as an instrument of social change, not in so many words; with a view of the world tempered by the concept of Original Sin, Irish politicians entertained few illusions about the natural goodness or perfectibility of man. At the same time, however, the Irish scorned the fashionable Yankee notion of laissez-faire "social Darwinism." Irish political machines were short on ideology; but they mitigated poverty by dispensing food, clothing, coal, and city jobs, and not only to the Irish but also to Italians, Poles, Jews, and other constituents.

Johnny Powers, alderman boss of Chicago's Nineteenth Ward at the turn of the century, routinely provided bail for his constituents, fixed court cases, paid the back rent, and attended weddings and funerals. One Christmas he personally distributed six tons of turkey and four tons of duck and goose. Inadvertently, by example rather than precept, Irish "machine politics" advanced the notion of welfare-state liberalism.

Of course, men such as Powers in Chicago and George Washington Plunkitt in New York City, not to mention the numerous subalterns in their organizations, were less than fastidious about lining their own pockets. Corruption was rife. Yet to their constituents, such men often appeared as Robin Hoods, taking from the rich and giving to the poor. Joseph F. Dinneen made the same point in his 1936 novel, *Ward Eight*, when Boss Hughie Donnelly explains to a protégé why grafters run a more prosperous, happy

may have cost him the Presidency in 1928, the religion of Irish America came to appear less alien during the 1930s and '40s. On the screen, movie stars such as Spencer Tracy and Bing Crosby portrayed priests less as spiritual leaders than as social workers in Roman collars.

But the GI Bill proved to be the real springboard. Millions of Americans of Irish ancestry had served their country in World War II. By 1950, for the first time in history, more Irish men than women were enrolled in college. Among American ethnic groups, including English Protestants, only Jews as the 1950s began were sending a higher proportion (59 percent) of their children on to college than the Irish (43 percent). By the 1960s, the evidence was clear that Irish America was now a solid, middle-class community, with its fair share of millionaires, civic leaders, academics, and entries in *Who's Who in America*.

### Shifting Gears

A 1963 survey by the National Opinion Research Center showed that not only were the Irish the most successful Catholic ethnic group in the country (in terms of education, occupation, and income); they also scored highest on questions of general knowledge, were least prejudiced against blacks and Jews, and were most likely to consider themselves "very happy." That is not to say that all Irish-Americans were confident, content, and open-minded. Irish-American literature during the 1960s and '70s would expose a distasteful underside. Jimmy Breslin's Dermot Davey and other hard-drinking New York cops abuse blacks, are on the take, and have perverse sexual relationships with wives and lovers. Tom McHale's wealthy Philadelphia Farragans hate "niggers," "fags," and "pinko draft dodgers." The best of the family, Arthur, turns holy pictures to the wall when making love with his wife. The paranoids, drunks, wife beaters, bigots, and sexual neurotics who inhabit the novels of Breslin, McHale, Thomas J. Fleming, John Gregory Dunne, Pete Hamill, Joe Flaherty, and James Carroll all have real-life counterparts. Many Irish-Americans, meanwhile, continue to inhabit bleak Irish ghettos in dying industrial towns; these communities are seldom publicized, but they are still there.

Yet the real story of the Irish in modern America is not that some of them nurse private tragedies or, as in South Boston, aggravate public ones. It is what success has done to the Irish as ethnics, and what it has done to the two institutions—the political machine, the Catholic Church—that long sustained them as a group.

## COUNTING FOR SOMETHING

From the beginning, Irish-Americans followed events in their homeland with special interest. They also spent considerable amounts of time and money trying to influence those events—to improve the lot of the Irish peasant and, if possible, to bring about Ireland's independence from Great Britain.

Irish-American nationalism had no single source. For some in the 19th-century American ghetto, it was rooted in an exile mentality that romanticized Ireland as a paradise lost, a land of green fields and soft rain, purple mountains and blue lakes. It was a country of honorable men and chaste women, where ties of family and friendship were strong.

Another source was hatred. All that was wrong with the land the immigrants left behind—the poverty, the hunger, the disease, the evictions—all of this was cruel England's fault. And now the oppressor had forced millions of Irish to "cross the raging main" and, especially in New England, suffer a new and different form of Anglo-Protestant ascendancy. In his poem "Remorse for Intemperate Speech," William Butler Yeats described how the Irish had left their country with maimed personalities, carrying from their "mother's womb a fanatic heart."

Finally, there was the yearning for respect. Many Irish linked their low status in the United States with Ireland's colonial collar and leash; with independence would come dignity. Promised Michael Davitt, founder of the Land League in 1879: "Aid us in Ireland to remove the stain of degradation from your birth, and the Irish race here in America will get the respect you deserve."

Dedicated Irish-American nationalists—always a minority—could usually count on the moral and financial support of the broader Irish community. Through societies such as the Fenians and Clan na Gael, and by bankrolling the efforts of politicians and reformers in Ireland, Irish-American nationalists during the 19th century variously sought to curb evictions and stabilize rents, promote ill will between Britain and the United States, and, above all, pry Ireland loose from the British Empire, by force if necessary.

The Fenians, a 50,000-member (at its peak) conspiratorial brotherhood dedicated to Ireland's independence, received $228,000 in contributions from Irish-Americans in 1865; the next year, donations swelled to almost $500,000. The Fenians hoped to use the United States as an arsenal, providing arms and ammunition to freedom fighters across the sea. At the same time, brandishing Irish America's new political clout, the Fenians sought to shape American foreign policy to their own purposes. Ultimately, factional squabbling dimmed Fenian hopes of fomenting armed insurrection; sporadic, Fenian-sponsored acts of terrorism in Ireland ended not with Britain's hasty retreat from the island but with "martyrs to the cause"

dangling from a hangman's rope.

The Irish nationalists had little impact on U.S. foreign policy. After the American Civil War, while the United States was haggling with Great Britain over the settlement of war-related claims, Washington successfully intimidated London with friendly overtures toward the Fenians, 600 of whom in 1866 had launched a quixotic invasion of British Canada. (The Fenians had hoped to trade a "hostage" Canada for a free Ireland.) By the mid-1870s, however, President Ulysses S. Grant let it be known that the United States would not tolerate an Irish nationalist government-in-exile using America as a base to attack British territory.

After World War I, amid an Anglo-Irish war (1919–21), President Woodrow Wilson resisted pressure from Irish-Americans to recognize the embattled Irish Republic, notwithstanding the "self-determination" principle enunciated in his Fourteen Points. Wilson's stand cost the Democratic Party many Irish votes in the 1920 presidential election.

Creation in 1922 of an Irish Free State, consisting of all but six of the island's 32 counties, did not entirely quell nationalist fervor in the United States. With Northern Ireland still an integral part of the United Kingdom, and Catholics there an oppressed minority, nationalist efforts focused henceforth on Irish unification. Although no one has produced any credible figures on the amount of money Irish-Americans today contribute to the terrorist Irish Republican Army (IRA) through front organizations, such as the New York–based Irish Northern Aid Committee (Noraid), the sum is certainly substantial. However, only a small number of Irish-Americans are involved in aiding the IRA. When, in 1983, Noraid director Michael Flannery (above) was named grand marshal of New York's Saint Patrick's Day parade, prominent Irish-Americans, including Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D.-N.Y.) declined to march. New York's Terence Cardinal Cooke, breaking tradition, refused to receive Flannery on the steps of Saint Patrick's Cathedral. Many American IRA supporters are recent immigrants who left Ireland during the 1950s, bitter at their government's failure to provide jobs, only to discover an upwardly mobile Irish America into which they did not fit.

The current efforts of these people on behalf of a united Ireland recall Sir Isaiah Berlin's definition of nationalism as "the inflamed desire of the insufficiently regarded to count for something among the cultures of the world."
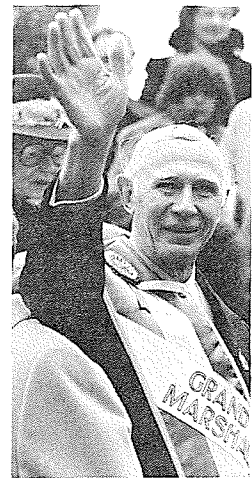


*Noraid's Michael Flannery.*

The election of John F. Kennedy to the Presidency in 1960 marked the arrival of Irish-Americans as politicians on the *national* scene. Ironically, at the same time, Irish pols were losing their grip on City Hall. Why? In Edwin O'Connor's *The Last Hurrah* (1956), one politician attributes the defeat of Mayor Frank Skeffington, loosely modeled on Boston's James Michael Curley, to the New Deal. "The old boss," he explains, "was strong simply because he held all the cards. If anybody wanted anything—jobs, favors, cash—he could only go to the boss, the local leader. What Roosevelt did was to take the handouts out of local hands. A few things like Social Security, Unemployment Insurance, and the like—that's what shifted the gears, sport."

## A Costly Success

That may have been part of the reason, but the flight by increasingly prosperous Irish families from the central cities to the suburbs was surely a bigger factor. Sociologist Marjorie Fallows has documented how working- and lower-middle-class Irish families tended to forsake the old neighborhoods for ethnically "mixed" communities ringing downtown. Middle- and upper-middle-class Irish families found homes even farther out. In Chicago, for example, Southsiders typically migrated to Oak Lawn, Evergreen Park, and Burbank; Westsiders to Oak Park, River Forest, and Lombard; and Northsiders to Evanston and Wilmette.

The refugees from the ghetto parish left much of their Irishness behind; by the early 1970s, according to one study, only 43 percent of the Irish were marrying "within the tribe." The 1970s also witnessed an accelerating defection of Irish Catholics from the Democratic Party. (Ronald Reagan in 1980 received an estimated 53 percent of the Irish vote.) Increasingly, Irish Americans are voting along *class* rather than ethnic lines.

Weakening, too, in recent years has been Irish America's reflexive allegiance to the Catholic Church. Most well-educated Irish-Americans welcomed the theological renewal promised by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), and most came away believing that the church had either gone too far or not gone far enough. On the one hand, the council scrapped many of the ritual and theological landmarks—the Latin mass, for example— that Irish Catholics had held dear. Gone, now, was what writer Mary McCarthy once called the "history and mystery" of the Roman Catholic Church. On the other hand, the Vatican remained adamant in its condemnation of birth control, a stricture that many American Irish-Catholics studiously ignore. Since Vatican

II, attendance at mass has fallen, as has use of the confessional. The sharpest Irish-Catholic youths now go not to Saint Joseph's Seminary but to the Harvard Business School.

What does it mean in 1985 to be an Irish-American? Americans of Irish ancestry are beginning to wonder about that themselves, now that the answers their grandparents accepted no longer seem to suffice. Many, of course, do not care. Others identify with the cause of Irish unification and naively send money to support the depredations of Irish Republican Army (IRA) gunmen in Northern Ireland (see box, pages 90–91).

But quite a few Irish-Americans, aware that "ethnicity" offers a psychological bulwark against the nation's chronic cultural turmoil, have reacted more sensibly. The field of Irish studies, for example, has blossomed during the past quarter century. Founded in 1959, the American Committee for Irish Studies now counts some 600 scholars as members; respected journals such as *Eire-Ireland*, the *James Joyce Quarterly*, and the *Irish Literary Supplement* have commenced publication in the United States. All over the country, college students flock to courses on Irish literature, history, music, and dance.

Is such enthusiasm merely for the moment? Perhaps. But it may also be that a new generation is prepared to help Irish America survive in a reduced but still vital context. No longer self-consciously Catholic, unsatisfied by the material affluence of suburban life, many younger Irish-Americans seem to find a certain solace in the historical and cultural aspects of their ethnicity.

Meanwhile, the long drama of the Irish in America may offer others some timely reminders. To blacks and Hispanics, the Irish experience promises hope but also cautions patience. It underlines the crucial roles that family, school, church, and politics variously can (and do) play in promoting social progress in America. But "success" also came to the Irish after heavy casualties—in terms of lives ended prematurely, in terms of lives misspent or spent in incredibly harsh circumstances. And it took 100 years.

## THE IRISH

The early settlers of Ireland, sailing across strange seas to a strange and hidden land, are said to have taken poets along. The "Children of Mil," whose voyage from Spain is chronicled in the seventh-century *Book of Invasions*, believed the songs of their bards to be magical, to provide protection from the unfriendly spirits of the universe.

It is somehow fitting that even these early travelers sought solace in the capacity of words to vanquish and sustain. Ireland's most enduring victories have been won not by the sword, but by the pen.

"I care not if my life has only the span of a day and a night if my deeds be spoken of by the men of Ireland." So proclaimed Cúchulainn, mythic hero of the Gaelic epic *Táin Bó Cúailnge* (The Cattle Raid of Cooley). **The Tain** (Univ. of Pa., 1962, 1982), poet Thomas Kinsella's elegant translation from the Irish, is enhanced on nearly every page by Louis le Brocquy's equally elegant abstract drawings.

Thanks to Christian missionaries, who arrived in Ireland during the fifth century A.D., the spoken verse of the Heroic Age was preserved for posterity on parchment. The missionaries and later monks also penned poems, hymns, and tracts of their own. For these, see Douglas Hyde's **Literary History of Ireland** (Scribner's, 1892; St. Martin's, 1980).

"From Clonmacnois I come; / My course of studies done / I am off to Swords again." Ireland's hothouse humanism withered in the wake of Viking raids, beginning in 795. The ensuing centuries were punctuated by wars of conquest. Native aristocrats—the "wild geese"—fled the Emerald Isle. Many bards, lacking

noble Gaelic patrons, no longer plied their trade.

A moving testament to Gaelic culture is **An Duanaire** (Univ. of Pa., 1981, paper), an anthology of poems edited by Seán Ó Tuama. Written between 1600 and 1900, and still bearing the imprint of bardic verse, many of the poems, given here both in Irish and in English translations by Kinsella, are poignant: "Tonight the walls are lonely / where we once heard harps and poets. . . ."

Gaelic Ireland's plight remained largely hidden—not only from English eyes but also from the sight of Ireland's own Protestant "ascendancy." During the 18th century, it was entirely possible to be Irish—to have been born or even educated in Ireland—and to write without any apparent consciousness of the fact. Fashionable Irish playwrights such as William Congreve (author of *The Way of the World*, 1700), Oliver Goldsmith (*She Stoops to Conquer*, 1773), and Richard Brinsley Sheridan (*The Rivals*, 1775) wrote elaborate drawing-room comedies—primarily for sophisticated London audiences.

The miseries across the Channel were not ignored by everyone. The Crown's draconian Irish policies appalled the conservative political philosopher Edmund Burke, who warned that British oppression was "not only very grievous to [the Irish Roman Catholics] but very impolitick with regard to the State."

In 1729, Jonathan Swift published his scathing **Modest Proposal to the Public for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from Being a Burden to Their Parents or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Public.** His solution to the problem of overpopulation: to cook and

eat Irish babies who, upon reaching the age of one, would make "a most delicious nourishing and wholesome Food, whether *Stewed, Roasted, Baked,* or *Boiled.*"

The mindless cruelty of the great Anglo-Irish landowners is a central theme in the 19th-century novels of Maria Edgeworth and in the more recent work of Walter Macken. The title of Edgeworth's **Castle Rackrent** (1800), the best of her efforts, refers to the devious methods by which Irish landlords "racked" the rent—driving it up beyond its fair level.

Macken's **The Silent People** (1962) spans the decades leading up to the Great Famine. In one passage, a weary Irish schoolmaster explains life's realities to his nephew: "I own nothing. I built this house but it isn't mine. I grow potatoes in a two-rood field but it isn't mine. . . . We have no weapons, except patience and sufferance, and talk about tomorrow."

The Famine left a legacy of bitterness. It fed nationalist passions that stunned and wearied the greatest of all Irish poets: "Dear shadows, now you know it all, / All the folly of a fight." Many of **The Collected Poems of William Butler Yeats** (Macmillan, 1933) reflect the artist's disaffection from the world of politics.

From the dizzying currents of public life, Yeats found temporary refuge at Coole Park, the Galway estate of his mentor, Augusta Gregory. Lady Gregory was an innovative folklorist and vigorous supporter of Irish drama, whose history she traces in **Our Irish Theatre** (Putnam's, 1913; Oxford, 1972). As she put it: "We went on giving what we thought good until it became popular."

That took time. Riots attended the 1907 opening of J. M. Synge's **Playboy of the Western World**. The plot: A young peasant who claims to have killed his father is welcomed into a neighboring community, enjoying the inhabitants' worshipful admiration until the truth comes out—he has not, in fact, "destroyed his da." Devotion turns to contempt, and in a sudden frenzy, his former friends move to hang him.

The stark brutality characteristic of much of Synge's work repelled Dublin audiences. They would get more of the same from Sean O'Casey (1884–1964), author of such Abbey Theatre classics as **The Plough and the Stars** (1926) and **Juno and the Paycock** (1928).

While "that enquiring man John Synge" fell easily into the rhythms of the Celtic revival, Yeats, at the forefront of the movement, was not always successful in his search for converts. Failures included such a major figure as James Joyce (1882–1941), who wrote about Ireland but refused to place his talents in its service.

Joyce remains, of course, a towering figure in the Irish literary pantheon. His **Ulysses** (1922)—a modern-day epic tracing the journeys of two Dublin men, Leopold Bloom and Stephen Dedalus, on June 16, 1904 ("Bloomsday") —recently appeared in a new "corrected" version (Garland, 1984). Some 5,000 errors, detected by scholars over the years, have been eliminated in this three-volume critical tour de force (undertaken, as it happens, by a team of West German professors).

Another writer who disdained what poet Paddy Kavanagh once called Ireland as "invented and patented by Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge" was Brendan Behan (1923–64), one of the most perversely congenial talents Ireland has produced. Behan preferred the seamier side of Irish life; alcoholism ("I'm very fond of decanters, hav-

## IRELAND: HISTORIES

*The titles below were recommended by James S. Donnelly, Jr., a University of Wisconsin, Madison, historian and former Wilson Center Fellow, and Thomas Hachey, a Marquette University historian and president of the American Committee for Irish Studies.*

ANCIENT IRELAND: **Ireland before the Vikings**, by Gearóid Mac-Niocaill (Gill & MacMillan, 1972). The standard work on the period. See also **Early Christian Ireland**, by Máire and Liam de Paor (Praeger, 1958, cloth; Thames & Hudson, 1979, paper). Subsequent centuries are treated in **Ireland before the Normans**, by Donncha Ó Corráin (Gill & Macmillan, 1972).

FROM CONQUEST TO UNION: **The Lordship of Ireland in the Middle Ages**, by J. F. Lydon (Univ. of Toronto, 1972). A vivid account of the rise and decline of Anglo-Norman society. **Irish Life in the Seventeenth Century: After Cromwell**, by Edward MacLysaght (Longmans, 1939, cloth; Irish Academic Press, 1979, paper). Especially valuable for its analysis of the Plantation of Ulster. W.E.H. Lecky's **A History of Ireland in the Eighteenth Century** (Longmans, 1892; Univ. of Chicago, abridged, 1972) is dated but still a classic. **Partners in Revolution: The United Irishmen and France**, by Marianne Elliott (Yale, 1982). A prize-winning, gracefully written study of Irish revolutionary republicanism.

THE ROAD TO INDEPENDENCE: **The Great Hunger: Ireland 1845–1849**, by Cecil Woodham-Smith (Harper, 1922, cloth; Dutton, 1980, paper). Graphic and moving account of the Famine. **Ireland since the Famine**, by F.S.L. Lyons (Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1971). The most authoritative political and cultural survey. On nationalist movements, Robert Kee's **The Green Flag** (Weidenfield & Nicolson, 1972) may be familiar to public-television viewers who saw the 1982 series based on this book. George Dangerfield's **The Damnable Question** (Little, Brown, 1976; Peter Smith, 1983) focuses on the 1916 Easter Rising.

MODERN IRELAND: **Ireland: A Social and Cultural History, 1922–79**, by Terence Brown (Fontana, 1981). Covers the nation's evolution since independence. A complementary volume is Basil Chubb's **The Government and Politics of Ireland** (Stanford, 1970, 1982). For a lucid account of the contemporary crisis in Northern Ireland see **The Uncivil Wars: Ireland Today** (Houghton, 1983, cloth; 1984, paper), by Padraig O'Malley.

ing a slight weakness for what goes into them") led to an early death at the age of 41.

In **Brendan Behan's Ireland** (Hutchinson, 1962), a diary-sketchbook-literary grab bag, the ramblings of the spinner of tales are cover for the well-aimed blows of the myth-basher.

Hapless victims include an American student whom Behan gleefully remembers having seen jotting "Parsnips—attitude of Yeats to." Behan is best remembered as a writer of plays, notably **The Quare Fellow** (1956) and **The Hostage** (1958).

As for verse, Seamus Heaney has

been called (by Robert Lowell) the finest Irish poet since Yeats. He has published six volumes of poetry, including the best-selling **Field Work** (Farrar, 1979, cloth & paper). **Sweeney Astray** (Farrar, 1983) is Heaney's recent translation of a medieval Irish legend whose hero, Mad Sweeney, has been cursed and turned into a bird after killing an innocent psalmist.

The short story has been an exceptionally rich Irish genre during the second half of the 20th century. In many of the **Collected Stories** of Frank O'Connor (Knopf, 1981, paper), the banal blossoms suddenly into the eternal; daily life becomes a window on something larger. In "My Oedipus Complex," one of O'Connor's most popular stories, a precocious child vies with his father—recently returned from war—for his mother's time and attention, and for a place in her bed.

Where O'Connor is tender, the **Finest Stories** of Sean O'Faolain (Little, Brown, 1957) evoke a bleak world of constricted possibilities. In "The End of the Record," a biting satire of the Celtic revival, a young radio personality comes to town offering cash for authentic Irish lore. Aged residents, sunk in lethargy, do not themselves remember—or much care about—the old tales but are drawn by the money: "One time I had a grand story about Finn Mac-Cool and the Scotch giant. But it is gone from me. And I'd be getting my fine five-shilling piece into my fist

this minute if I could only announce it to him."

At the heart of much Irish writing is a grand refusal to embroider reality, to portray the world other than as it *is*. But there is also a companion tendency not to take the world—and writing—too seriously. Irish writers like to break mirrors as well as hold them up to life.

One of the more outrageous—and most lucid—of Irish iconoclasts is Brian O'Nolan, alias Flann O'Brien, alias Myles na gCopaleen. The author of **At Swim-Two-Birds** (1939) and **The Dalkey Archive** (1964), O'Nolan was at his most exuberant in the freewheeling columns he wrote for Dublin's *Irish Times*, many of which appear in **A Flann O'Brien Reader** (Viking, 1978).

What "Myles" engaged in here was nothing less than a giant send-up of the "best" Irish literary life: "Poor Jimmy Joyce abolished the King's English . . . and I . . . I? As far as I remember, I founded the Rathmines branch of the Gaelic League. Having nothing to say, I thought at the time that it was important to revive a distant language in which absolutely nothing could be said."

And yet, behind the jibe is an abiding Irish faith in the power of words to draw meaning from the world. "Out of the quarrel with others, we make rhetoric," Yeats once observed. "Out of the quarrel with ourselves, we make poetry."

—*Amy R. Gutman*