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The Irish

Male

issue fourteen

Whatever his exact nature, the Irish male has been formed under the influence of two major factors - patriarchy and colonialism.

The arguments about patriarchy are well known: the family is where people are socialised into gender roles, the education system confirms those roles, the mass media and the churches play their part in idealising the definitions, the division of employment, domestic and otherwise, is built on the same definitions, and the whole thing is underwritten by the state and its policies. Out of this emerges 'masculinity' - boys learn to be men, and that means, to some extent or other, competitiveness, violence and brawny silence.

Interwoven with this in the Irish context is the legacy of centuries of imperialism and colonialism, which deprived many Irish men of the opportunity to play a full role in the 'male' spheres of political and economic domination of the country, while that was still held out by the coloniser as the only model for a 'real' man. Further, the specific nature and influence of the Catholic church in Ireland and its impact on definitions of maleness, cannot be understood other than as part of our colonial heritage.

How men express their prerogative to violence, whether as republicans, loyalists or police in the North, or indeed as violent partners, likewise results from a complex interaction of patriarchy and colonial history.

But as elsewhere the old certainties about what it means to be male are under stress and there is no doubt that the opportunities for new and varied definitions of maleness are greater than even a generation ago; witness the recent decriminalisation of homosexuality in the South. Some take this imprecision as a sign or hope, a harbinger of possible revolutionary change, while others see it as a threat. Insofar as the latter voices dominate the debate there is a very real possibility that the 'new Irish male' will be stillborn.

It is as an antidote to the pessimists that these articles are presented. The views expressed in them are those of the authors, the headings have been added by the production team.

Thanks to a number of colleagues who helped me trace some of the contributors, in particular Mary Corcoran and Mary Cullen.

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The Roles They Are A Changing?

Ethel Crowley looks at the changes which have taken place in women's and men's roles over the past 20 years and asks how real is the 'new man'

Picture: Derek Speirs



IN A RECENT INTERVIEW on RTE Radio 1, a young Belfast single mother categorically stated that she was better off on social welfare, without a man, because she would 'only get shite maintenance money'. This statement encapsulates a large part of the problem of Irish men in the 1990s.

Their traditional role of provider and authority figure in the family is being challenged by changing attitudes, unemployment and dependence on the welfare state.

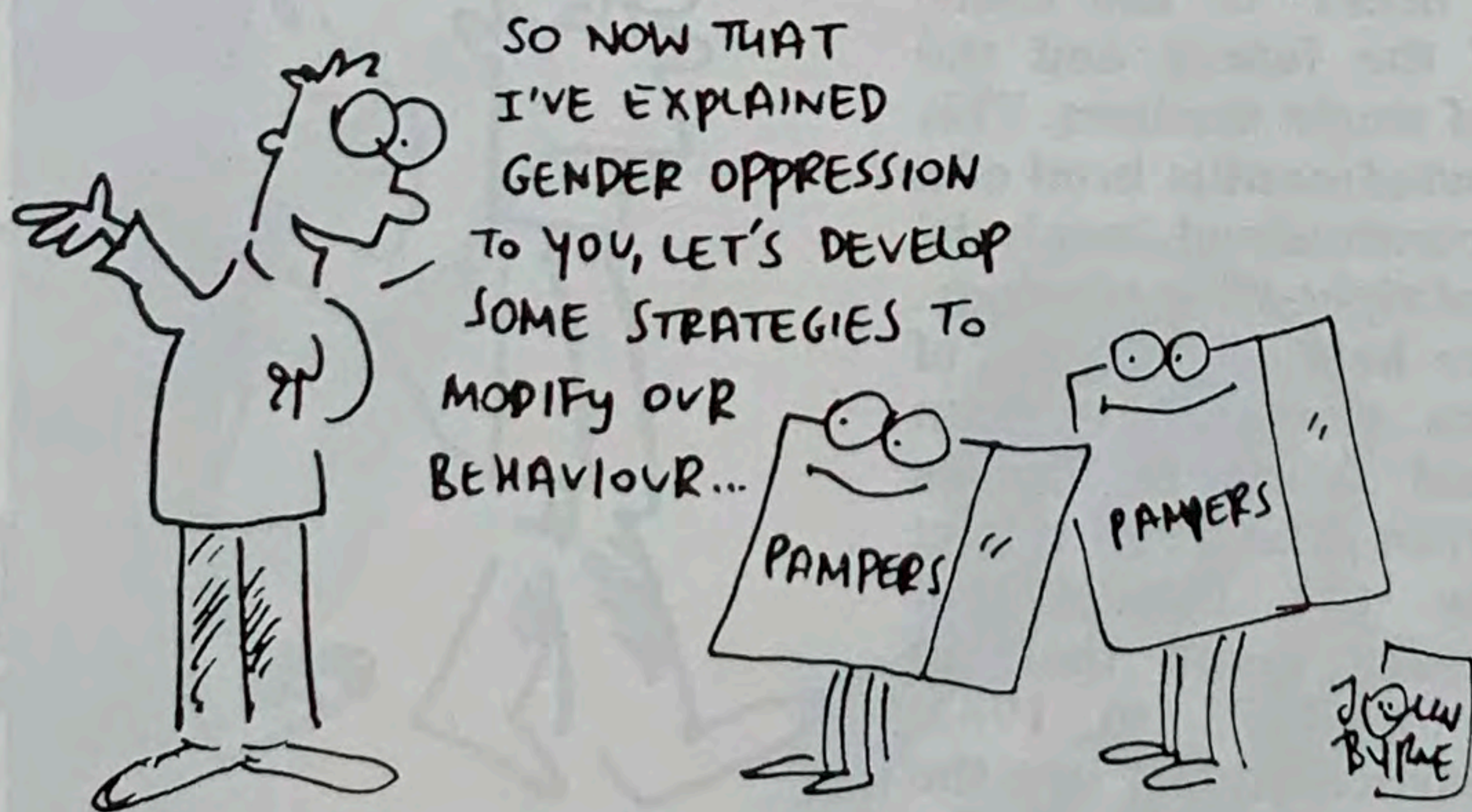
Enormous changes have occurred in Irish society in the last thirty years. The 'gendered' social norms and codes of behaviour guiding women's and men's contribution to the maintenance and reproduction of society have encountered particularly significant amendments in recent times. How is this to be explained?

Sociologists argue that one's sex and one's gender are entirely separate. The former is the set of genotypical and phenotypical arrangements with which one is born, and the latter involves the social expectations and value attached to women and men.

A basic conceptual tool used by feminists is the differentiation between public and private spheres of activity. The former is broadly the domain of men and of patriarchy, the latter the powerless realm of women in the home. Feminists argue that the roles emanating from the private sphere, those of motherhood and homemaking, and also,

Single mothers rearing children alone

MARTIN CHANGES THE NAPPIES:



more recently, unequal participation in a gendered workplace, have always been and continue to be undervalued and devalued.

Feminists also argue that the nuclear family and the sexual division of labour within the household are among the primary sites of women's subordinate position in society. Also, in recent times, the attempted combination of women's role in the private, domestic sphere and the public sphere of the paid workplace has been highly problematic. Class, racial and ethnic differences among women are also highlighted in this argument because, of course, gender is clearly not the only variable relevant to the examination of this subject.

For years now, women have been thinking about and acting upon these issues. The result has been a steady increase in independence and visibility for women. The proliferation of women's groups and gender-related courses throughout the country bears testament to that fact. There is a prevailing trend toward the funding of women's community groups, exemplified by the New Opportunities for Women programme from Europe, adult education on gender issues, and postgraduate courses on women's studies.

So it is assumed that only women have a gender, a 'problem', just as the popular assumption is that only black people have a colour or working class people a class identity. Little or no reflection occurs in the, respectively, male, white, middle class sectors of society. Those who have traditionally been subordinated have to do all the criticising and reflecting.

The political lobbying and activism that have emanated from these reflections have indeed borne fruit. Examples include the lifting of the marriage bar from public sector jobs and the equal pay legislation of the 1970s. While these were significant, much still remains to be done. For example, women still earn only two-thirds of the average male industrial wage. Those in power obviously only begin to self-reflect when they are forced to.

Many of the assumptions about appropriate gender roles are based upon the norm of the nuclear family, with its paid working male, unpaid, stay-at-home female, and children. However, it is becoming evident throughout western countries, with Ireland being no exception, that this pattern is now being challenged. 18 per cent of children in the South and 20 per cent of those in the North are now born to single mothers.

It is not yet established whether they are mostly born to couples who consciously choose not to marry or (in the South) to separated people who cannot marry, or whether the majority are born to vulnerable, perhaps young, mothers who depend on the welfare state for subsistence. All of these possibilities have significant social ramifications in terms of gender roles.

In the Republic the lack of divorce legislation serves as a disincentive for marriage, as is evidenced in the decline in rates of marriage and also the trend towards later marriage. Also, in the 1991 census 55,143 adults classified themselves as separated. Usually children are involved, and usually the mother gains custody in the event of a break-up. This group - separated

mothers rearing children alone – is over-represented in the poverty statistics. If divorce were introduced in the promised 1994 referendum, perhaps they could remarry their way back out of poverty by pooling their resources with those of another man.

At a time of very high unemployment both North and South, a large proportion of families are dependent on social welfare. For a father not to be able to provide for his family often has an enormous negative psychological impact on him. A study in Edinburgh showed that the risk of deliberate self-harm is eleven times greater in unemployed males than among unemployed females, and nineteen times greater among men who were out of work for a year. There is a direct link between unemployment and anxiety, depression, family tensions and strained relationships.

In terms of attitudes, hardship and vulnerability lead to a very functional view of male-female sexual relations and/or marriage. We hark back to our quote from the young woman in the dole queue in Belfast. Men are seen solely as sources of income rather than as sources of human support. Single mothers have always been stigmatised in western countries, from Daniel P Moynihan in the US in the 1960s, blaming the dominance of the mother in black families for high crime rates, to John Major's cabinet in 1990s Britain attributing the 'breakdown in law and order' to the disintegration of the family and the prevalence of single mothers. This 1990s-style witchhunt is bred of a totally decontextualised 'analysis' in the guise of right-wing ideology.

As men are being forced out of the workforce, women have been entering paid work in droves since the 1970s. The 1988 report compiled by the Employment Equality Agency found that, in the period for 1973 to 1983, women's participation in the paid workforce increased by 24.4 per cent. However, there was a simultaneous increase in part-time employment of 66 per cent from 1977 to 1987, of which around 70 per cent were women. Of those female part-time workers, again around 70 per cent were married. The types of work that women do is still, however, largely concentrated in services and lower skill work in industry.

These statistics indicate that during a period of high unemployment among males, there is an increasing trend towards women entering the workforce. The logical corollary of this is that men would take over many of the tasks previously done by women. However, every survey of household divisions

of labour indicates the contrary. Change is slow indeed. The idea that the gender roles are being swapped, that "the men on the dole are playing the mother's role", is not corroborated by the statistics. While attitudes are changing a little, and we now have some 'helpless males' on the adverts for washing-up liquid, perhaps we should not get over-enthusiastic about the extent of the changes.

The 'new man' is a perfect example of a contemporary myth. It is based on an attempted re-evaluation of the masculine gender role. Young men now feel quite free to discuss such topics as babies, their partners' careers, and the advantages and disadvantages of breastfeeding. All this is undoubtedly positive, but it has also been documented that in many cases, one is far more likely to find *homo novus* playing with the new toys from the Early Learning Centre than washing the eco-friendly cloth nappies.

Perhaps you agree with Robert Bly, the American author of *Iron John: A Book about Men* (1990), that our friend the 'new man' needs to leave all this rubbish behind and seek the 'wild man' deep down inside himself. He states that "wild man energy ...

leads to forceful action undertaken not with cruelty, but with resolve". Or perhaps you might agree with Susana Faludi who argues in *Backlash* (1992) that this attempt to find a positive image of masculinity is another attempt by the conservative lobby to scuttle the gains made by feminists over the years.

Let us finally look to the language associated with child-rearing for clues about changing gender identities. 'Mothering' has always and continues to be perceived as a very intensive activity which involves the complete submission to the needs of the offspring for several years. However, to 'father' a child equals a minimum of two minutes of sexual activity. Should it be seen as threatening that the word 'parenting' is now entering the realms of ordinary speech? This is a particularly pertinent question in a society like Ireland, where a request for paternal leave in the workplace is tantamount to a mutiny, or at least an indication of lack of commitment to the job.

Whatever direction the future takes with regard to these issues, it is clear that men themselves need to do much more self-analysis. The women's movement is not an inappropriate model for undertaking this task. □



Picture: Derek Speirs



Trend towards women entering the workplace

Truth and Fiction in Domestic Violence

Monica McWilliams argues that domestic violence must be looked at in the context of social attitudes rather than as an individual problem

THERE ARE AGE-OLD myths about the causes of domestic violence. As a result, public attention has been focused on the 'deviant' kinds of background of the individuals involved and the 'abnormal' behavioural characteristics of both the perpetrators and the victims.

Those working within the framework of these myths have produced misplaced stereotypes about 'inadequate men and masochistic women' and have succeeded for many years in diverting attention from the gendered nature of the abuse.

As a consequence of this, professionals and organisations who see violence against women in the context of gendered power relations have had to work extremely hard to shift the focus of public attention from the 'deviant' individuals. In shifting this focus, researchers have also developed a model which reflects the unequal power and control asserted over women in violent relationships. The debate on masculinity has more recently added weight to this model in that it helps to illustrate how women are victimised in these relationships and how this victimisation is maintained by those responsible for providing help.

Despite the profound changes of the past twenty years, institutions such as the church, the judiciary and the police have been criticised for their 'masculine' approach to women's issues and indeed for the masculine style of management which operates within these

institutions. Similarly, the way in which issues are prioritised or addressed by certain professionals, such as general practitioners, psychiatrists, health visitors and social workers, may also reflect the 'masculine' norms operating within their medical and social service settings.

Although the responsibility for domestic violence has become more clearly identified with the men in these relationships, it is still relatively rare that the discussion becomes focused around issues of masculinity. For example, in the dissemination of the research findings of a study of domestic violence in Northern Ireland, the questions which were asked about the men who perpetrated the violence were frequently posed in terms of the individual characteristics of these men. Those who were unfamiliar with the extent of the problem wanted to

know what were the distinguishing features or pathological characteristics which separated those who become abusive from those who do not.

No such diagnostic tool exists. Those seeking such answers may want to be assured that there are relatively few men who abuse their partners. The reality however is very different. In a Canadian national survey on prevalence rates in 1993, one quarter of all women had experienced violence at the hands of a current or past marital partner. What this acknowledges is the extensive gender inequities which exist within marital and cohabiting relationships and which reflect wider societal values and culture.

When hearing evidence to the Select Committee on Domestic Violence in 1975, Sir George Young also questioned whether certain

Reflect masculine norms

Picture: Derek Speirs



Violence at the hands of a partner

types of men engaged in domestic violence to a greater extent than others. He had been "struck by the disparity in incidence of wife battering between immigrants and UK citizens" which led him to ask "... is there not something about the Irish, some characteristic that makes them exceptionally prone to this?" The psychologist, submitting his own expert evidence to the committee, responded that "the simple answer is drink."

In the research on domestic violence in Northern Ireland, we found no such simple answers. Men who used violence when they were drunk also abused their partners when they were sober. Men who did not drink were also abusive. A proportion of men did become abusive only after consuming large amounts of alcohol, but these were in a minority.

The abuse of substances, such as alcohol and drugs, is often associated with other forms of abusive behaviour, but it is not a clear cause and effect relationship. What we need to focus on is the extent to which men want to dominate and control women in intimate relationships and within this context, the substance abuse may become a contributory factor.

Why is the excessive use of alcohol allowed to be used as a

pretext to diminish the responsibility for the violent actions of these men? This question needs to be addressed, and in doing so we should remember that those who choose to drink and drive are no longer tolerated by the criminal justice system. Even those around them hold them accountable for driving infringements.

In relation to violence against women in the home, it appears that those perpetrating the abuse are not expected to take the same responsibility for their actions. The victim is frequently told that



the perpetrator was not really to blame since he was intoxicated and therefore did not really mean her any harm.

Domestic violence is also perpetuated when those living within the community internalise this value system by

not challenging the attitudes and actions of these abusive men. In condoning such behaviour they may be indirectly colluding with the abuser. In a society which sustains an element of masculinity through its passive acceptance of the 'hard' man who likes his drink and knows how to keep his wife in place, a relationship in which there is domestic violence may not be seen as an aberration.

The corollary of this is that women also internalise the dominant cultural values of the society in which they live and in doing so, they may come to accept that there is nothing they can do to change the dynamics of power within their relationship.

The other major explanatory model which concentrates attention at the individual/behavioural level argues that those who have experienced domestic violence in childhood are likely to become involved in violent relationships as adults. We find, however, that in the debate about the generational effects of abuse, very little attention has been paid to the gendered nature of the violence. The fact that the majority of those perpetrating the violence are male and the majority of those on the receiving end are female has only recently become a significant part of this debate. Obviously if male children have been exposed to

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violence in their childhood, there may be an increased tendency for them to use violence to dominate and control partners in their later relationships.

Given that a proportion of men who have witnessed violence in their childhood choose not to use violence as adults, we need to assess what have been the contributory factors in enabling these men to break out of the abusive cycle. Clearly all young men need to be shown alternative non-violent ways of behaving in their adolescent years if they are to develop constructive relationships at a later stage. For those who have witnessed their fathers or other adult men using physical power and abusive attitudes towards women, then this becomes even more crucial.

In summary, the focus on single explanatory factors such as personality traits, alcohol abuse or abuse in childhood ignores the need to include issues of masculinity in the discussion and shifts the location of the abuse away from the wider social context in which it occurs. The construct of gendered power is offered as an alternative perspective by which to explain how the violence is maintained at both the interpersonal and institutional levels. For example, masculinity is relevant in explaining the experience of women who have been abused and who have sought and received help for domestic violence from the police.

Despite the fact that there is a struggle for legitimacy around the role of policing between the security forces and the paramilitary groups in certain areas of Northern Ireland, there is some similarity in the way in which both groups carry out their policing roles. Judgements are made on what constitutes real crime and on how best to handle it in the context of the community.

Decisions are made on the type of 'justice' which fits the more public forms of crime such as joy-riding, but there is a good deal of ambiguity about the 'just' response to violence in the home. This is partly because neither group considers domestic violence to be a real crime, but it also reflects the contradictions of trying to police such crime in the context of a community undergoing other kinds of conflict.

In our study of domestic violence in Northern Ireland, women in nationalist communities were asked if they would contact the police for help. Some felt reluctant to do so since the question of who policed their community was such a strongly contested issue. As one respondent noted, "In this area the police are not people that you normally go to."

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The most common response reported by women in nationalist communities was police refusal to answer calls. Telling women to call the police had no meaning if the police would not or could not come. Lack of police response also undermined the value of any court orders, which depend on police action for their enforcement.

At the same time, the police argument about their own personal security must be assessed within the context of their traditional attitudes toward domestic violence and this predominantly (90 per cent) male police force's understanding of what is considered to be proper police work.

Victims, professionals and the police agree that there is a slow response time – up to six hours – in these areas, because of the potential for paramilitary attacks and police officers' need to organise security for themselves. When the police arrive in these communities, they are escorted by the British Army. This arrangement usually entails a convoy of six to eight heavily armoured vehicles full of soldiers and police, all wearing flak jackets and carrying submachine guns. Not only does this draw considerable attention to the "offence" but it can also add to the anxiety of having to call the police for assistance.

We don't like getting involved

If the women need to be escorted elsewhere, then having to climb into the back of a steel-reinforced Land Rover is one more humiliating problem for the victims and their families. In rural areas, this problem is compounded when the police have had, on occasions, to use helicopters to arrive at homes in nationalist areas.

So, if local people in these communities are reluctant or unable to contact the police, do they seek alternative sources of help from paramilitary organisations? Over the years of the 'troubles', people have looked to paramilitary groups to take action over criminal activity. When criminal activity was thought to be particularly high, there was intense pressure on the IRA to take action against local criminals. To curtail the escalation in joy-riding, the IRA engaged in punishment shootings on a considerable scale. Between 1969 and February 1992, 1,670 people were victims of punishment shootings. The damage inflicted by these shootings ranges from flesh wounds to serious disability.

In 1978, however, the IRA were themselves taken to task for exercising their own forms of machismo in the types of punishment which they were handing out – namely the tarring and feathering of women accused of going out with British soldiers, and the punishment shootings of women, the majority of whom were mothers of single parent families. Derry Women's Aid provided practical support for these women whilst engaging in public confrontation with the paramilitaries. They argued that the latter were becoming mirror images of the forces they were combating in their tactics and attitudes, and demanded that such attacks should cease.

It is apparent that paramilitaries have, over the years, adopted a method for deciding what constitute acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviour. Within the continuum of less to more serious forms of crime, they set priorities and act accordingly. In the study on domestic violence, several women knew they could go to paramilitaries for help, but one woman thought the IRA in her area would take the attitude, 'we don't like getting involved.' Not wishing to invade the privacy of the home has often been the pretext for the lack of intervention in cases of domestic violence by statutory agencies, including the police. From the evidence above, it seems that the unofficial agents operate the same kind of gendered response to violence against women in the home.

The punishments meted out for anti-social behaviour have also changed over the years. Some of the young men from these

predominantly nationalist communities have had their heads shaved not only as a form of punishment but to identify their actions publicly. This public shaming has not been extended to the perpetrators of wife assault despite the historical precedent for doing so.

What is also significant is the reaction to the use of this strategy in the policing of crime within the community. In their submissions to the Helsinki Watch team, some community workers noted that the young men who had been subjected to this punishment would have preferred some kind of 'harder' treatment, like kneecapping, to the humiliation of having to stand outside churches with placards tied around their necks (Helsinki Watch, 1992).

In the domestic violence study, the initiative to consult paramilitaries came primarily from families, neighbours and from paramilitary groups themselves. A woman living in a Protestant area went to the Ulster Defence Association, a loyalist paramilitary organisation, whose members came and got her partner out of the house 'quicker than the police'.

However, this woman also explained that she remains afraid that the paramilitaries might expect something in return. The decision to involve paramilitaries can be fraught with danger. Some women said they would not call the paramilitary groups because they thought they would be exploited later by being asked for favours, such as hiding weapons in their houses.

**He can't
claim
I did
him any
harm**



Other women disclosed that when their husbands were reported to the police or to a paramilitary group, action would be taken if the partner was wanted for some criminal offence. These women felt that the various policing forces, both official and unofficial, would only condemn or punish the offender for his violent behaviour in the home if he was well known to them for his anti-social or 'offensive' behaviour outside the home.

In these cases the domestic violence incident would be the pretext for 'getting back' at the man for some other offence. These women pointed out that this was no solution for them because it left them vulnerable to retaliation by their partners, or by his friends, who would interpret it as 'informing' on him.

Most of the women who considered involving paramilitaries decided against it for many of these reasons. Some, however, who had considered asking for help were concerned that their partners would be physically harmed or permanently disabled through a punishment shooting. In a Protestant area, when one woman found no support from the police, the UDA offered to do something about her husband. Although she claims that "they would have given him the same as he gives me", she declined their offer "so that he can't claim I did him any harm".

There are many complicated pressures on these women not to report violent incidents. If the abuser happens to be a member of a paramilitary organisation, then exposing 'one of their own' to the police is not acceptable and the policing by paramilitary organisations of their own members is not always effective. One woman who was abused by a republican ex-prisoner pointed to the duplicity involved when paramilitaries are willing to police others, but not members of their own organisations.

The masculism and the militarism of both the police and the paramilitaries is reflected in these various responses to domestic violence. Punishment with weapons is seen by paramilitaries as the appropriate response to the war situation but it is this same punishment which makes many victims reluctant to seek their help in the first place.

Similarly, the accompaniment of the police by the symbolism of their military might in these communities makes victims reluctant to come forward and identify their plight. As a result of the way in which both sides operate a system of getting information

on the other, victims have also to weigh up their decisions on who it is most appropriate to go to and how this will reflect on them.

In attempting to highlight these problems, I am not in any way claiming that domestic violence is more extensive within these communities. What is being claimed here is that the abdication of normal policing within these communities means that there are special constraints placed on the help-seeking process of women. Abusive partners may be in a more powerful position within these communities because they know that women cannot pursue help through the normal channels.

As a result of the way in which the alternative systems of policing operate, women also live in fear of further victimisation. The result may be that they are less likely to seek alternatives outside of the abusive relationship and hence the abuse itself may be maintained for longer than would be the case elsewhere.

Some local women have already weighed up the issues and have decided that they are not going to remain subjected to the continual control of their abusive partners or become the subject of control of another group of men to whom they turn for help. Instead, they have set up alternative structures within their own communities. These include support networks which enable women to make decisions within a framework of choice.

In the process of setting up these alternative structures, they have not only helped to provide support and sanctuary for the victims of crime but have become involved with other community activists in discussions around the issues of masculinity. They are concerned that innovative projects should be set up for young people in their communities which address issues of power and control and which challenge the gender inequities within inter-personal relationships. In their imaginative ways, these local women point to the possibilities of a less 'masculine' approach to dealing with such issues as domestic violence. □

I would like to acknowledge Joan Mc Kiernan's contribution to the original study on domestic violence in Northern Ireland. This study was commissioned by the Department of Health and Social Services in Northern Ireland and was published by the HMSO in 1993. Since its completion, some additional interviews were carried out to assess the policing responses within these communities. Some of this material is also included here.

Helsinki Watch, *Children in Northern Ireland Abused by Security Forces and Paramilitaries*. New York, Human Rights Watch, 1992.

McWilliams, M. and McKiernan, J. *Bringing it Out in the Open: Domestic Violence in Northern Ireland*. Belfast, HMSO, 1993.

Reflections on the Men's Movement

Maurice Meehan looks at the role of some men's groups in helping to change relations between the sexes

THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE to suggest that in Ireland some small groups and numbers of men are coming together to form men's groups. In common with men's groups in Europe and America, their focus is often on personal development with particular reference to attempting to redefine traditional masculine roles in our friendships and relationships.

Some feminist thinkers and activists have expressed anxiety at the development of a men's movement which concentrates on men seeking to heal men's inner hurt without reference to the structural oppression of men and women. Rosemary Reuther, an American writer, states:

The men of the men's movement appear unaware of social structures that shape the family. They present themselves as the tragic victims of material domination and paternal neglect. Inner therapy for their wounded masculine psyches, not social transformation of the systems that create these distorted patterns, is the solution.

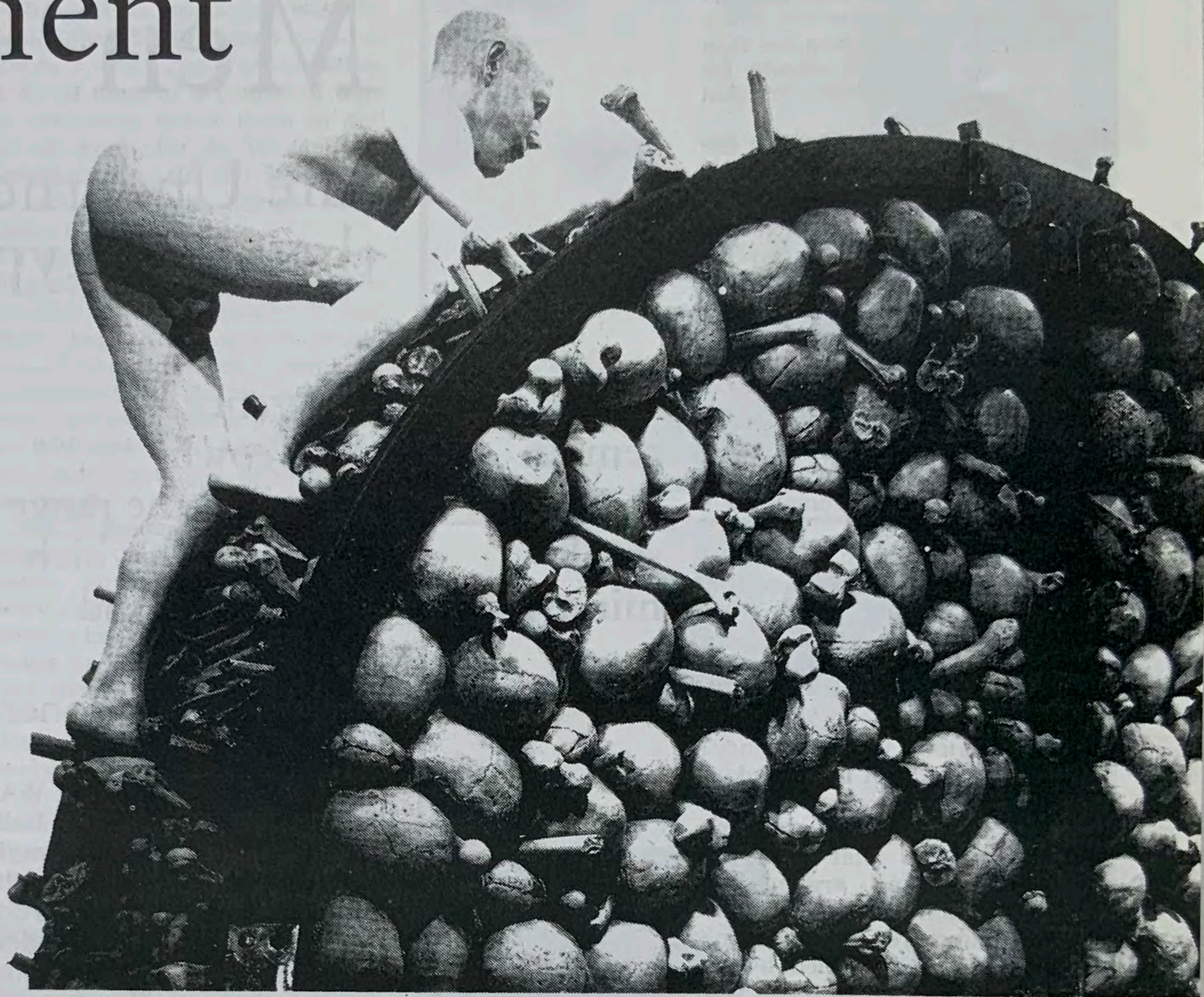
In the context of continued high rates of male violence against women – rape, sexual harassment – combined with institutional sexism which denies women full and equal participation in the arenas of politics, employment and education, one can understand why feminists may feel impatient that sympathetic men are not concentrating their energies on addressing these issues.

For me, there needs to be a synthesis between men creating

a separate space to both discover and recover from the socialisation of and assumptions of male superiority and a position where men can take action alongside women in challenging patriarchy as a means of releasing all of us, women and men, from its power.

One group attempting to play a role in tackling male violence is MOVE, Men Overcoming Violence. Pat Synod is a probation officer and co-founder of MOVE, which was established in 1989 in Dublin following a model developed in England. Two MOVE groups currently meet weekly, one in the centre and one in North Dublin. The groups have a facilitator and men who have battered confront men who are battering.

Pat believes the reason why the groups appear to be effective in stopping significant numbers from battering behaviour is due to the model of men challenging men to end violence against women. While the base line for those involved in the group is to stop violence against women occurring, it is necessary to have a critique of



what societal pressures are put on males. Don Long, a psychologist, describes the process:

The individual batterer uses violence at the level he deems necessary to make up for his sense of inadequacy, his perceived sense of loss of power or control, or as an outlet for his sense of rage at an unfair world in which he can never live up to the expectations of being masculine, (thus) fulfilling social prescriptions found in institutional sexism.

The MOVE groups in Dublin have recently given rise to WOVE groups, Women Overcoming Violent Experiences. These groups are made up of partners of men who have battered and who are, in some cases, themselves involved in the MOVE groups. This development, Pat Synod believes, is evidence of the growing maturity and success of the model.

There are international examples of men organising to take action on violence against women, such as the White Ribbon Campaign in Canada, which was organised by men. The campaign

**Heal
men's
inner
hurt**

focused on the second anniversary of the Montreal massacre of women, when Marc Lepine denounced 'feminists' as he shot fourteen women dead at the Ecole Polytechnique. A section from the text of the 1991 White Ribbon statement reads:

Men have been defined as part of the problem. But we are writing this statement because we think men can also be part of the solution. Confronting men's violence requires nothing less than a commitment to full equality for women and a redefinition of what it means to be men.

One needs to be realistic that the vast majority of men in Ireland, as worldwide, give no indication of being prepared to give up many of the benefits of patriarchy. If anything, some of the hard-fought-for gains of the feminist movement with regard to women's greater control over fertility, for example, seem to be in danger. Some men appear to be taking a greater degree of responsibility for domestic labour and for childcare, although these men remain in a small minority.

A recent meeting in Belfast saw 200 men turn up in protest at the Child Support Agency, set up to enforce separated fathers' mean-tested contributions toward the upkeep of their children. While there may well be legitimate objections to this agency's policies, I could not help thinking that perhaps this may well be a much more coherent men's movement than that made up of small groups arguing for a redefinition of masculinity. Perhaps the more coherent men's movement is exemplified by the large group of men who can with relative ease and immediate media attention attempt to ensure that men's rights and power are not challenged. □

These men remain in a small minority

Republican Men

Life Underneath the Stereotypes

Lawrence McKeown describes the range of attitudes which are to be found among male republican prisoners

IN 1982 A MURAL WAS painted on the Falls Road depicting female IRA volunteers which had the slogan: "We must grow strong but without losing our tenderness". Some women protested at the time on the grounds that it would be nice if the slogan were used in a mural depicting male volunteers.

There are many who would think that the very idea of male IRA volunteers being tender is just a ludicrous notion or part of republican propaganda. How does tenderness fit with the person who lies in a field with a rifle waiting on the next RUC or British army patrol, or who drives a car bomb into the centre of Belfast, London or wherever causing millions of pounds worth of damage? Surely these people are aptly named 'mad bombers', 'psychopaths' and 'terrorists'.

That of course is how the IRA volunteer is depicted in popular fiction or television drama based on the 'troubles'. The only difference between any of the characters is that some are just thoroughly 'bad people' whilst others are plainly 'evil bastards'.

This popular depiction of the IRA volunteer is either born out of ignorance (the result of censorship laws such as Section 31, thankfully now repealed) or from political motivation, by those who

see it as one more weapon in their fight against the enemy. The policy of criminalisation introduced by the British in 1976 — an important part of which was to introduce to the airwaves on news bulletins the new language of 'godfathers', 'Mafia-style shootings', 'gangs', 'psychopaths', etc.) was devastated by the world-wide support for the H Block hunger strike in 1981. But it lives on in the minds of many authors and script writers.

No doubt it is a lucrative business and one supported by the establishment. Just look at the reaction to Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* for his depiction of the IRA volunteer as human. To his credit, Jordan replied that that is exactly what volunteers are.

I can certainly vouch for that in my own experience. (Unfortunately I must write about male volunteers, as they are the group with which I have had most contact.) My knowledge arises from having been a volunteer myself and having spent the last 16 years in Long Kesh, locked up with other volunteers. So, I think I am fairly well placed to have some idea about the behaviour, ideas, opinions and aspirations of IRA men.

The first thing I think I could say about IRA volunteers is that they are fairly representative of the wider community. Some are single, some married with children, some not married with children; some are very young, while others have died in their seventies whilst still being active members.

I have listened to their diversity of opinions. Some of their views have smacked of fascism and elitism. Some, at particular stages of their lives, have been deeply religious, whilst others have been atheistic. I have witnessed arrogance and sexism, sometimes to extreme degrees. I have seen

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displays of machismo, sullenness and pride.

All of these aspects of behaviour are ones we don't want to admit to in ourselves, but they are there and I'm as guilty of them as the next person. To challenge one distortion of the IRA volunteer should not lead us to create another equally unreal one. I won't attempt to portray volunteers as lily-white, ideologically sound, politically correct socialist-feminists. They are not. They are very ordinary people.

What I do want to say here is that the richness of my life has been lived through the very 'ordinariness' of those lives. I have witnessed a camaraderie and love that many others never experience in a lifetime. I have felt and seen in others the hopes and fears, the doubts and anxieties, the laughter and aspirations, the despair and the pain that people struggling to come to grips with life and incarceration experience.

I have listened to and watched the frustrations of the man who can't come to terms with the fact that his partner has left him and that he is, probably for the first time, totally powerless to influence that situation. I have witnessed others who have walked away from such situations, never to speak of them again, their emotions buried, ultimately to their own harm. I have listened to the man who was physically abused in his childhood, choking on the words that poured from his lips as he recounted the terrors he had gone through, his life and relations now scarred, but striving to rebuild that trust that is so necessary.

Or the man now living in an all-male environment who was raped as a teenager – his doubts and anxieties about his sexuality, his feelings of guilt, his mourning at the loss of those teenage years being shouted out in his stifled sobs and shaking limbs.

Watching and listening to the man/boy who knows his father or mother is about to die, knowing he will only see them when their ears can no longer hear his words, eyes see his smile or tears, or hand hold his clasp in theirs.

It is in moments such as these that I have witnessed the real tenderness and empathy of those men who also just happen to be IRA volunteers. Like most men everywhere we have a difficulty expressing our emotions in the manner which women appear to handle easily, but that's not to deny the tenderness or empathy that exists.

In the jail context we handled such situations as best we could by firstly making space for the person. In such a tight-knit community someone under pressure or stress soon became noticeable, even

when they tried to hide or bury it. Often those who responded to such situations were those who had been in prison a few years longer. They had that bit more maturity and experience of similar situations. Usually there was not a lot more they could do than sit and listen and offer comments where they thought appropriate or advice about other people to speak to.

But just as important was the other person who would come to the door with a cup of tea or coffee, a bit of toast of a couple of bars of chocolate, throw them in and go off again. Or the person who would shout in the side of the door at lock-up at night: 'Alright cara? Oiche mhaith duit'.

I don't recall any scenes of men hugging one another to provide comfort or reassurance. It just didn't happen that way. No doubt those involved would have felt uncomfortable. But in our own ways, according to our own culture of maleness and imprisonment, we could show one another that we cared.

And tenderness was not expressed only in situations of stress, anxiety or where people were coping with personal problems. I have watched men sit for hours on end creating a work of love out of matchsticks and glue, have heard them sing in tones that resonated with emotions of every sort. I have listened to them with a lump in my throat, still holding onto some vestige of my own 'masculinity' by not crying whilst wishing to hug them and weep openly at the beauty of the moment.

We all have those moments, the ones that mean that extra something special to us, the ones that moved us emotionally in a way few others do. I recall the morning I walked out of my cell in the prison hospital. Tom was lying in bed in his cell directly opposite. He was propped up with pillows behind him and smoking a cigarette, a rare commodity in those days. He spoke across to me. 'Alright, Lorney, maidin mhaith'. I stopped at his door and asked if he was alright. He said, 'Dead on'. We spoke for a few moments, then the doctor arrived and I moved on.

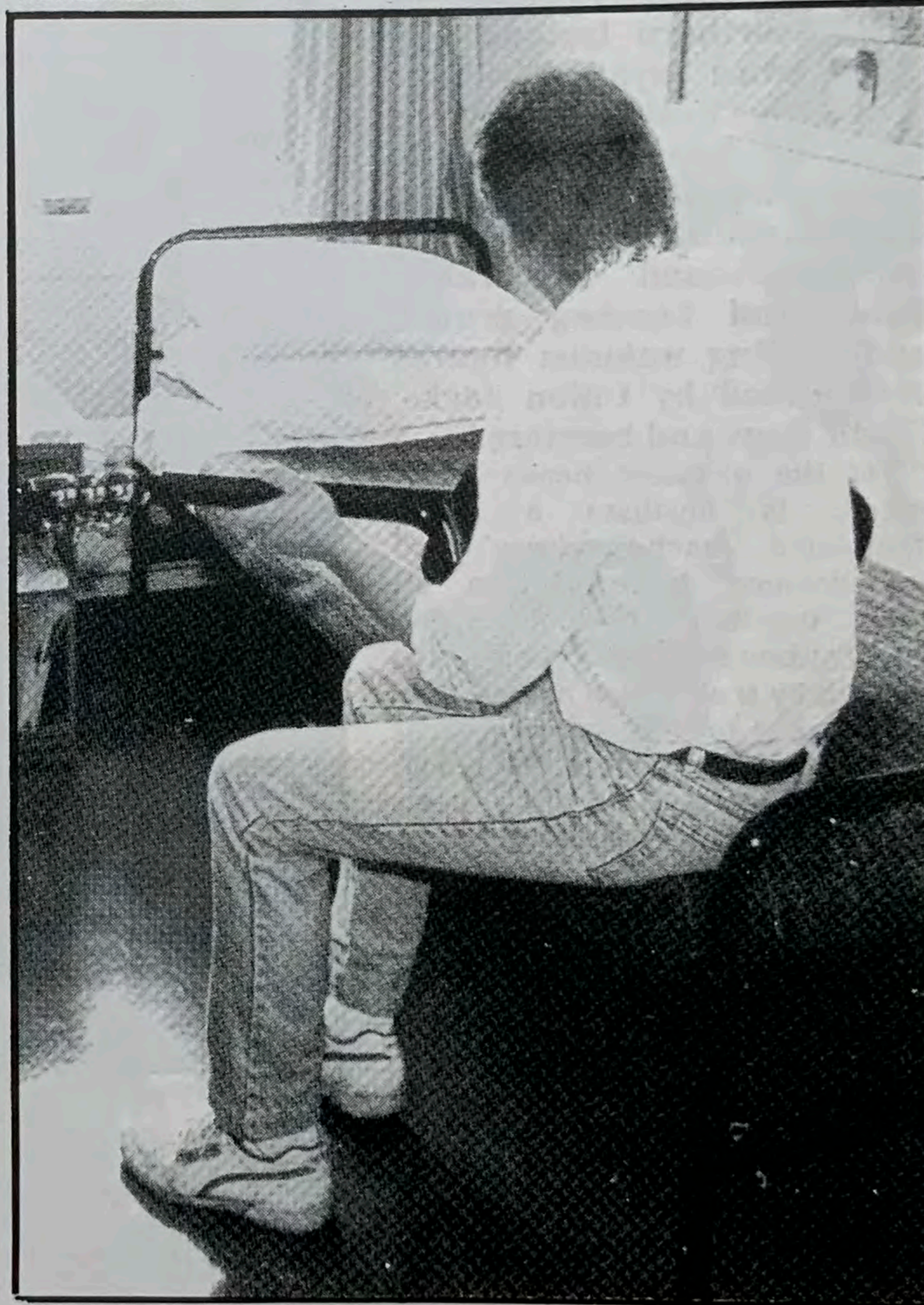
It was from the radio two hours later that I learned that Tom (McElwee) was "the ninth person to die on hunger strike". We were locked in our cells, the silence broken only by the bump of a steel stretcher against a wooden door as Tom's corpse was wheeled down the corridor, away from us, from the prison hospital, out of the prison.

I picked Tom to speak about, but I could just as easily have spoken of Bobby, Frank, Raymond, Patsy, Joe, Martin, Kevin, Kieran or Mickey. All of them were examples of real republican 'men', no



Thomas McElwee

Picture: Courtesy An Phoblacht



Difficulty expressing our emotions

better or worse than other men. Our republican politics do not automatically set up apart from others who in every other manner are identical to us – in tastes, fashions, sports, music, ideas and values. We might well hope that through our involvement in one form of struggle we may come to a realisation of the oppression of others in our society, and I think that whilst this is actually the case in many instances, we shouldn't expect it to be already there. □

Loyalism: Male, Macho and Marching?

Picture: Derek Speirs

Sammy Douglas questions whether macho culture is the only way for loyalist men to express themselves

TO MOST PEOPLE IN Northern Ireland, the word 'loyalist' will immediately evoke images of men in bowler hats and sashes, hooded paramilitary figures, young men marching to the sound of orange flutes and Lambeg drums, and leading unionist figures surrounded by Union Jacks, Ulster flags and banners.

Yet the question needs to be asked: is loyalism a male-dominated 'macho culture', and do violence and loyalism sit easily together? I would argue that, although these claims are essentially true, there are notable exceptions to the stereotypical loyalist image. In fact, I believe that loyalism, as it has been previously known, is changing to the point that it means different things to different people.

I was brought up in the working class Sandy Row area of Belfast, an epitome of Ulster loyalism. From a very early age I learned loyalist folklore – of the Sons of Ulster marching to the Somme, and how our forefathers had fought to defend our freedom, religion and laws against King James, the Pope, Hitler and De Valera.

Joining the Junior Orange Order at five years of age, and subsequent involvement with local 'kick the pope' bands, I grew up in a loyalist culture where our future lay in the hands of 'the men and the boys'. Women's role, on the other hand, was to support their men, particularly on the 12th of July, the 'big day', when their place would be to mind the kids and watch 'the men' march to the field and back. Paul Sweeney, Director of the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust,



Loyalists marching in Portadown

The men and the boys

addressing a conference which looked at the role of women in Northern Ireland, concluded:

Consider the 12th of July demonstrations, essentially a male phenomenon, where the role of women is to look good. And what a pathetic role model the caricature of 'Orange Lil' portrays: a human flag, loud and the butt of Orange jokes.

Undoubtedly, men have been at the forefront of Ulster loyalism and many of its organisations and institutions are merely 'old boys' clubs', excluding women from any meaningful involvement. Republicanism, on the other hand, because of its strong links with international struggles and

revolutions, has been more willing to embrace feminism and involve women in a way that loyalism has failed to do. However, there are some signs that male dominance in the loyalist community is not the bedrock that it was formerly.

The growth of the women's movement in Protestant working class areas is a fairly recent development, which loyalist leaders are now beginning to take notice of. Although many of the members of these women's groups retain their loyalist identity, they have established links and networks with their counterparts in the Catholic, nationalist community.

In 1991, an Independent Protestant Unionist councillor, Liz

Seawright, and the Shankill Women's Group were involved in a successful campaign to restore funding to the Falls Women's Centre which had been withdrawn by the government under the process of political vetting. Seeds are being sown with these groups that will see the emergence of a future articulate and highly politicised female leadership in the loyalist community.

By and large, loyalist violence has been carried out by Protestant males. One has only to look at the prison population, where the vast majority of the loyalist prisoners are young men. An exception to this generalisation occurred in the 1970s, when 12 women of different ages were involved in one of the most horrific murders to have taken place in the 'troubles'. UDA women from Sandy Row and Donegall Pass in Belfast murdered a Catholic woman in front of her three year old daughter. The entire community was shocked that such an act could be carried out by loyalist women.

To say that violence sits easily within loyalism, however, is to over-simplify the issue. Just because the loyalist community values and identifies with a British way of life does not necessarily mean that we are bigots or supporters of violence to achieve political goals. I believe that the majority of people in the loyalist community are opposed to violence no matter its source and are content to support the forces of law and order.

Historically, though, Protestants have had more connections with the B Specials, the RUC and the British army, a fact which would support the view that loyalism is not just a political identity, but also a military culture.

Yet this association with the security forces has changed over the years, particularly since the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement. Equally, loyalist violence has manifested itself against the British army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary during times of rising political tensions or uncertainties.

Further Protestant alienation came to a head in 1993 when there were widespread gun and bomb attacks against the RUC in many working class loyalist areas throughout Northern Ireland.

The threat of violence has long been part of the rhetoric of some unionist politicians. "Ulster (men) will fight and Ulster (men) will be right" has been a popular battle cry from political platforms. The same politicians who hypocritically make these claims, and are not slow to call on the loyalist paramilitaries when the time demands, are only too quick to demand hanging or internment of the same people they call to arms.

Another assumption in many

quarters is that being a loyalist is about being a man, and a 'real man' at that! There is no room for the 'wimpish' type of individual, the 'namby pamby' or gays.

The establishment of the loyalist paramilitaries at the start of the 'troubles' brought an influx of recruits who commanded high respect in their communities – the 'hard men'. As a consequence, the perception of the loyalist paramilitary was that of a tough, macho hard man who could take care of himself in the regular power brawls that took place in the local pubs and clubs. I remember one such 'macho' loyalist who ran a drinking club in a Protestant area a number of years ago. While driving a drag queen to his local loyalist club to do a cabaret act, they were stopped at a police roadblock, and the 'superprod' had a lot of explaining to do to the RUC officers who were aware of his tough loyalist image.

Ironically, the notion that "God made all loyalist men but the Colt 45 made them equal" resulted in some of the most 'wimpish', but ruthless and callous, men assuming power in loyalist paramilitary circles. The same men who, prior to the 'troubles', would have been picked on and bullied now commanded fear and respect.

Another characteristic of the loyalist 'male and macho' image is that it cannot and does not entertain gay men in its ranks. One leading loyalist paramilitary in the past was nicknamed 'queenie' while in prison, but it was easier for 'queenie' to 'come out' than for the ordinary paramilitary foot soldier as he had already established a power base in his local community and was well respected.

I heard a story recently of a loyalist prisoner who was suspected by his comrades of passing on information to republicans in one of the North's jails. Eventually a letter was intercepted on its way to the republican wing, but it turned out to be a love letter from a loyalist prisoner to his gay republican boyfriend.

There has always been within loyalism a strong Protestant evangelical and biblical influence with numerous campaigns such as 'Save Ulster from Sodomy'. Given that, is it any wonder that homosexuality has been shunned and demonised?

As political events in Northern Ireland are overtaken by regular developments and declarations, the loyalist community is currently going through an identity crisis. Unsure of who or what we are loyal to, the stereotypical loyalist image is rapidly fading away as we come to terms with our diminishing, second class British citizenship. Bill Craig, a former

Unionist cabinet minister, once asserted that Ulster loyalists were "an old and historic community for whom the Union with Britain had never been an end in itself, but was always a means of preserving her loyalist people".

With growing Protestant alienation, particularly among young men, the loyalist community sees itself in retreat and betrayed by a British government which would abandon Northern Ireland, "if only us damned loyalists would allow them"! The future for loyalism in Northern Ireland rests in the hands of all of that community; it is too important to leave it solely to the 'men of Ulster', particularly to those men who have helped to give it a world wide image of being strident, sectarian, aggressive and exclusivist. □

Save Ulster From Sodomy

The Eleventh Night in Tiger's Bay, Belfast

Picture: Ed Kashi



The RUC, Drink, Dames and Debt



Picture: Derek Speirs

Graham Ellison looks at how the political situation in the North of Ireland affects the intensely male atmosphere within the RUC

UNLIKE POLICE FORCES in Europe, the United States and perhaps to a slightly lesser extent those in Britain, the hierarchy of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) is not particularly amenable to having its officers researched in anything other than the most restrictive of circumstances.

Consequently, the RUC has generally escaped the intrusiveness of sociological research of the kind that has illuminated several

important aspects of police occupational culture such as the now widely accepted charges of racism and sexism.

In considering the RUC, therefore, it might be illustrative to consider the extent to which they share aspects of the occupational culture which can be found within other police organisations. Additionally, the high levels of political violence have resulted in a large number of RUC officers being killed or seriously injured, and this has to have an effect upon the occupational culture of the RUC.

What kinds of 'coping strategies' do officers use to combat stress? How does an almost constant 'terrorist' threat affect their lifestyle and relations with family and friends? How do Protestant officers relate to their Catholic counterparts and vice versa? How is loyalist violence perceived? How are female officers perceived within the force? These are all important issues that warrant examination.

Perhaps the most fundamental point to make about the RUC —

and one which it shares which many other police forces elsewhere — is that it is distinctly male in terms of numbers and ethos. The RUC currently numbers over 13,000 full and part-time officers amongst its ranks; only 1300 (10 per cent) of these are female. If women are under-represented within the force generally, they are heavily under-represented at senior and middle management levels — particularly at the rank of Inspector and above.

However, the majority of male officers spoken to suggested that the reality of the situation was different. They argued that women were in an advantageous position in terms of initial recruitment into the force and promotion prospects. As one male officer suggests:

People coming into the force now, the majority of them have degrees and the majority of them are female. Like, it's getting to the stage now where if you are a woman you can get promoted anywhere you like. It's all because of this equal opportunities stuff.

Some women officers suggested that they were regularly subjected

Distinctly male in terms of numbers and ethos

to sexist remarks, taunts and conversely over-protectiveness and paternalism. Some added that their male colleagues viewed police work - particularly what was seen as *real* police work, what is referred to as 'the big stuff' or anti-terrorist duties - as man's work. In these kinds of situations women are often portrayed as unreliable and having the tendency to 'crack under' pressure. According to one (male) officer:

If we get into a bit of a situation, I don't want some woman running around getting all flummoxed and getting in the road...It makes my job that bit harder if they are out on patrol with us and something happens. It means that I've got to make sure she's alright and try and deal with the situation.

Somewhat ironically perhaps, female officers who attempt to develop a more aggressive, masculine, 'one of the lads' persona are ridiculed by their male colleagues as 'she men'. It would appear that this is a no-win situation for women. On the one hand they are portrayed as being incapable of dealing with 'real' policing tasks. However, when they display a proficiency at activities which are perceived to fall within the male realm - for example, hand to hand combat, or firearms proficiency - the basis of their femininity is questioned. In what are euphemistically termed 'sandbag' stations in border areas the sense of maleness takes on a more pernicious character. Since these are the stations which are typically under the most threat from IRA attack, the police officers usually patrol the areas in conjunction with a British Army patrol and usually spend long periods (very often entire shifts) cooped up in the police station.

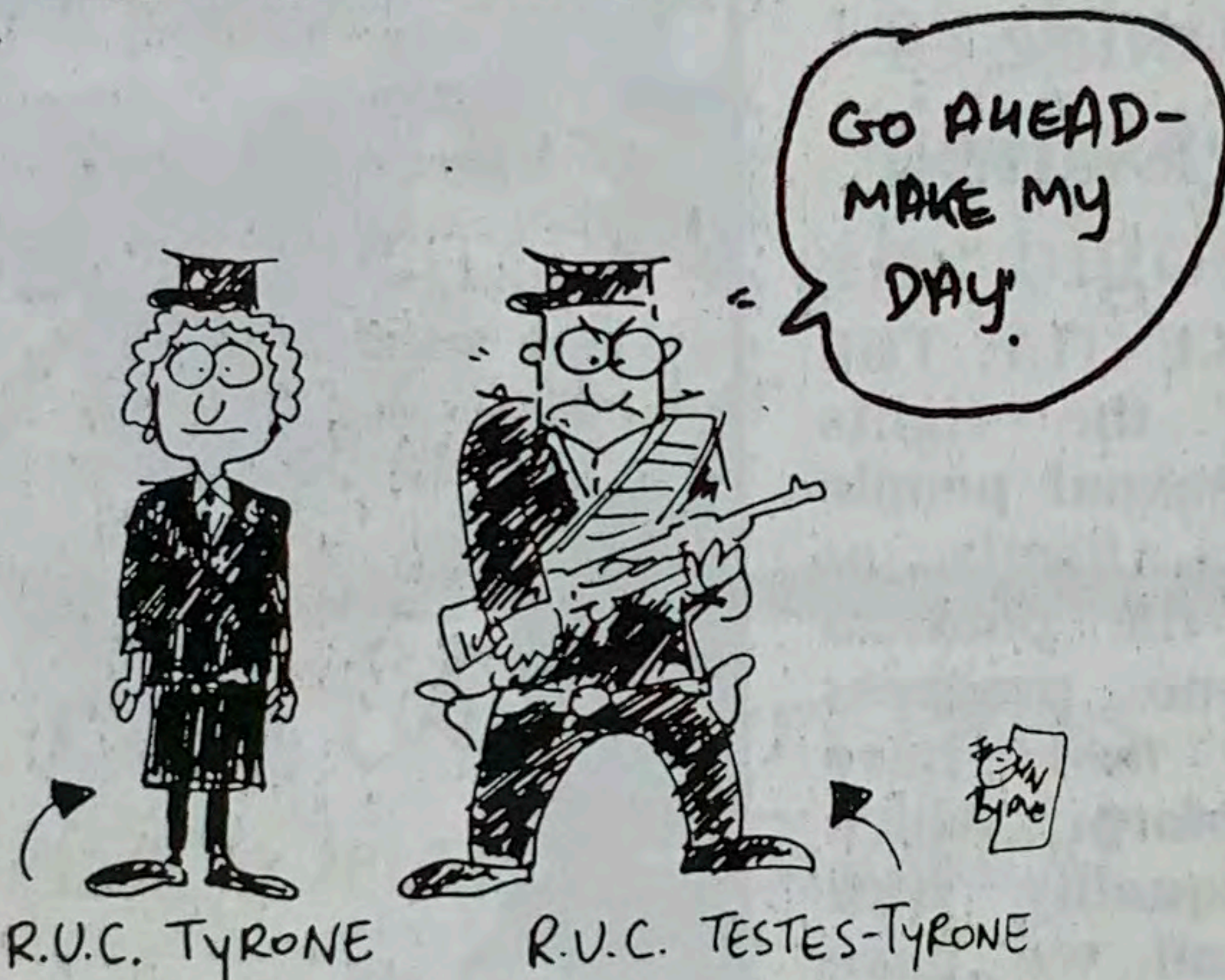
Not surprisingly, in this situation stress levels tend to run quite high. However, some officers suggest that it is the spirit of camaraderie enjoyed in 'sandbag' stations which provides a coping mechanism to alleviate the symptoms of stress. Some officers have suggested that the bonds created between officers in these circumstances are almost sacrosanct and have expressed doubts about how they could react to their female colleagues under these conditions. Somewhat bizarrely a number of officers expressed the idea that policing in 'sandbag' areas forged an envious respect for IRA activists.

They suggested that anti-terrorist policing was like a game of 'cat and mouse' or a 'battle of wits' between themselves and the terrorist which demanded cunning, guts and nerves of steel. Subliminally, of course there was the underlying supposition that these were faculties which women officers didn't really possess. As one officer recalls:

Now I've met some of these guys on the street which in a different situation could be construed as being friendly. You sort of look at each other ... both of you are permanently smiling ... and like ... they are thinking, 'I'd love to fuckin' do you' and you're thinking, 'I'd love to fucking do you too' ... you know. Like I mean, there's a sort of grudging respect there because they are the best fuckin' terrorist outfit in the world and that's the truth.

Several features of the lifestyle of young, male RUC officers attracted severe criticism from the ex-Chief Constable of the RUC, Sir John Hermon. Hermon launched a major crack-down on what he termed the 'three D's', drink, dames and debt. Hermon insisted on the liberal use of the transfer procedure as a means of enacting discipline amongst the ranks. For example, it was not uncommon to find an adulterous couple posted to opposite ends of the North.

However, in spite of Hermon's puritanism, the force still appears to be dogged by the same problems.



Some older officers, commenting on the antics of their younger colleagues, believe that the root of the problem lies in the relatively high wages which police constables in Northern Ireland receive in relation to those in other regional forces. A recent *Belfast Telegraph* article suggested that an average RUC Constable with five years' service could expect to earn £25-£30,000 per annum if overtime bonuses are included as part of the basic salary. There is the temptation then for young officers of eighteen and nineteen years of age and who may not have much experience at managing money to indulge in fast cars, expensive houses and numerous foreign holidays.

There is, of course, an additional problem, which according to one senior officer a high proportion of recruits do not consider carefully enough whenever they join the force. Very often joining the RUC necessitates a dramatic change in lifestyle and the pattern of everyday living. In some cases it is no longer possible (for security reasons) to go to your 'local' for a drink at the weekend, or to

Fast cars, expensive houses, foreign holidays

keep the same circle of friends. In extreme circumstances it can also be relatively difficult for an RUC officer to travel home to visit parents or relatives. These restrictions can very often lead to frustration and boredom and can result in officers indulging in compulsive behaviour, whether it be alcohol abuse or spending large amounts of money on credit.

The existence of stress and stress-related conditions continues to be a very real problem for a great many RUC officers. Until quite recently there existed no official mechanism to deal with stress within the force. In 1986 an Occupational Health Unit was established. However, the Unit operates largely on a self-referral basis, leaving the onus upon the individual officer to establish contact in the first instance in the majority of cases. This suggests a reluctance on the part of senior officers to highlight a problem with what is very often considered to be an individual's private behaviour. As someone suggested to me, "No one wants to be the person to say to a friend, 'You're an alcoholic - you need help'".

There still appears to be a heavy stigma attached to stress. Very often officers are reluctant to seek help because they are worried about the stigmatising effects this will have on their work and their chances of promotion. What is clear, however, is that the system for detecting stress within the force is deficient in a number of respects and which can be illustrated by the tragic events which took place at the Sinn Fein advice centre on the Falls Road in 1992.

One final and perhaps unmistakable fact about the RUC is that its membership is drawn in large part from the Protestant community. Although, the RUC will not release precise figures on religious composition, it is generally held that Catholic representation within the force is approximately 10 per cent and could fall to perhaps three per cent if Catholic members who were born in England (ex-British soldiers, for example) are excluded from the total figure.

It would appear that officers in the RUC are little different from those in other police organisations in terms of their social class background, political conservatism, attitudes towards women, educational background and so on. However, it is clear that the political situation in Northern Ireland does affect the way in which ordinary police officers perceive their role. Unfortunately, in the absence of major sociological research into this area the role of the RUC as a major player in the Northern Ireland conflict will continue to remain relatively obscure. □

Moving Hearts and Changing Minds

Lifting a Burden from Gay Men

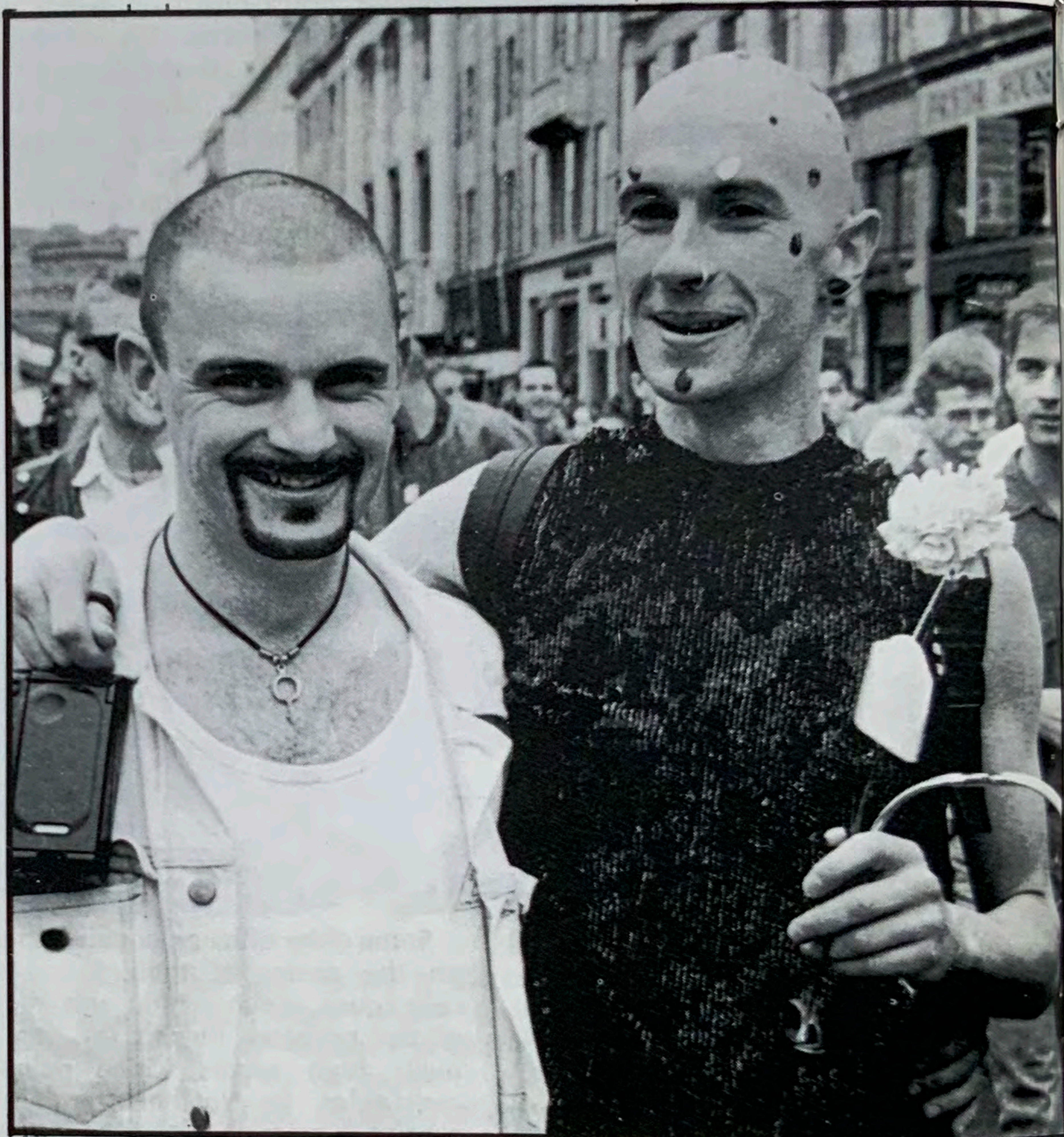
Kieran Rose describes how Irish traditions were invoked to win gay law reform which has placed Ireland at the leading edge of equality legislation

UNTIL RECENTLY, THE issue of the rights of homosexual people in Ireland was firmly at the bottom of the political agenda, with no progress in sight. We now have a gay law reform which provides for equality with heterosexuals and we have anti-discrimination legislation which specifically includes lesbians and gay men. Ireland is now at the forefront of developments in lesbian and gay legal rights internationally.

The gay law reform Act incorporated all the basic proposals made by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN). Most importantly, in a short phrase – “any rule of law by virtue of which buggery between persons is an offence is hereby abolished” – Section 2 of the Bill erased the basic criminalisation of homosexuality introduced into Ireland by England as part of the process of colonisation in the 17th century. Previously the Brehon laws referred non-judgementally to homosexual behaviour as grounds for divorce.

The Act provides for a common age of consent of 17 years and there are no special restrictions regarding gay sexual expression in public. In other words, homosexuality and heterosexuality are on an equal footing in terms of the law.

At the same time, the Unfair Dismissals Act was amended so that a dismissal on the grounds of



On the Gay Pride march

Picture: Derek Speirs

sexual orientation is deemed to be automatically unfair. This change had been demanded by the lesbian and gay community for well over a decade. For adults, job discrimination is the most effective and insidious form of discrimination. Now it is legally unacceptable, for example, for the Catholic church to fire a teacher or youth worker solely on the grounds of their homosexuality. This is progress of the greatest importance; there are no more than a handful of countries in the world that have such legislation.

These momentous legal changes were almost universally and enthusiastically welcomed. I attended all the debates on the gay law reform Bill in the Dail and Seanad and I was delighted and heartened by the well-informed, generous

and human contributions from all parties dealing with the rights of lesbians and gay men, the principles of equality, the nature of sexuality and the duty of legislators in a democracy to provide for difference. In the words of GLEN, it was “an Irish parliament extending Irish freedoms”, and it made me proud to be an Irish citizen.

There was no sense of these legal rights being given grudgingly. The opposite is in fact the case. The government is committed to introducing amendments to the Employment Equality Act as well as a new Equal Status Bill, which will significantly expand the legal rights of lesbians and gay men and other disadvantaged groups.

For a country that was thought to be irredeemably reactionary and repressive, this is astonishing progress which, to our minds, has

An equal footing in terms of the law

not been sufficiently acknowledged or analysed. How could a small, relatively powerless community win its demands so effectively? What does this change signify and what are its effects on Irish society and the Irish psyche?

Put very briefly, these changes stem from the positive traditional Irish values reinvigorated and amplified by the new social, cultural and economic influences from the 1960s onwards. Allied to these favourable social conditions was the reforming and equality policy of the Fianna Fail-Labour coalition and a Minister for Justice who was enthusiastic about introducing a gay law reform and open to the arguments put by GLEN.

But the vital factor linking the favourable social conditions and the political decision to introduce equality legislation was the work of the lesbian and gay movement. These reforms, both in timing and quality, were not inevitable. David Norris maintained his constitutional action from the mid-1970s to final success at the European Court of Human Rights in 1988. Parallel to this legal action, the lesbian and gay movement from its inception in the early 1970s slowly built up support, turned defeats into victories, survived and gained in confidence and experience.

GLEN evolved from that movement. It was set up in 1988 as a response to the European Court decision, with the remit of equality which was subsequently formalised into the twin aims of law reform on the basis of equality and anti-discrimination legislation for all disadvantaged groups. It was a very deliberate decision to join sexual demands to social and economic ones so that each aspect could support the other.

These were bold and radical demands which we were determined to win but which were often regarded as impossibly optimistic. It has to be remembered that at that time the right seemed invincible. They had won the abortion and divorce referendums handsomely. SPUC had shut down the abortion information services and had created a paranoia amongst social workers, trade unionists and others about the dire legal consequences of giving abortion information. Brian Lenihan was certain of the Presidency and Mary Robinson was just a brilliant human rights lawyer.

There was a perception that Irish people were guilty of being immovably backward. But from our experience, especially in the trade unions, we knew that Irish people were open to arguments based on fairness and justice. For

us there were real and positive traditional Irish values arising from the struggle against colonialism and for civil, religious and economic rights which we could activate.

Our demand for equality was attuned to this heritage. We were also very aware of the profound changes which had taken place in Ireland since the 1960s but which had not yet been translated into legislative and institutional reform. There was an emerging Ireland which was confident of its identity and origins and open to new influences and change and which found its most notable expression in the music of Moving Hearts, Mary Black and others. Our 'imagined Ireland' was benign, open and tolerant, and we were offering it a way to express itself on a social/sexual issue. Our imagined community was made up of ordinary Irish people from Letterkenny to Ballydehob to Swords. We very deliberately turned our back against the mythical Irish as 'new Europeans', ashamed of the past and present and dashing madly to a state of Euro-boredom.

At the meeting which led to the setting up of GLEN, I said our task was to consolidate our supporters around the principle of equality, to win over the doubtful, to pacify those opposed and to isolate the bigots. Easier said than done, but five years later this is how events turned out. Modesty should forbid me saying that GLEN is a textbook example of a successful campaign. I have already spoken of the quality of the debates in the Oireachtas. The Catholic church issued a conciliatory statement which we welcomed.

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In essence this was a back-handed compliment to the lesbian and gay movement, recognising that we were a serious social movement; it was also essential reading for any young gay person if pro-gay material was not otherwise available! We had been warned by an official who had experienced bruising encounters with the right that we would not know what had hit us once a gay law reform Bill was published. However, in the end, despite their determined and lurid scaremongering, this once-mighty organisation was

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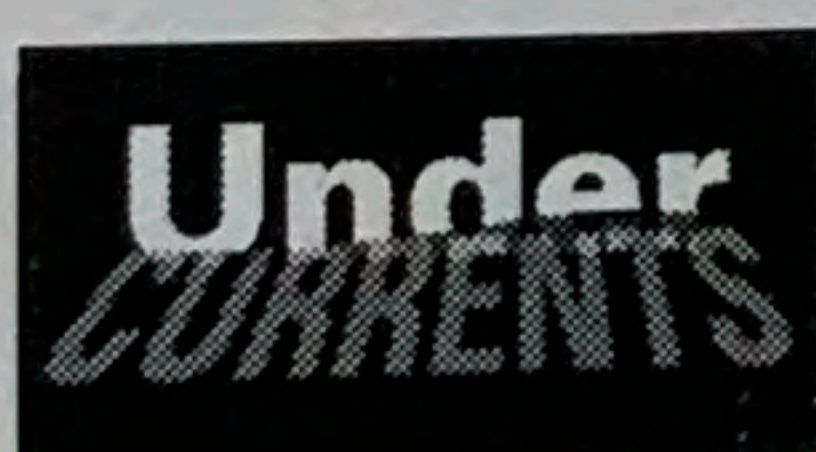


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Series Editor J.J. Lee, Professor of History,
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not been sufficiently acknowledged or analysed. How could a small, relatively powerless community win its demands so effectively? What does this change signify and what are its effects on Irish society and the Irish psyche?

Put very briefly, these changes stem from the positive traditional Irish values reinvigorated and amplified by the new social, cultural and economic influences from the 1960s onwards. Allied to these favourable social conditions was the reforming and equality policy of the Fianna Fail-Labour coalition and a Minister for Justice who was enthusiastic about introducing a gay law reform and open to the arguments put by GLEN.

But the vital factor linking the favourable social conditions and the political decision to introduce equality legislation was the work of the lesbian and gay movement. These reforms, both in timing and quality, were not inevitable. David Norris maintained his constitutional action from the mid-1970s to final success at the European Court of Human Rights in 1988. Parallel to this legal action, the lesbian and gay movement from its inception in the early 1970s slowly built up support, turned defeats into victories, survived and gained in confidence and experience.

GLEN evolved from that movement. It was set up in 1988 as a response to the European Court decision, with the remit of equality which was subsequently formalised into the twin aims of law reform on the basis of equality and anti-discrimination legislation for all disadvantaged groups. It was a very deliberate decision to join sexual demands to social and economic ones so that each aspect could support the other.

These were bold and radical demands which we were determined to win but which were often regarded as impossibly optimistic. It has to be remembered that at that time the right seemed invincible. They had won the abortion and divorce referendums handsomely. SPUC had shut down the abortion information services and had created a paranoia amongst social workers, trade unionists and others about the dire legal consequences of giving abortion information. Brian Lenihan was certain of the Presidency and Mary Robinson was just a brilliant human rights lawyer.

There was a perception that Irish people were guilty of being immovably backward. But from our experience, especially in the trade unions, we knew that Irish people were open to arguments based on fairness and justice. For

us there were real and positive traditional Irish values arising from the struggle against colonialism and for civil, religious and economic rights which we could activate.

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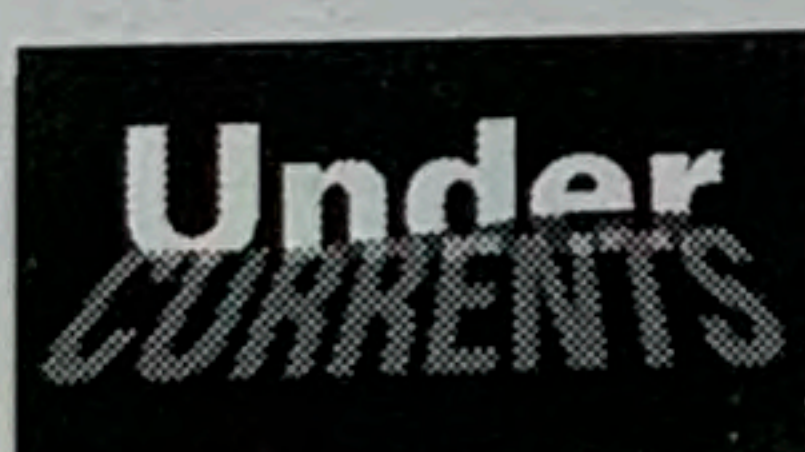


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out-maneuvered and relegated to the margins while the policy and proposals put forward by GLEN were expressed in law.

The prevailing notion of gay people in Ireland is, I suggest, that of being different. The right did their best to link gay people with images of buggery, back passages and disease. They failed. The ideas of Irish, lesbian/gay and equal citizenship were consolidated instead.

The significance of the reforms can be encapsulated in two words: confidence and fear.

The fact that a controversial social/sexual issue was solved (at the first attempt) on a rational and principled basis and with popular approval expands the growing confidence of Irish society. It was particularly important for our maturing as an independent state that we rejected the British-style reform and instead opted for the equality recommendations of our own Law Reform Commission.

As a society, we faced up to our fear of sexuality, especially a different sexuality, and said "yes, it's time to make our own decisions and on the basis of an optimistic view of life and human nature". In many ways the law reform was about a respect for heterosexuality as much as for homosexuality. For many heterosexuals, including politicians, the bleak and narrow vision of Family Solidarity was rightly seen as personally threatening. The reforms are an important step in healing the shame that we as Irish people experience regarding sexuality in general and in particular.

For nearly all lesbians and gay men I have spoken to, the law reform has had a powerful liberating effect on our sense of ourselves. It is like a great burden being lifted from our shoulders, a burden we had grown up with and hardly realised existed.

Over the past 20 years lesbians and gay men imagined a community and an Ireland and then we worked (and played) to realise it. It seems clear that the success of our efforts, as expressed in these law reforms, has so significantly changed the environment that we can now imagine and develop communities in a more comprehensive and delightful way. □

**Mick Quinlan,
Keiran Rose
and Bill Foley at the
Gay and Lesbian Pride
march 1993, two days
after the passing of
the Act reforming the
law on homosexuality**

Picture: Chris Robson



A Midwife's Tale

Colm Boyle

relates some of the problems he faced in becoming the first male midwife in the North

Hello, my name's Colm and I'm your midwife.

Oh, that's nice. I wasn't expecting a man. What on earth made you want to be a midwife?

Well, I really enjoyed my time in obstetrics during my nursing training. It's a very happy branch of nursing and besides, I'm hoping to work in the Third World where I imagine being able to deliver babies would be valuable.

Do you not get funny reactions from women when you introduce yourself as a midwife?

Mostly people are just a bit surprised. I don't fit their "Nurse Megan on a bike with her cape" image of midwife. Very often they go on to rationalise the situation themselves and acknowledge that most of their doctors and gynaecologists are men and that people generally don't object, so why not?

But some women do object to male doctors and would prefer a female one.

Certainly, and they're perfectly at liberty to ask for a female midwife if they want one.

Ah, but surely then you're putting a woman who might feel uncomfortable with you in a position where it is difficult to refuse.

I understand that, but of course she is free, and must be shown that she is free to choose another professional. Even to the point where I might say, "If you want rid of me, just say so", or picking up on some non-verbal cues where there is discomfort, simply suggest that I get some of the other midwives to look after her. There are people whose personal history can make them uncomfortable or unhappy

with the prospect of a male carer in a field like midwifery. My job is to make their whole experience of pregnancy and childbirth easier, not more difficult.

It is fair to say that some of the procedures and examinations carried out as a part of maternity care are intimate and often embarrassing. This is true whatever the gender of the practitioner. Might I suggest that the initial reaction of a woman given the choice of an unseen female or unseen male carer is based on a complex mixture of socially ingrained notions of sexual stereotyping, gender roles and, not least, the idea that strange men are threatening or dangerous. The problem I face therefore is one of



The idea that strange men are dangerous

being rejected as a possible carer on an unseen judgement of my character based on my gender.

This issue became a bone of contention during my training placement in the community. I found that, unlike my female counterparts, I was not being sent on what are called first visits. This is where the community midwife calls to a mother's home just after discharge from hospital. The midwives with whom I was working had decided to vet the mothers I was to meet. In order to avoid embarrassment all round, they sought the mothers' permission to send a male student.

I can of course see that this manoeuvre was well-intentioned, but unfortunately it removed from me any chance to prove my ability to defuse the awkwardness or even to take credit for visits that had gone smoothly. I was not being allowed to perform the full range of the job. Had that continued, I feel that the need for chaperonage would become so great that the position of men in midwifery would become untenable.

In a world where sexual abuse and litigation are commonplace, there is a need for extreme caution on the part of medical personnel in this regard. Doctors, nurses and midwives should, in good practice, be chaperoned when carrying out intimate procedures such as vaginal examinations. This is true whatever the carer's gender but becomes particularly emotive when the carer is male. When I first began my training, this was a big issue, but fortunately in a big teaching hospital or where partners are welcome during labour, there is rarely any need to seek extra assistance as there is usually more than just myself present. In other situations, such as assisting with breast feeding or toileting, the need for chaperonage is superfluous.

To put the subject in proportion, I estimate that less than two per cent of the women I have worked with have expressed any concern about my caring for them. Nonetheless, it is still difficult not to feel personally rejected when I am seen as an unsuitable carer.

What about your colleagues? Do they have any reservations about having a man in what is seen as a woman's job?

By and large, I think not. They have all been very supportive, even protective. Unfortunately I am six feet tall and have a beard, which makes me stick out a bit from the crowd. I am almost invariably called Colm where everyone else is Nurse Smith or Student Midwife Ferguson. I think this galls some of the women and is seen as an indicator of the disparity in the treatment of men and women in society at large and particularly in nursing.

There are disproportionately more men in middle and higher management levels in nursing. This may in part be due to the fact that in the past it was not considered the done thing for a woman to continue working after she was married. You still find that there are more single than married women in the hierarchy.

I suggest that within the Irish psyche there remains an expectation that the male be the money earner or breadwinner while the female be the homemaker and child rearer. This sexual stereotyping leads to thinking along the lines that he needs the job or promotion as he has a family to support and she doesn't need it because she has a husband or will soon get one and will then run off to make babies. Of course no employer in their right mind would admit it, but worse still, few suspecting such a mind-set could prove it sufficiently for the Equal Opportunities Commission to act on it.

This is why it has sometimes

been suggested that I have an unfair advantage as regards career prospects. I protest that I wouldn't take advantage, but am I such an idealist as to look a gift horse in the mouth should opportunity for advancement arise? I don't know.

There is a school of thought amongst psychologists and anthropologists that proposes a motive beneath men's desire to work in the fields of obstetrics and gynaecology. The suggestion is that these men have a need to dominate women, to control their lives to such an extent that even in that women-only function of childbearing the man can 'save the day' and be rescuer to the weak incapable woman.

I must say that such motivations, if true, are embedded in my deepest subconscious. More crass suggestions, such as a desire to play with and derive sexual pleasure from 'girlie bits', I find ludicrous. I suspect, however, that there might be some degree of womb envy involved, with my participation in the delivery and care of the baby somehow compensating for an inability to bear a child myself.

I feel that the very earliest question asked of me on my introduction to a mother, namely, "What made you become a midwife?", is a search for motivations which allows the mother (or her partner) to gauge the degree of trust she can place in me.

I have found my answer, as described earlier, to be quite an effective password and yet, would a 'pervert' not also attempt to appear plausible to avoid detection? This is an uncomfortable subject but one that must be defused before an atmosphere of trust and rapport is established.

Isn't it a shame that we still have to legislate for equality of treatment? I hope that we men will strive to share our power, acknowledge our advantage, otherwise in a world where women are not equally valued, it would be understandable that they guard jealously that which is theirs alone, the joy of childbearing.

As a student midwife I have been delighted to share in that most exciting of times in a person's life. Not just the coming into the world of a new life, but also the joy, fear, anticipation and exhilaration of becoming a parent. I can understand why people might loathe the thought of all the blood, sweat and tears, but it really is a magical experience.

I hope that the trend to encourage the increased involvement of fathers in the birth of their children will continue in their greater involvement in childrearing, thus broadening, even slowly, our restricted understanding of what it is to be male or female.



Picture: Derek Speirs



A Very Touchy Subject

Priests, Masturbation and Confession

Tom Inglis says that what passed as confession by men may well have been more of a ritual exchange of words

THE FOLLOWING JOKE did the rounds in clerical circles: A prominent Irish businessman was on a plane to Rome when he got chatting to a priest sitting beside him. As the journey progressed, the businessman confided in the priest that he was a member of the Knights of Columbanus and that he was going to see the Pope about a private matter which had been bothering him for years.

No matter how hard he tried, he could not stop masturbating. He had been to several priests, bishops and theologians and had discussed what could be done. They had given him conflicting advice....

A week later, while waiting in the airport lounge, the priest spotted the businessman sitting quietly in a corner looking very dejected. He went over and asked him what was the matter. The businessman said that the Pope had told him he was a sinner for repeatedly engaging in such intrinsically evil activity. He said that he had asked the Pope if it was alright to masturbate while he was praying. "Ah, I see", said the priest, "what you should have asked him was whether it was alright to pray while you were masturbating".

Jokes like this serve an important social function, particularly among men. For all their bravado and cockiness, men are often very nervous, especially among strangers in new social situations. One of the reasons for this is that they spend most of their daily lives in a competitive, hierarchical, bureaucratic world, constantly engaged in a series of major and minor power struggles. Telling jokes is a ritual which helps displace fears and anxieties about power. It puts the company onto a social rather



Picture: Derek Speirs

than political or economic power footing, especially since the jokes are usually about people outside the existing company, eg women, Irish, Blacks, Jews, etc.

The jokes are often about sex. Telling sex stories can help to deflate that mixture of fear and anxiety about performance and latent sexual aggression which lies beneath the surface when males meet each other.

Men may joke about masturbation, but talking openly and honestly about it is a different

matter. It is a very touchy subject. Although, according to surveys, most men do it, few readily admit to it. Many of us as kids got ourselves into knots worrying about the way we handled our bodies and it was priests who were the instigators of this worry.

Like the prominent businessman, I too became quite worried about masturbation. After going to confession and talking to a couple of priests, I eventually brought it up at a retreat, only to be told to spend less time with myself and more time playing rugby. Apparently I needed to engage in some healthy, robust, outdoor activity which would take me out of myself.

I had not read Foucault at the time and did not realise that my soul, the very concept of my self, was constituted within the sexual moral discourse of the Catholic church and the assorted disciplinary practices exerted over my body. The way to self-discovery was through greater bodily discipline. I stopped going to confession and mass and eventually gave up rugby.

Priests have been getting some bad press in Ireland during the past couple of years. First there was the Bishop Casey affair. The notion of a bishop becoming romantically involved with a young woman, having sex, fathering a son and keeping the whole thing secret for years and years captured the imagination of many Irish Catholics. Then, late last year, there were allegations of another well-known priest also having a secret love-child.

Whatever else these stories have done, they have helped remind us that priests are human beings like the rest of us and are just as frail and fallible when it comes to sex. But one of the main reasons why there is huge interest in priests having sex is that over the years they have set themselves up as paragons of virtue.

But what is the relationship between Irish priests and Irish men? Since priests are men, is it not just a case of them being in a different profession? Would we ask what is the relationship between Irish policemen and Irish men? An immediate obvious difference is that a policeman does not have to have a vocation which keeps him separated from the rest

Mixture of fear and anxiety

of the world 24 hours a day. More important perhaps is that women are now a major part of the police force.

But there is something else which marks priests out as different from other men. It is that they have set themselves up as being experts on love and marriage, have willingly entered into the private space between husbands and wives and yet remain celibate. What makes many priests similar to other men is the realisation that they are caught in this out-of-date double bind. It is very difficult to talk to other men about sex. Like many other Irishmen, however, priests are willing to tell jokes against themselves and on very touchy subjects such as masturbation.

I have always liked the story about the businessman and the priest because it revealed a new dimension to the legalistic approach of Catholic moral theology. It was as if I had been accepted into an inner sanctum in which not only did priests tell jokes about sensitive issues like masturbation, but there was an implication that there was never really anything to worry about in the first place. It was as if during all those years of self-doubt there was a simple little technical solution to my moral dilemma. It was as

if, while sex is a major part of the minefield of Catholic theology, for the initiated, the cognoscenti, there was a way of transgressing the field without fear of losing one's soul.

As on many other sexual moral issues, particularly contraception, the Church speaks with a forked tongue. It has an official public tongue which dencounces acts such as masturbation as intrinsically evil. But it also has an unofficial, private tongue with which it speaks in confession and through constant forgiveness practically admits and accepts such behaviour. The only problem is that to find the religious loophole you have to go to confession and many Irish men are no longer bothering to do so.

There has been a dramatic decline in institutional confession; from approximately 47 per cent attending at least once a month in 1974 to 18 per cent in 1989. While half of Irish Catholic men go to confession several times a year, the other half rarely or never go. This proportion is much higher among young urban men. The question is, if many men are no longer talking to priests about their sexual emotional problems, to whom are they talking?

It may well be that most Irish Catholic men have never talked

Sex became wrapped in a veil of silence

to anyone about their sexuality, especially to a priest in confession. What passed as confession may well have been more of a ritual exchange of words.

In recent years there has been an explosion of discourse about sex. Part of this explosion has been people talking honestly and openly about their sexual feelings, emotions and experiences. Women have tended to be much better at this and there has been increased pressure on many men to express how they feel sexually and emotionally.

For those brought up within the Catholic church who have only been used to confessing to priests, and that in a vague, distant and abstract manner, this is an enormous task. It would be wrong to blame priests for all our sexual woes; nevertheless, there is a cultural incompetence among many Irishmen, especially older men, to talk honestly and openly about themselves. As part of the Catholic church's monopoly on morality and the way in which that monopoly was exercised within families, sex became wrapped up in a veil of silence. It was difficult if not downright awkward and embarrassing to talk about it.

Men are now facing a major cultural contradiction. On the one hand the veil of silence is being unwrapped. Women are anxious and willing to talk about their sexual problems, pleasures, fears and worries. They want to put on the table everything that has been going on under the table for years. They have started to confess not just to each other but often publicly and with great difficulty. This is a huge new challenge facing us. Unfortunately, many men can only respond by making a joke of it.

The irony is that some trainee priests are now being encouraged to talk about their sexuality, including masturbation. As part of his investigation for *The Irish Times* into how priests of tomorrow are being prepared to deal with their sexuality, Andy Pollak came across some final year students who considered masturbation to be 'a natural stage of psychological development' and who said that "the realisation that a young person would not go 'straight to hell' if he or she masturbated often led to anger toward the institutions of the church for keeping them feeling so guilty and ashamed".

The course they were taking was run by a Dominican sister and a psychotherapist. It is a sign of the times that while the rest of the nation deals with its guilt and shame, the sexuality of new Irish priests is in the safe hands of women and sex professionals. The only problem is that these priests are being trained for work overseas. □

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The Irish Male in Cinema

Martin McCabe looks at the role of recent Irish films in defining masculinity for Irish men

RECENTLY LELIA DOOLAN, reviewing a film called *Horse* (1993), said: "Was it Pearse who said, 'Lord, thou art hard on mothers'? Irish film-makers (men) are hard on fathers and on the Irish male project." So, which male project is this then? The 'Irish male project' referred to by Doolan is possibly some informal cultural project that may be identified in some recent cinematic representations of Irish men.

Historically, the Irish have been categorised as 'feminine' both in 'race' and culture, and this description was not only a way of representing the power imbalance in the relationship between the colonised and coloniser, but was also used as a justification for that colonial enterprise, ie, if the country is female, it must be governed.

Yet the post-Independence culture of the Free State simply inverted this image of the 'feminine' Irish and reproduced a rigid hyper-masculine identity to confirm the Irish male identity that had been questioned, and to assert power and control over the nation, which the colonial enterprise had displaced. Manliness and virility were valorised as the lifeblood of the new-born nation, and women were at the same time idealised and enslaved as mothers of the nation. Hence the 'Gaelic masculine ideal' of the early Free State was epitomised by what Catherine Nash, in *Feminist Review* 44 calls the 'Western Man': hard-working, 'rugged, wholesome, pragmatic and Catholic.'

Feminists and gay men have always contested narrowly-defined gender identities and the notion of masculinity, since

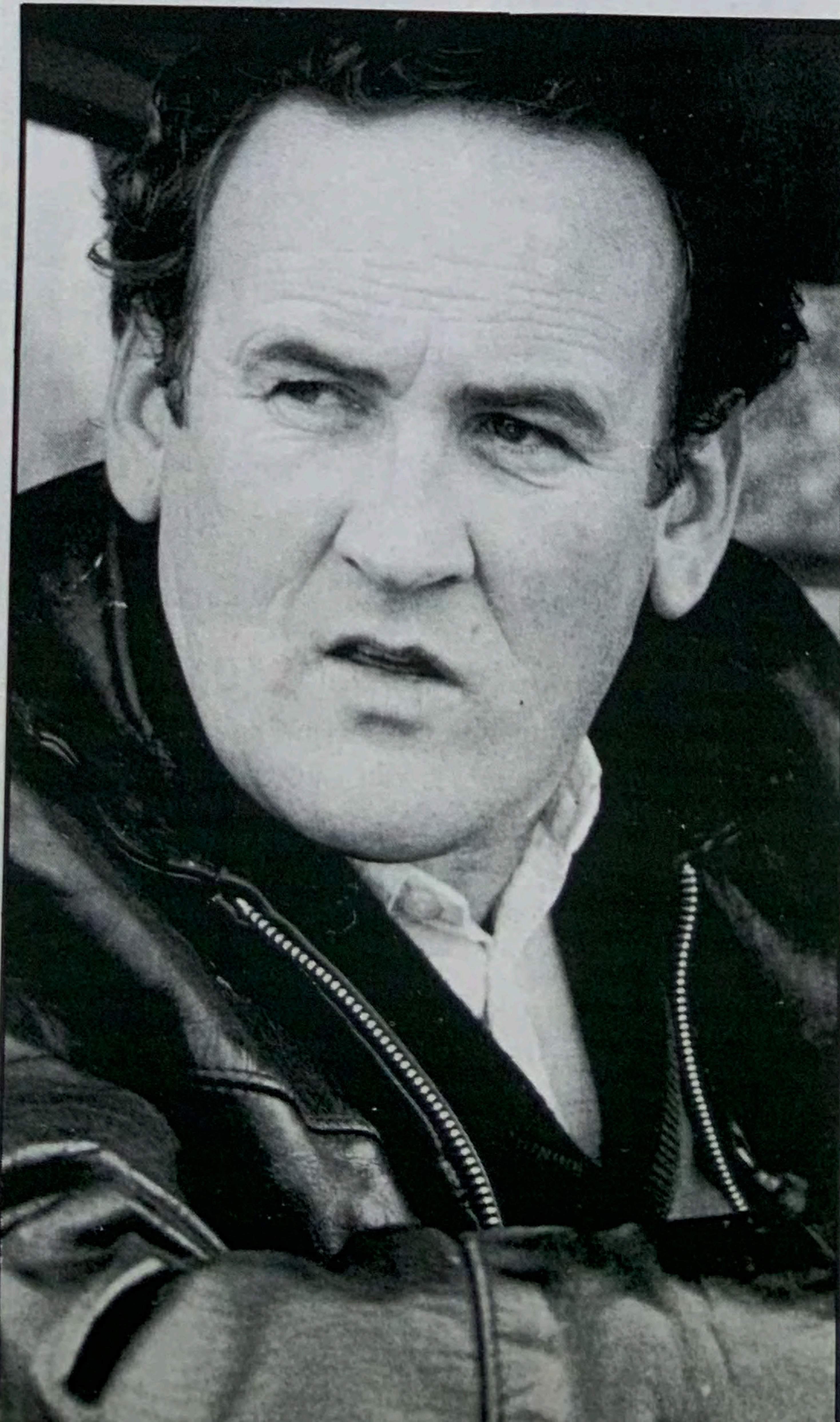
they have been marginalised and excluded by the dominant culture. For instance, full citizenship of the Republic, a male and, up until recently, heterosexual identity, were coterminous.

However, the critical concept of 'masculinity' makes of gender identity a cultural fiction. Men are made by their environment and culture, and not born. To understand what makes men, we must examine the representation of 'masculinity', in which film is playing an increasingly important role.

A regressive expression of male bonding is savagely indicted in the late Kieran Hickey's *Exposure* (1978), a taut drama about three Irish men's encounter with a foreign woman in a remote hotel in the west of Ireland. When the youngest man, Oliver (Bosco Hogan), falls in love with

Suffering, Brother, is always a grace

Colm Meany in *The Snapper*



Caroline (Catherine Schell) and begins a sexual relationship, his colleagues' attitude changes. They seem fearful of and threatened by her. After much tension and jealousy the older men go on a drunken rampage through her room, clothes and underwear. The returning couple, however, confront the two, who, immediately playing on Oliver's insecurities and self-doubt, proceed to reel him in to rejoin them wallowing in their bitterness and self-pity.

Exposure reveals a traditional male identity that personifies stifling repression, misogyny and a neurotic fear of difference.

Cathal Black's *Our Boys* (1981), banned in Ireland for ten years, is an angry attempt at exposing the brutality and physical violence of an institution at the core of national life: the Christian Brothers' school. It is a grim indictment of a system which uses corporal punishment with a ferocity that renders the pupils senseless, confused and damaged. "Today's lesson was that suffering, Brother, is always a grace, Brother!" one boy fearfully parrots.

It represents the vigilant and violent policing of the young male body through the school system. One evocative montage of pupils being thrashed cuts to land surveyors obtaining 'a measure of the man' with a theodolite in the school grounds.

The film mixes documentary footage of the arrival of the papal legate to Ireland in 1932 for the Eucharistic Congress with testimony from ex-pupils who were scarred emotionally and mentally by the latent homophobia of the order, 'No bodily contact!', while beatings were habitual. *Our Boys* can be read as an allegory about Ireland and its history during the dark and austere 1940s and 1950s.

Horse (1993), an episodic coming-of-age tale set in the early 1960s, performs a similar function. It represents a boy, brought up by his widower father, who is brutalised and scarred by the emotional coldness, bitterness and violence shown to and witnessed by him. Although a deep silence permeates the gritty realism of the film, it ends in an act of aimless violence, which is proposed as the only possible outcome for such an upbringing. After witnessing his father being beaten up by a neighbour, the boy is instructed: "Michael, never turn the other cheek and what anyone tells you is right, you take it as wrong!"

Horse, too, operates at the level of allegory, yet does not offer any way out for the boy, Michael. He seems fated to be like his father; emotionally strangulated, inarticulate and bitter.

Repression and abuse of power are at the core of these films, where history produced the person and the past constantly impinges on the present, as the cycle of repression and violence continues.

However, there are more contemporary images of Irish men and masculinity which represent something of a move away from a traditional roles. A narrowly defined 'masculinity' is under pressure in the endearing image of fatherhood in *The Snapper* (1992). A kitchen-sink comic melodrama, it tells of a father, Dessie Curley (Colm Meaney) learning to cope, learning about himself and about women through his eldest daughter Sharon's crisis pregnancy. The film more than anything else is about his 'coming to terms', and not Sharon's coming to term.

From his hysterical disgust at the mention of biological processes of the pregnant female body and his abrogation of familial duties ("I'm only their Dad. They'll only laugh at me", Dessie pleads to his wife), to his new-found knowledge of the female body, we see Dessie gradually coping, sometimes painfully, with his new surrogate father and grandfather roles and his self-understanding as a man.

Dessie is initially portrayed as a stereotype: an immature, self-pitying and sentimental man who ends up fighting like his aggressive son for the 'honour' of his daughter and family in traditional macho style. Yet for the film to reach any satisfactory resolution, Dessie must break down and cry. Dessie: "Sorry, Sharon, I haven't cried since I was a kid." Sharon: "You cried during the World Cup." Dessie: "Sober, Sharon, sober... Drunk doesn't count! We all do stupid things when we are drunk, don't we?"

In this Year of the Family, Roddy Doyle's yet to be filmed novel *The Van* will hopefully continue the theme of fathering/husbands-in-the-home. Little attention in film terms has been given to the social transformation, if any, in domestic labour brought about by massive and prolonged unemployment in the Republic.

The role of men as providers, and their validation through economic independence, is just the flip side of the role of women as mothers in the traditional social order. This is a very powerful cultural fiction that underpins a narrowly-defined Irish male identity, whose power today, it has been argued, can be seen in the annual suicide statistics.

The 'common sense' of gender as nature and biology as destiny is punctured in Neil Jordan's *The Crying Game* (1992). For all its imputed reactionary

images of the Irish, female and Black characters, it shows that the distinction between male and female bodies are cultural impositions onto an only apparently clear biological base. It also implies that gender is a constantly changing historical fiction.

Fergus (Stephen Rea), an IRA member but reluctant gunman, is shaken when he kidnaps a Black British soldier, Jody (Forrest Whittaker). Their relationship has a homoerotic tension which Fergus denies but Jody plays on. Jody observes Fergus's hesitancy at handling his (Jody's) penis in a moment of need as an example of homophobia and repression ("I know that wasn't very easy for you"). Later on Fergus falls in love with the late Jody's girlfriend, Dil, only to discover that she isn't all she seems. Dil masquerades as a woman and to all intents and purposes is a woman. The film poses the question: if this is what being a woman is about - acting, dressing, masquerading - then what is a man?

The Crying Game represents, in Fergus in particular, a male identity that counters the idea of a static, innate and natural 'masculinity' whose sexual identity may be homo- or heterosexual, or both, and whose object of desire may not be coherent and fixed. In this way, *The Crying Game* is a film which denaturalises and makes strange our gender and sexual identities. This self-consciousness marks it out from the other films mentioned.

Until the Criminal Justice (Sexual Offences) Act was passed in July 1993, certain Irish 'masculinities' were illegal. The necessity for representations that challenge and rethink both male and female gender roles is ever more pressing. Where are the marginal sexual identities?

There has been nearly a total invisibility of Irish gay men, and an absolute invisibility of Irish lesbians in film. For instance, in *Reefer and the Model* (1987) and *Pigs* (1984) the gay male characterisations are insubstantial.

This Irish 'male project' is a curious category, one that the chairperson of the Irish Film Board recognises may contain an 'incipient feminism', even if "women are still the stereotypical mother, floozie, drab." This needs more analysis than space allows here, but there is also a danger that some of these representations may only be exercises in moral masochism or a hand-wringing confession about how men have been oppressed by the post-colonial patriarchy.

In the examples mentioned, there are signs of this: the crisis resolution of Dessie Curley may be viewed as a strategy to re-consolidate the nuclear family;



Mick Lally in *Horse*

The Crying Game's ambiguities can be seen as a denial of difference, eg, the 'it's in my nature' subtext; or the 'Daddy did it to me' theme of *Horse*.

The recent *In the Name of the Father* (1993) is an attempt to address the father and son relationship which the director, Jim Sheridan, believes to be neglected in Irish culture. He says: "Once you destroy the father figure, the figure of authority, then you haven't got a society."

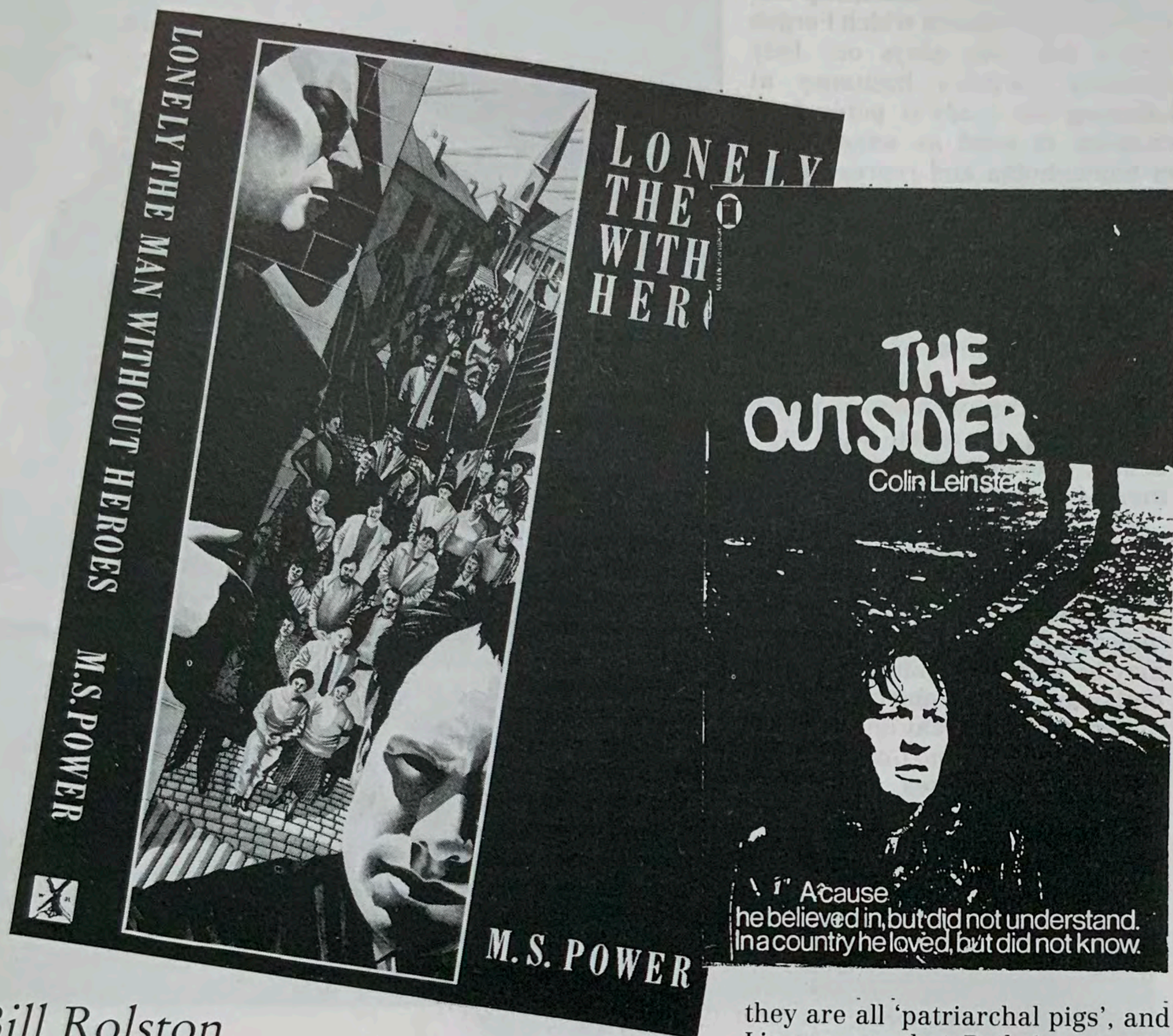
Although some of the examples given are historical dramas, there seems little or no recognition of the fact that contemporary Irish men's notion of who they are, their 'masculinity', is as much formed and influenced by Hollywood, rock music and the global consumer culture as by family structures, the Catholic church or unemployment.

In fact, it is the interaction and competition of these social, economic and political forces that mould Irish 'masculinities'. In this sense we have yet to see in film self-conscious representations of contemporary Irish male identities in all their diversity. □

This Irish 'male project' is a curious category

Sex and Violence

Images of Men in Novels of the Troubles



Bill Rolston looks at the how male stereotypes of violent Irishmen are used in novels which use the Northern troubles as their backdrop

“THEY WERE ALL Pushing and yelling. This was no English queue; it was more like a swarm of ants on a melting chocolate bar ... The bus was packed now. Irish-looking men next to each other, stupefied from the fumes of their own beery breath and sweat” (Valerie Miner, *Blood Sisters*).

Blood Sisters is the story of two cousins, both born of Irish parents. Liz, the American, is a feminist and Beth, the English woman, a republican. Liz warns Beth about her involvement with IRA men;

The godfather or the killer

they are all ‘patriarchal pigs’, and Liz can see that Beth is going to come to no good. Sure enough, at the end of the book, as she lies in her hospital bed, severely injured in a premature ‘own goal’ explosion, Beth finally realises she has been used as a pawn by the IRA men, and tells Liz: “I should have listened to you. I was so stupid”.

If Beth had only seen the Irish men on the bus through her cousin’s eyes, she would have realised that it was a short journey from being an Irish man to being a violent ‘patriarchal pig’.

Blood Sisters is one of almost 300 novels written about the Northern conflict over the last quarter of a century, most of them thrillers. It is the only thriller with an avowedly feminist message. Yet there is a sort of vulgar feminism running through many of the other thrillers. This is surprising, given that the bulk of the authors are men, and few show any knowledge whatsoever of feminist politics beyond the simplistic equation that men are warmongers and women are peace lovers (except for those women – usually young virgins and frigid grandmothers – who espouse war and in thus being

untrue to their very nature end up worse than the men).

The equation often starts with a racist view of the Irish similar to that of Miner’s heroine. Take the assessment of Irish men in Liverpool by James Carrick’s hero Michael Nealis in *With O’Leary in the Grave*:

They are a raucous, beefy race; unfashionably dressed and temporarily affluent, they are eager to get their money spent so that they may exchange the awful responsibility of having money for the uncomplicated pleasures of being poor.

Such neanderthals easily turn to violence, whether the Saturday night pub brawl or the violence which masquerades as politics. Keegan in Brian Ball’s *Keegan: The No-Option Contract* first suspects and then later experiences this link:

Keegan heard the thick, coarse voices. Several of them – not comic Micks, the other kind, the deadly obsessed ambushers, those who tortured before they killed.

He is later interrogated by two such Irish men: “They were both big fellows in their thirties, hard men with those lumpy Irish faces and hands like grabs.”

The Irish man thus all too easily becomes a violent Irish republican. As such he is totally at home in one of two roles, the godfather or the killer.

The godfather is cool, calculating, ruthless; like the fictional Mafia boss, he does not dirty his hands with blood, but orchestrates those who do the killing, usually younger men who are bursting with wild, directionless energy. The godfather must control the younger men, reprimanding if necessary with all the force of a stern parent.

Thus Seamus Reilly, the godfather in M.S. Powers’ *The Killing of Yesterday’s Children*, reprimands the volunteer Martin Deeley when he remarks that he likes killing:

You’re supposed to get sick to the pit of your stomach every time you kill... The day you stop puking when you take someone’s life, you’re no use to anyone. Least of all us. You get so you can’t stop. You get careless and that means trouble for everyone.

There is a similar ‘scene in Hardiman Scott’s *Operation 10*. Sean O’Sullivan, the ex-petty thief, now an IRA member, kills a man

by breaking his neck. The victim screams before dying, and Liam Grady, his commanding officer, reprimands him. "Ah, but where's the fun in it, boss, if they don't scream?". At that, Liam hits Sean and tells him: "A scream attracts attention".

The control over younger men becomes almost sexual, not surprisingly, given the frequent insinuation in the thrillers that the godfathers' outer calmness hides an inner sexual turbulence. In Catholic Ireland, in a supposedly arch-conservative and moralistic political movement, every republican godfather is a Pearse-like homosexual afraid to emerge. Skeffington, the godfather in Michael MacLaverty's *Cal*, is one such person - unmarried, effete, fawning on the inane comments of his senile father. (In the film he even looks like Pearse!)

Hugh Ward, the godfather in John Broderick's *The Fugitives*, comes closest to emerging from the closet. He protects and comforts the young male IRA volunteer Paddy Fallon in terms that are openly sexual while being willing to send him out to certain death. He draws the younger man to himself through lengthy expositions about the way in which women and priests unite to prevent political change.

But for many godfathers, expressions of such blatantly homosexual attraction are impossible. Indeed, for all godfathers there is little time for any sexual attraction and commitment. Lee Dunne describes the top IRA man Jordan in *Ringmaster* in the following terms:

He was unmarried, although he had never been short of females willing to share his life ... His father had moaned and groaned endlessly about how marriage prevented a man doing what he wanted to do. Jordan senior had blamed his wife, a decent and gentle woman, for the fact that he was not in the IRA.

A woman can stand in the way of 'the cause'; but 'the cause' can be as exciting as any woman, as Moss McSherry, the godfather in Kevin Dowling's *Interface Ireland*, knew: McSherry enjoyed being married to violence. She was a cruel lover. She ate her husbands. But while it lasted, she gave marvellous satisfaction. She could solve so many problems and soothe him for all his hurts, slay his enemies, make him feel like a man.

Ultimately there is no real cause except self-esteem. The godfathers are political cynics seeking power for the buzz; it's not even about money. What makes Taig Riordan, the IRA Chief of Staff in Michael McNamara's *The Dancing Floor* tick is 'chaos, upheaval, the letting of blood' (back to Pearse again!). He says to Colum Donnelly: "Patriotism is for the simpleminded ... A

facade for the general public that is superstitious, sentimental and insecure".

Some of the characteristics of the godfathers are shared by the foot soldiers of the IRA, the ordinary volunteers - with one major exception: not being able to get their kicks from the exercise of power, their buzz is from violence itself. The psychopaths - like Martin Deeley and Sean O'Sullivan mentioned above - love to kill and to inflict pain. They are directionless and potentially self-destructive to themselves and the movement. But like Crilly in Bernard MacLaverty's *Cal*, under the right godfather they can be controlled and moulded into efficient killing machines.

The bloodthirsty psychopath is happy to have anyone as a victim, but there is an extra buzz if the victim is a woman. Thus Power in Shaun Herron's *The*

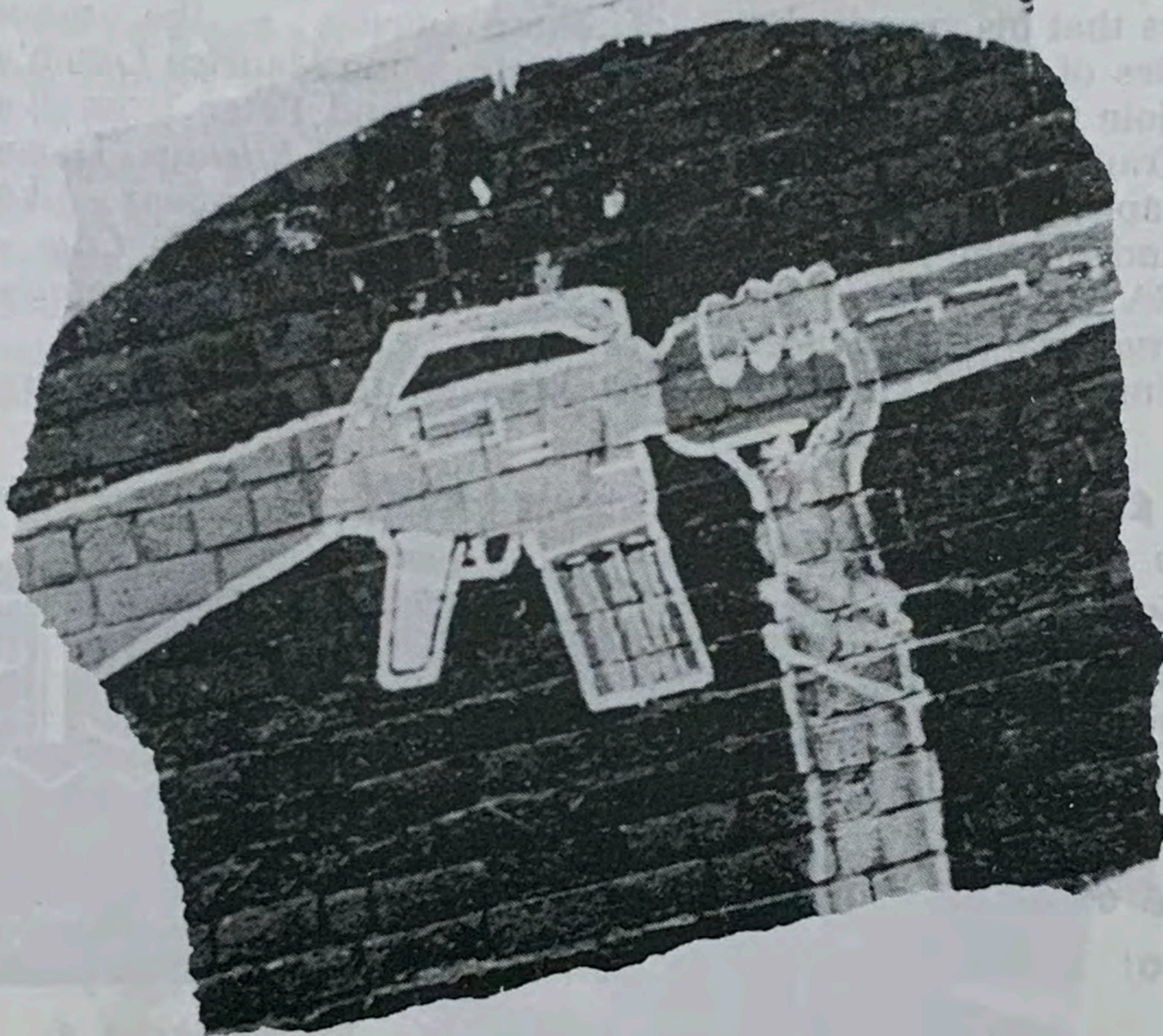
An extra buzz if the victim is a woman

Whore Mother rapes and kills a woman. "What's like best?" asks his sidekick, "fuckin' or killing?". Power replies: "Och, one's as good as the other". Such men cannot possibly have any lasting relationship with a woman. Power's only sexual encounters outside of rape are with a desperately lonely and frustrated widow. Martin Deeley in *The Killing of Yesterday's Children* has occasional sessions with a prostitute.

Some of these killing machines are not psychopaths, but professionals. Where the psychopaths have no ability to love, the professionals have no time. Hugh O'Donnell, the republican hero in Hugo Meehan's *No Time for Love* tells one of his brief sexual conquests: "I have dedicated my life to a cause and both of you would interfere with each other". But, like the psychopaths, they get a kick out of killing which borders on the sexual. As professionals they cannot allow themselves unbridled pleasure at the moment of killing.

Frank McCrossan, in Peter Ransley's *The Price*, knows the secret. He has a wife who is 'always mute and passive'. But after a killing, he rushes to another woman, the wife of a jailed republican; for a quick round of sex. "It was always the same after a killing: first the running, then the exultation of escape, then the woman". Sex here is the reward for killing, rather than, as in the case of the psychopaths, killing being the substitute for sex.

There is one other class of IRA man who needs to be mentioned briefly - neither the godfather or the psychopath, not even the professional, but the wimp. He is the thoughtful boy who gets



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dragged into violence through blind idealism or some cruel hand of fate but to whom violence is ultimately anathema. But once involved, he cannot escape. He tries, but the psychopath or the professional is quickly on his tail. We may admire him for his sensitivity and love of peace; moreover, unlike the others he is capable of deep love of a woman. But he is ultimately a loser; nothing, not even his ability to be a loving partner, can save him.

Cal in Bernard MacLaverty's novel of the same name is finally caught by the RUC and dragged away from his lover who is also the widow of a policeman for whose murder Cal was the driver. Michael Flaherty in Colin Leinster's *The Outsider* is an American who joins the IRA out of idealism, but is clearly not cut out for the viciousness of the North.

He escapes with his life intact, but not his ideals. Back in America he discovers that his grandfather, whose stories of republican glory led him to join the IRA in the first place, is a fraud, an informer who had to escape from Ireland and the IRA. And Martin Fallon, the runaway IRA professional in Jack Higgins' *Prayer for the Dying*, is trailed to England and killed, but

His life intact, but not his ideals

TELL ME THE ONE ABOUT THE HARDENED PROVO ASSASSIN HIS PACIFIST BROTHER AND THE MOTHER THAT LOVED THEM BOTH...



not before voicing his deep despair that he, who had killed 30 people in the name of 'the cause', had been merely believing, in Ezra Pound's words, in 'old men's lies'.

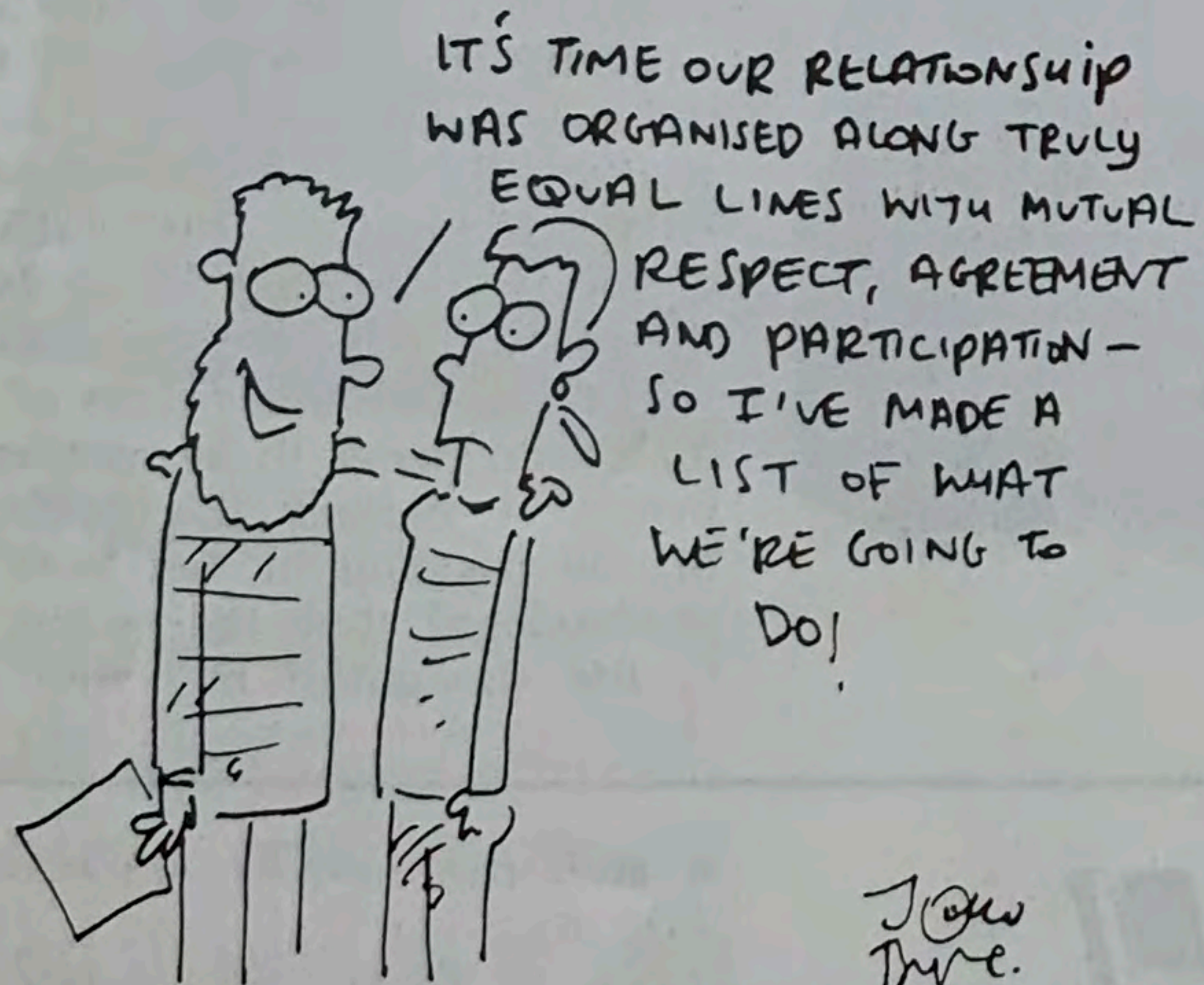
Incidentally, there are few prominent loyalist men in any of these novels - the main exceptions being Maurice Leitch's *Silver's City* and Peter Driscoll's *In Connection with Kilshaw*. Those loyalist men who do appear - like Ned Galloway in *Silver's City* - are carbon copies of the republican men.

As far as these thrillers are

concerned, there is no political cause in Ireland - it is violence for its own sake, partly racial, and thriving on a culture of bitterness. As Tom Moody, the British soldier in James Barlow's *Both Your Houses* puts it, the Irish problem is incomprehensible, the only explanation for its intractability being that violence is "ingested by each generation with its mother's milk".

And thus the final denouement of this story is revealed, as in any good thriller: Irish men make Ireland a godforsaken place, but Irish men are raised by Irish women, and behind them stands the femme fatale par excellence, Mother Ireland. She is 'the whore-mother', 'the old sow that eats her farrow' (Shaun Herron's *The Whore Mother*). And worse, she oversees the castration of her sons, as Michael Nealis explains (*With O'Leary in the Grave*):

The Irish as a race are a nation of eunuchs and that's what it's all about. The more they try to prove they're men, the more they become conscious that they've been gelded and the more they try to prove they're men. Eunuchs! They've been gelded by the church and the state, their balls chopped off by King Billy, robbed of their potency by the blessed works of St. Patrick. God blast this lousy, stinking country. □



The Jonathan Swift Seminar

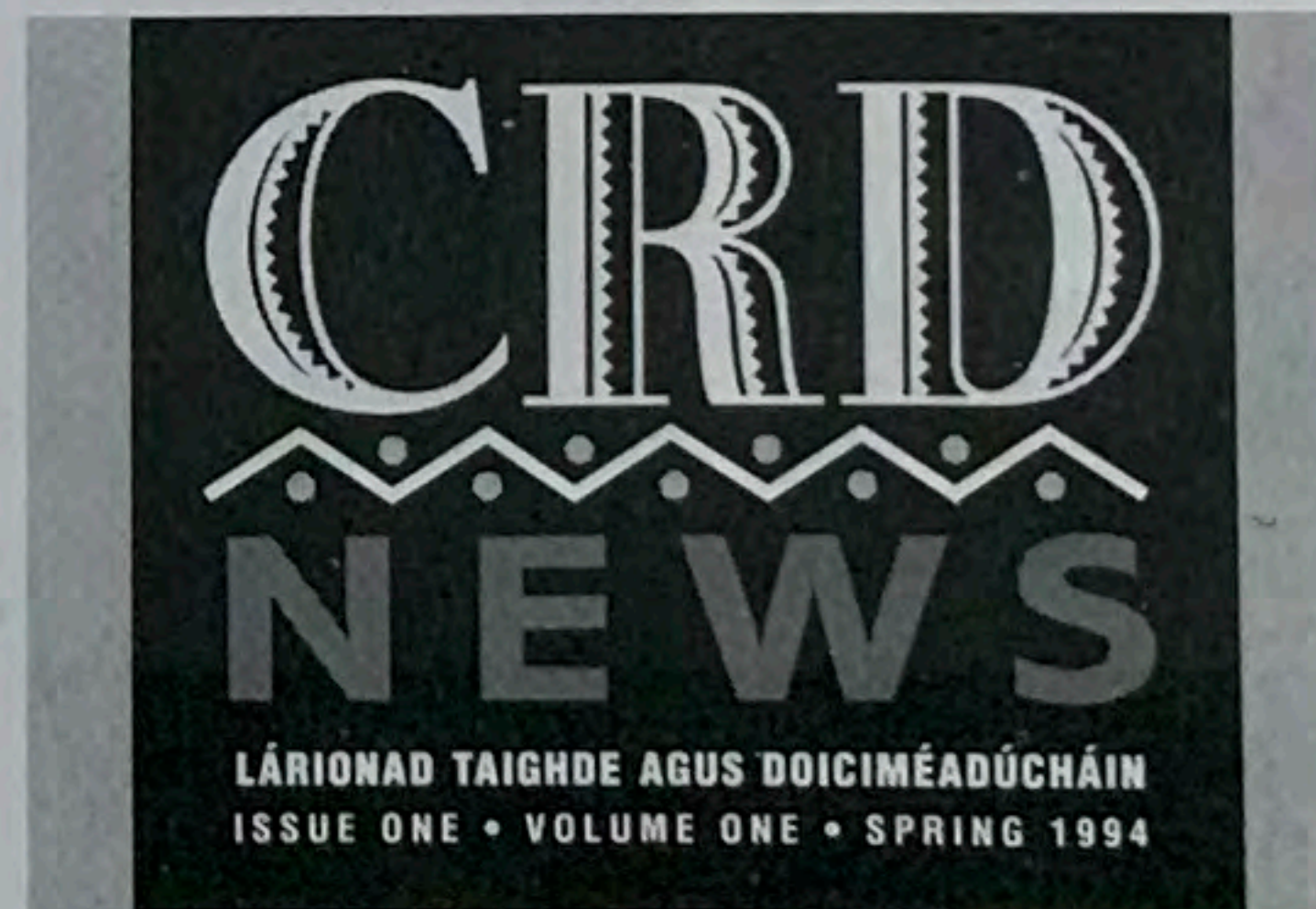
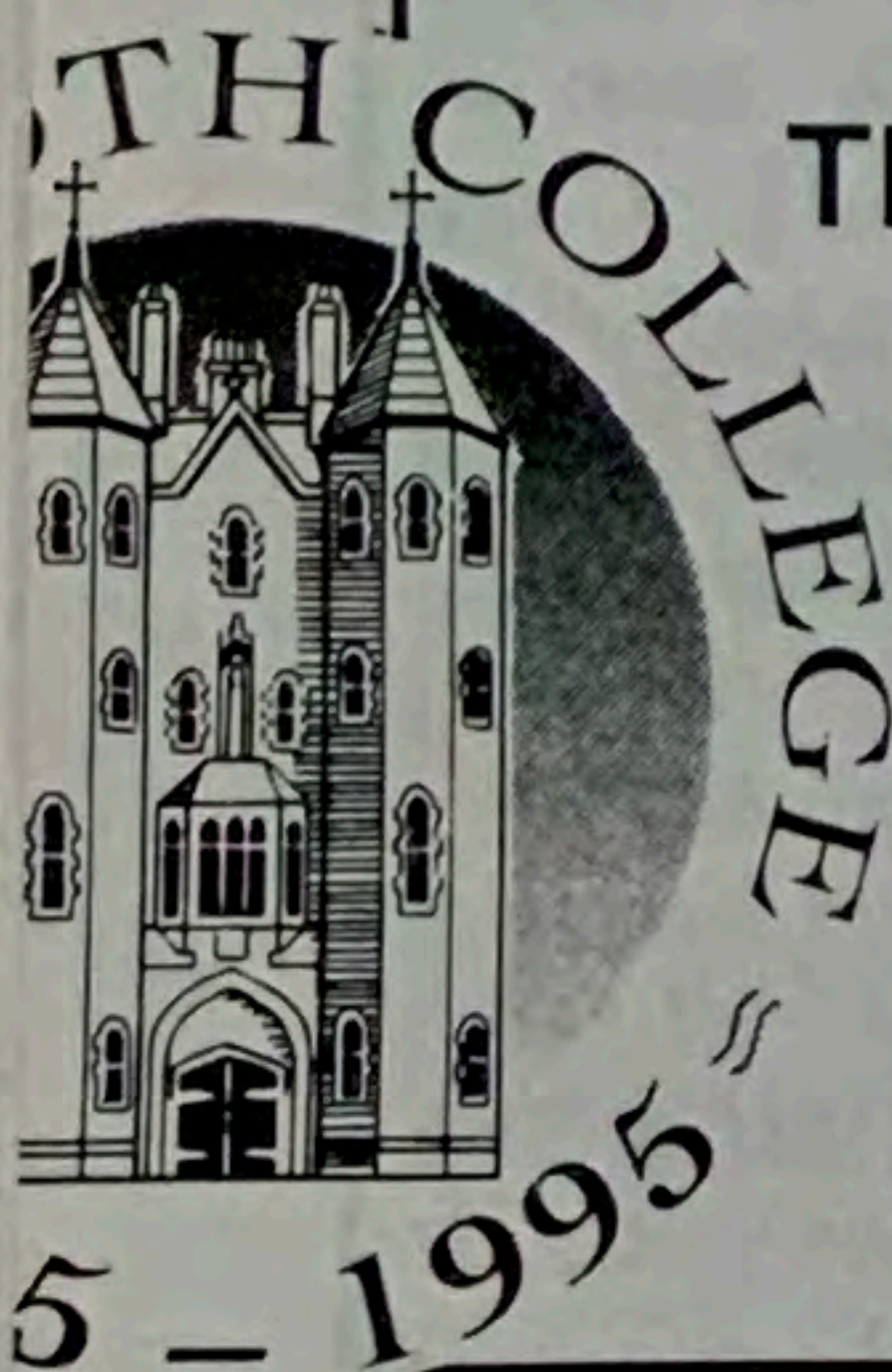
will take place
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Theme: The Legacy of Swift

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The Centre for Research and Documentation

in Belfast has just launched its newsletter, CRD News. It provides up-to-date information on the work of CRD, interviews with leading 'Third World' activists, a calendar of events, a review of publications relevant to development education and human rights work in Ireland and a list of contact addresses in areas pertinent to CRD's work.

CRD News is available by subscription to CRD publications programme only. Subscription to the programme for a calendar year is only £12 for individuals (£6 unwaged; £20 institutions). In 1994 subscribers will receive three copies of CRD News, at least three factsheets ('refugees', 'emigration' and 'prisoners' rights') and a profile of Ireland poster.

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Between the Lines

Pornography and Censorship

Steve MacDonogh recognises the difference between pornography and other writing but questions the role of censorship

MY FIRST DAY IN A publishing company was spent writing blurbs for the back covers of pornographic books. It was 1968 and the company was Grove Press, New York, publishers of the wonderful *Evergreen Review* and the first US publishers of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet, and others.

In my first week in New York I had met Anne Waldman and Lewis Warsh (then publishing the literary magazine *Angel Hair*), Gerard Malanga and Gilbert Sorrentino, all of them more or less loosely associated with Andy Warhol, whom I had hoped to meet but who was in hospital recovering from a serious gunshot wound to the head inflicted by Valerie Solanas of SCUM (the Society for Cutting Up Men – *plus ça change!*). Gilbert was working at Grove and had invited me to be a guest in the place for a day, given my interest in the world of avant garde literary publishing.

Porn was not what I had expected to be faced with, but the truth was that Grove was subsidising its adventurous and radical literary output by publishing a particular brand of Victorian porn, the apogee of which was a book called *The Pearl*. Most of the other books in this money-making series were some kind of pale imitation of *The Pearl* and each book was so remarkably similar that the editorial staff was at its wit's end to come up with different blurbs for the latest in the series.

So the precocious young writer from Ireland got the job.

I didn't complain then, and I've never regretted it since. In fact, that day helped steer me in the direction of a publishing career which has so far lasted

26 years, during which I have published nothing that I consider pornographic (though, see below re *My Man Jack*). Initially invited to lecture at the New School for Social Research, I was in New York principally to write and give poetry readings.

In that overblown American way, I was being described by a radio network as 'the new Shelley', yet I had this passion for the mechanics of books and publishing, a passion which received substantial encouragement from meetings with writers in New York and San Francisco, from encounters in Ed Sanders' Peace Eye Bookstore, out of which he was publishing *Fuck You: a magazine of the arts*, from the Ikon Gallery, where I learned about Margaret Randall and *El Corno Emplumado*, and in Grove Press where, amongst other things, I wrote the blurbs.



In return for my work that day I received a parcel of books published by Grove – *Human Universe and other essays* by Charles Olson, the *Selected Works* of Alfred Jarry, *Tales* by Leroi Jones, *For a New Novel* by Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Stories and Texts for Nothing* by Samuel Beckett. I no longer have the pornography titles included in my pay packet, and I have given away or sold several

Always impervious to irony

thousands of books between now and then, but most of those books with which I staggered out of Grove and walked to my apartment on the Lower East Side that day I still have on my bookshelves.

What do I make of the fact that Grove's literary publishing was subsidised by pornography? What do I make of my own small contribution to the vast catalogue of international pornography?

If the truth be told, I don't make much of it. I found the pornographic books momentarily entertaining but soon tedious, and full of an unconscious humour which soon palled. Their obsessive dwelling in geographical detail upon the joys of the 'mons veneris' seemed more like a strange form of stilted affection than a form of verbal assault or threat. Compared with some papal encyclicals I have read, they were positively bursting with human kindness.

I am conscious of seeming to differentiate in an unexamined way between the 'adventurous, radical literary' books and the pornography. The difference was clear enough to me then and is clear enough to me now. But in their day the powers that stood in favour of censorship failed to differentiate, as the officials who administer all forms of censorship always fail to differentiate.

Amongst the books with which I staggered out of Grove's office was a book of poems entitled *Word Alchemy* by Lenore Kandel (1967), which included items such as 'Poem for Perverts':

Come be my leather love/and hand in glove we'll play our own amazing games/behind locked doors and silent window shades .../Be mine! Be mine!/I'll buy you iron fetters for your tiny wrists! .../I'll buy you manacles and thongs/and lash you trembling to the chairs/I'll lead you at midnight on a dog chain/to secret parties where Lady Olga demands *discipline*/and even I am subject to her whims .../Love, he whispered, Love is my whip/and etched his ardor on her slender back/The blood wreathed down like roses!/until she wept for joy who also wept for pain ...

The reactionary apparatchiks of censorship, as always impervious to irony, subjected Kandel to an obscenity trial in San Francisco.

Most of the authors who grabbed my attention at this formative stage were writers who for one reason or another ran into trouble with the censors. When I travelled on to San Francisco, I met people in City Lights, another progressive literary publisher, and worked on Antonin Artaud, later translating and producing his banned radio play, *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu*. I met Michael McClure and Charles Bukowski, both of whom had run into censorship troubles, and published them in *Cosmos*, the literary magazine I brought out later in 1968. I was associated for a time that year with the 'cut-up conspiracy', whose leading light, William Burroughs, was roundly condemned and censored, and whose *oeuvre* furthermore could be described as at least including a strong element of violent misogyny.

As a publishers' representative in the 1970s, I sold and promoted books by two authors attacked as pornographers: Anaïs Nin, who upset some by, amongst other things, portraying herself as a woman who experienced pleasure in incest, and her friend Henry Miller, some of whose work was, understandably, denounced by feminists. Books I was representing were banned in Ireland, including my old friend Charles Bukowski's *Notes of a Dirty Old Man*. At the same time I was representing Virago, some of whose titles contravened censorship legislation in relation to contraception and abortion information.

More than twenty years after Lenore Kandel was put on trial for obscenity, the religious right in the United States is still actively promoting energetic censorship of a wide range of literature in schools and public libraries. In Ireland the Censorship of Publications Board still bans books, but new would-be censors in both Ireland and the US carry the banner of an alleged feminism.

So far no book I have published has been banned by the Censorship of Publications Board. But in 1989 *My Man Jack*, a Brandon title by veteran folklore collector Michael J Murphy, was removed from the shelves by an otherwise excellent progressive bookshop (Bookworm in Derry) on the grounds of being 'obscene and disgusting'. And I have in recent years heard more calls for the suppression of literature for allegedly progressive reasons than for avowedly reactionary reasons.

From time to time I have come across books and other printed material which I have regarded as loathsome, and some of this has fallen within the meaning of pornography as understood to be illegal under existing legisla-



Steve MacDonogh and Salman Rushdie at the Let in the Light Conference

Picture: Derek Speirs

tion, while also conforming to the proposed new definitions of some feminists as to what should be banned. I have never thought that I should be prevented from having the opportunity to read that material, and I have never thought that I should seek to prevent other adults from being able to read it. On the contrary, I find it immensely depressing that some who campaign under the flag of women's liberation have interpreted that brave and positive movement as having to do with the

suppression of words and images.

Nevertheless I have felt great sorrow as I have witnessed at first hand in former countries of the Soviet Union the advance of a vast tide of pornographic rubbish as the harbinger of capitalist freedom. And I have felt that the problems associated with pornography stem most significantly not from words and images that degrade but from a social system based upon competition and exploitation as the norm and driving principle of human existence. □

I have
felt
great
sorrow

Game, Set and Macho

Masculinity and Irish Sport

Sport reflects the attitudes of society as a whole to masculinity, argues *Raymond Boyle*

FEW AREAS OF POPULAR culture are as seemingly gender specific as that of sport. Popular perception and media representations construct both sport and masculinity as being unproblematically intertwined. Media sport, with its emphasis on competition, aggression and the physical, seems to embody the traditional male characteristics so celebrated in western culture.

Recently Nick Hornby has illustrated the key role that sport plays in the socialisation of many young males into adulthood. In addition, he notes how:

masculinity has somehow acquired a more specific, less abstract meaning than femininity. Many people seem to regard femininity as a quality; but according to a large number of both men and women, masculinity is a shared set of assumptions that men can either accept or reject.

He documents how a knowledge of sport, especially soccer, enables a young boy in a school playground to attain a certain prestigious status among his peer group. Although Hornby deals with growing up in London, a similar experience is noted by Roddy Doyle writing about his boyhood in working class Dublin. This suggests the centrality of sports talk in both Irish and British male working class experience.

In reality, of course, many women enjoy both playing and watching sport, despite the lack of encouragement they receive from the way they are addressed by both the press and broadcast media.

Sporting activity, despite its apolitical presentation by the media, ultimately reflects the values of the society in which it is played and watched. Thus the Irish experience of sport is inflected by the political and cultural tensions that have existed here.



A celebration of the simple and rural

In many instances women are invisible from sporting histories and narratives, particularly those which are assigned a place in popular folklore. Certainly a social history of Irish sport (a project yet to be tackled) would have to deal with the complex relationship between religion, gender and nationalist politics that has so informed Irish social development.

The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), although formed as an explicitly nationalist organisation in the nineteenth century, displayed many of the characteristics of the prevailing Victorian English attitude towards sporting activity and gender relations. It reproduced a form of 'muscular christianity' with an emphasis on athleticism, physical contact and 'manliness'. The participation of women in sport was of secondary importance.

Sport was a male-dominated arena in which the gender divisions of a Catholic society were reproduced and naturalised (a usage of sport, it should be noted, not unique to Ireland). Media treatment of sport reflected this social attitude, with coverage of female sports such as camogie secondary to other gaelic games. The sports field was just one other social arena in which Irish women were not encouraged to express their identity.

While there were obvious physical differences between men and women, the gendered nature

of society is very much socially and culturally constructed. The conservative nationalist ideology which dominated the Irish Free State from the 1920s to the 1950s actively discouraged women from contributing to public culture; their role was in the home, and not on the sports field.

As in other countries, the rough and tumble of male sporting activity signified the attributes of what constituted being a 'real man'. It was an arena where masculinity was celebrated and put on public display. Ireland, however, with its specific political and cultural history, offered a particular relationship between masculine values and sport. As in many small countries dominated by a larger and more powerful neighbour, sport occupied a position of heightened political and cultural significance in Ireland.

Gaelic games formed part of a wider nationalist cultural project. It stressed the ethnic distinctiveness of Irish people (men) through their games. Gaelic football and hurling represented a love of the outdoors, a closeness to nature, a celebration of the simple and rural, the inherent athleticism of the Irish, and offered via newspaper and radio coverage an arena of unsullied heroes of Irish manhood.

In reality, many of the gender specific characteristics displayed in Irish sporting activity echoed,



Picture: Derek Speirs

in their maleness, the attributes of soccer in Britain during this period. The crucial difference was that in Britain this game became embedded in an urban working class culture and consciousness, while in Ireland gaelic games were for many years the epitome of a self-sufficient and rural Ireland – a self-image in keeping with the dominant political ethos of that time.

Within this context, the interplay between nationalist discourses and those related to gender tended to present a particularly narrow vision of Irish womanhood. The arrival in Ireland during the 1950s of the American tennis player Maureen Connolly was reported as follows in *The Irish Press*:

Her delight at seeing Ireland's trees and fields newly washed by the afternoon thundery rains was enhanced by the knowledge that her father's father came from somewhere in Ireland (he is now dead) and her mother, Jessamine Gillan, had also Irish ancestry (*The Irish Press*, 7 July, 1952).

There is an assumed naturalness between sport and maleness, and this is both reflected in and perpetuated by media coverage of sport. In the apolitical world of media sport, men play, women watch. Women's sport is either regarded as of secondary importance to male sports (compare coverage of camogie to other gaelic games), or pigeon-holed to suggest that a sport like gymnastics, which displays all the appropriate feminine characteristics of grace and style, is fully representative of the broad range of female sporting experience.

Television by and large addresses a male audience in its coverage of sport. It constitutes an arena of 'male talk', a common currency of exchange between men from which women are largely excluded. Interestingly, this is increasingly being challenged by the recent success of the Republic of Ireland football team and the attendant national celebrations. During the successful Italia 90 World Cup campaign, the outpouring of national pride in the Irish team and the celebrations of Irish success on the international sporting stage had little to do with football and everything to do with national identity. In addition, women were not going to be excluded from this celebration.

Roddy Doyle recently documented the central role that the pub occupies in Irish sporting culture, and noted that, as the tournament progressed, more and more women could be seen following the matches on television in the pub. Indeed, some men seemed to resent the invasion of their domain by women wishing to discuss the matches. This is not

to suggest that women are not interested in football, rather that many are discouraged by the way that television (and newspapers) addresses the gendered audience.

Male power in sport extends beyond the field of play into the boardrooms of the governing bodies of sport. The Football Association of Ireland, the Irish Rugby Football Union and the GAA are all predominantly male-run associations. In Irish sport, as in other areas of society, to be a top female athlete, broadcaster or journalist requires being better than your male counterparts.

Irish sport, both rural and urban, remains a relatively unconstructed arena of maleness, a bastion of 'the lads'/pub culture that so shapes much of Irish social life. Sport becomes a focus for local, regional and national identities that can at times appear to transcend gender

and rural/urban divisions. It also reflects and naturalises wider social attitudes in Irish society, one of which tends to view the role of women as essentially passive; they can watch but not play.

More women need to be encouraged to participate in sport at all levels. They need to be addressed by the media and not feel excluded from what at times appears to be a male club.

A realisation that Irish masculinity is a social construct and that sport is a key site in the production and reproduction of many of its characteristics would be a good starting point for a wider debate. At present, the gendered playing field is far from level. □

Roddy Doyle, "Jacko's Army", *The Observer*, 7th November 1993.

Nick Hornby, *Fever Pitch: A Fan's Life*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1992.

Men's Groups

A Way to Tell Our Stories

Brian Smeaton
argues that men's groups perform a valuable function in allowing men to realise their humanity and tell their own stories

EVERYWHERE MEN ARE in groups: Dawson Stelfox and the boys going up Everest; submarines; football teams; the masons; rotary clubs; boardrooms; army headquarters; the church; the GAA; cricket; pubs and clubs; academia; the law – literally everywhere, men are in groups.

The distinguishing mark of all these outfits I have mentioned is that in every single case the men in these groups are there because of a function. We are not in these things for ourselves. We are there because we do the job. We fit the role. We are judged on performance and we learn to judge on this basis. This is one reason why unemployment is such a blow to men.

The men's groups I'm writing about are about human beings. First stop is 'Who are you?' That means telling the story, your story. To do that needs listening. Listening is one of the key elements. The other is confidentiality. We make a deal that what passes between us will not be repeated without the express permission of the individual.

What starts to pour out is the individual story. I try to work to a pattern of encouraging men to talk about what is good first, and then what is difficult, on the basis that if we can start with what is good it is easier to deal with what is difficult. Starting with the difficult stuff tends to push us further down the tubes and then it is doubly difficult to see any light at all.

My experience is that men's stories have not yet been told. Although the whole of literature, history, almost everything that is written down seems to be by men and about men, if you take a closer look, you will see that most of it is about what men do, not who we are. It's as if in order to be we have to do; we have to earn our place and prove our worth – on the battlefield, in business, in academia, the church, the state. Men are encouraged to lead and create and think and play, but what is the price? The price is giving up important parts of ourselves. To survive men's groups, we need men's groups.

Men's stories have not yet been told

To survive as a human race, we need men's groups. Men's stories need to be told, need to be listened to, by other men.

Women can assist us in this process. They have realised the importance of telling their stories and the difference that makes to history - 'his story'. One of the elements needed for liberation is the realisation that one is oppressed. For women, telling the story brought the realisation of the oppression and also the awareness of the courage, the resourcefulness, the creativity, the ability, not just to survive, but to enjoy and celebrate.

For men, a similar experience awaits us. Telling the actual story, the early memories, school and what happened after that, is crucial. Sometimes people rush over the early bits, or maintain that they cannot remember. Remembering is important. But it can be one of the difficulties for all kinds of reasons. Family loyalty - not wanting to let the family down; fear of what other men would do with the information; just the hardness of treatment: 'Be a big boy and don't cry.' That's a subtle code for 'Boys don't feel'.

All that stuff about boys having to be hardened up and made into 'men'. The place where we were isolated from our mothers very early on. Where we were given to understand that we are not supposed to be close to other boys. Where sex came to be understood as a substitute for closeness, that the only way we can have closeness, intimacy, is through the sexual act. We are given to understand that we simply have to compete, get the better of, stay on top, fight, win, wipe out the opposition. We get hurt, but we are not supposed to feel it.

Telling the story, remembering the early bits, that's the key. Making the space, the safety to relate what it is really like, what lies behind the bonhomie, the 'grin-and-bear-it', the 'hail fellow well met' slap on the back and 'what'll you have' stuff.

Recently I read *You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies and Men*, a series of essays on the portrayal of masculinity in films from Hollywood to India. Tarzan, Clark Gable, Rock Hudson, Vietnam war films, Amitabh Bachchan, the urban demi-god of the Bombay film scene, are all looked at from the aspect of how films portray what is expected of us men. We are supposed to dominate each other, to compete, not to feel hurt (which means that we can do the most awful things to each other). We are supposed to dominate women and children.

Women are supposed to be lesser beings. To be male is the way to be. Anything that is not male



Picture: James Bartholomew

is regarded as being flawed, like homosexuals. The violence used against homosexuals is not just about how they operate sexually. It is actually a message to all men to stay in the role, or see what could happen to you.

Surviving a men's group means telling the story, over and over again. It means remembering - remembering what it was really like. A couple of summers ago I went to Jerusalem to see Yad Vashen, the Holocaust Museum. That was tough, but also I found it a place of hope that, in fact, people could decide that such a thing would never happen again. It confirmed this notion of the importance of remembering, of telling the story as it actually is, warts and all.

It also displays the courage and creativity and the will to survive, and more. Survival is important, but the decision to enjoy, to celebrate being, is the next step. In Israel I saw a film, *Europa, Europa*, made in Germany, about the true story of the survival of a young Jewish boy through Russia and Germany in the 1939-1945 war. It is a wonderful portrayal of survival with such creativity and ingenuity leading on to joy and celebration. The recent film *In the Name of the Father* is another example of telling the story and the meeting of father and son in the prison cell is a marvellous evocation of the peace process working not only in and between individuals, but also on the whole context of our lives.

Actually taking time for ourselves

The fact that the truth about men is beginning to trickle out here and there, in films, in soap operas, in an increasing number of books and articles, is a credit to the work that has been done and is being done in men's groups, a different kind of men's group, all over the world.

One of the greatest difficulties men face is to get over the feelings we have about actually taking time for ourselves. Taking time, that is, time that is not laced with alcohol, competition, or isolation. Taking time to tell the story, to talk about ourselves, not about what we have done and what we will do: 'done that, doing it tomorrow'. The feeling is that the world might somehow stop twirling on its axis, that our path around the sun might be affected, that life might be extinguished if we did not defend and attack and all the rest. Isn't it about time we began to treat ourselves with the kind of respect and appreciation that such complex and wonderful intelligences deserve?

There is a job to be done. Accepting ourselves as men, male human beings, human beings who happen to be male. We need to get together to do it, to realise that being comes first. Then we can decide what is best for us, what is in our own best interests. 'One for all and all for one' - women, children and men together. This is what comes after surviving men's groups. □

Glorious History Is Not For Us

Kevin Casey
ponders what role
is there for Irish
men in a society
where they grow up
with little to look
forward to except
unemployment

IT STICKS IN MY MIND, AS
no doubt it sticks in
his, that time when Sylvie
Linane sent the sliotar past the
goalie with his wylie book to
win the big match.

A great forward of Galway
hurling, just a few minutes earlier
Sylvie had been standing on the
sideline having his head wrapped
in bandages after a four inch gash
had been left there by the full
back's stick. Now here he was
with the bandages soaked through,
making glorious things happen for
himself, for his team, for me and
for our county, while the blood ran
down his neck. What a man.

The best thing about Italia
'90, apart from the unsurpassed
celebrations that clogged the
drains of this country, was
the way in which it put Irish
masculinity back in the chair. No
matter that the team were mostly
of English origin, what counted
was their shirts as they took
on the world with tenacity and
success. O'Herlihy, Dunphy and
Giles ran things from back in the
studio while we the people cheered
from the lounges and showered
our opponents with abuse.

Admittedly although it was done
through coarse behaviour, Irish
manhood was bonding on a nation-
wide scale during that soccer
tournament when unpretentiously,
innocently, we, as a brotherhood,
exceeded our own expectations. If
it is the job of the man to lead
family, county and country, you
have to be able to mix it with
the best of them in order to take
some pride.



Picture: Derek Speirs

For we must be proud. A man's
rites of passage may involve the
odd jostle, maybe a scrap, a pint
too many, a clip in the ear, a
hard day's work and even a fair
degree of humiliation at the hands
of the group, but if not as the
corner forward then perhaps as
the wit, the hard man, the stud
or the savant, a man should find
a place amongst his fellows as a
fellow, leaving the women aside.
Talk big, talk dirty, avoid sincerity,
and never reveal your heart.

Remember the time when the
Soldiers of Destiny were led by
a man called Fionn McCumhail,
and his sons and brothers were
great also? His current successor
as leader of the Irish lacks the
passion, gallantry and virility that
guided the original Fianna and
alas, Irish manhood is not what it
once was, to be sure. Remember,
too, those men at the foundation
of our state who lived up to the
legends of the Fianna and Cu
Chulainn? The fathers who are to

**The legacy
of legends
and great
feats**

be remembered by we the children
as being noble and brave; the
might of their passions overcoming
the strength of their oppressors,
men whose deaths were the stuff
of legend also?

Life for the men of contem-
porary Ireland is banal by
comparison with the best achieve-
ments of Irish manhood – glorious
history is not for us. The robust,
meat-eating Irish male is losing
ground in the nineties with the
advent of the Fear Nua. Urbanity
has crept into his identity and
the new position of women has
undermined past roles.

Women are drinking pints and
young men pass no remarks. Wary
of smoking Carrolls, they'll smoke
Silk Cut Blue. Our forefathers
stood for Irish independence while
we're for European Union. Events
have overtaken the myths of our
national consciousness while the
future, not history, is the relevant
topic. The legacy of legends and

great feats lingers on, but its hold on its inheritors is in some doubt.

Irish men have not turned up great rational minds like our European cousins – there are no national philosophers here given to pure reason, wan and ill with contemplation. Our thinking men became writers, while undertaking activities in line with their ideas.

Beckett, Behan, Yeats and O'Casey, for example, burly members of that pondering elite who are now celebrated on tee-shirts, actually tinkered with revolution, protest and politics in their day and took in the struggle as is an Irishman's way.

Characteristically, Irish men are not content with mere reflection. Irish masculinity behoves its members to engage their physical and sensual faculties in material expression, be it on the farm, on the football pitch or in the pub. Part of Irish men's identity is to be active.

But machismo, of course, is absurd. It's germane to a man's identity but its tenets, when put to reasonable argument, appear ridiculous. Yet its presence drives men to self-actuation, to score goals while losing a pint of blood, to cast out the empire, to lead the family and drive the car, to drink until you're drunk and then to drink some more. Machismo is the creative/destructive force that has made the world around us, albeit a world in man's image.

The last time I saw Sylvie play, however, he was too overweight to chase down the ball while the next time I see Ireland play they'll be hounded out of the World Cup – the glory days are over, the men of glory have passed over us.

Inactivity, then, withers Irish manliness. Hence the loss of compass generated by unemployment on a massive scale, along with the ascendancy of women in the spheres of male action.

The impending public works programme and Euro-lolly has made beggars out of us. Hoteliers will make a golf course out of our fair isle for the benefit of real Europeans like the Germans and the French.

In the past we had a discernible enemy to define ourselves and pit our wills against, something we've long since lost and although the national task now is to address unemployment, it seems to be getting nowhere.

We men have suffered an erosion of our pride within the community while women may continue to be proud of their progress through male bastions. We've lost our enemy, our innocence and our employment; we're left with the comfort of our Guinness and, try as the taxman might, they won't take that away from us. Battered we may be, but we're still men and we need nourishment. □

The Pool Room

One warm July I found myself in an Irish house;
Not under the influence, not in a dream;
(Fuck the dreaming ancients and all poets
Dead and deader, their Aislings and their Saxon Epics);
A watching house. Food and fragile thought. Lives
Flasked from dimming noise. Part of my recovery.
All day long we danced the memory dance.
T-shirts wet with memory sweat.

Up North we have a horror of anger, a harrowing smile,
A Godly coven inspecting our file...In this hotel,
Motel, solitarium, sickness centre, gene explainer,
Memory breeder, dream provider, lie extractor. And
It frightened me, this displacement, all this gentle
Disproportion. It chilled me, scared me shitless. I
Helloed those horrors, bouncing, bruised apples in a churning tub.
"Tension won't kill you". Drowning is not the issue.
Children float, they say. "Throw them in the deep end".

Women give birth in the main. Lumbering buddhas squat.
In rippling water, fidgeting sea-nymphs, anxious handmaids,
Porpoise in the blood. "Come on, Come now!"
See the rosy tendrils rough-combed loose,
Float and spiral in the tile-blue pool. The hairmaids sing.

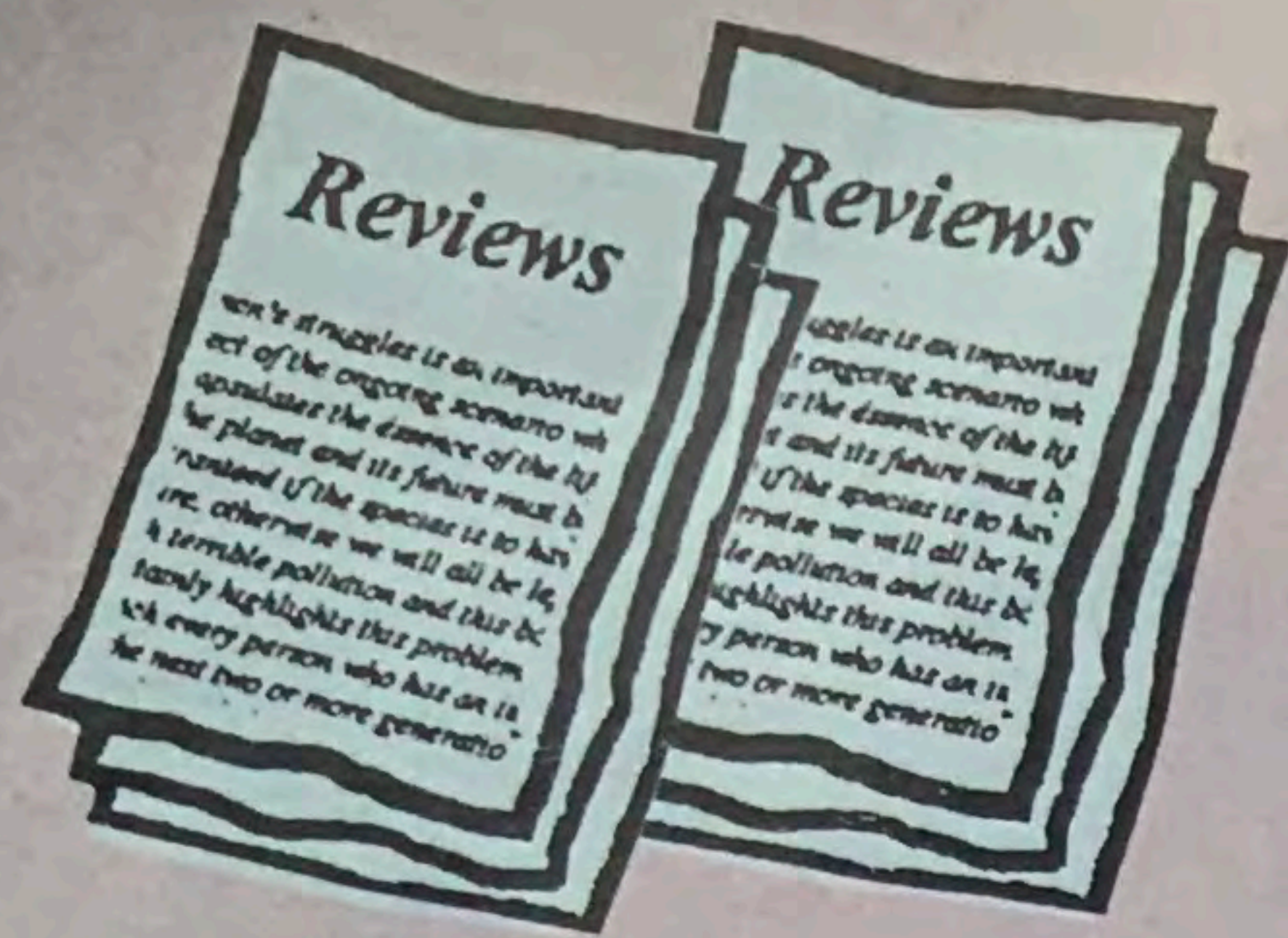
"A medium suitable for me does not exist, unless I invent it".
So Burroughs got his shotgun, and he tolled his wife.

Our inventive ancestors crunched the dead in foetal shapes.
They hoarded foodbowls at the corpse's mouth. I blasphemed?
I drank Vodka with the dead. I stole sustenance. I broke
Tradition. I lost patience with their patent. In
Stainless steel with the waiting smiles I was at home.
In the morgue of a provincial Irish town it was dead quiet.
With the moonlight drying on the midland grass
I dismembered, disremembered, set-squared,
Parallelogrammed the Ghost Dance.

In the Prayer Room all they ask is sentiment, regret.
In the Pool Room all we get is blood and cannon law.
We need a musical vocabulary. Off-pitch, off-centre,
Offprint. Of course. The white flag. White noise,
Mind assault. Surrender. Not in this house,
Not with my arsenal of swords and secret gangs.
Recovery must be danced in private places.

By Seamas Keenan





An t-Éireannach 1934-37
by Éamon Ó Ciosáin
An Clóchomhar Tta
Baile Átha Cliath, 1993

It is a profoundly depressing experience to read Éamon Ó Ciosáin's detailed and well-researched history of *An t-Éireannach*, the 'socialist Gaeltacht newspaper' which was published as a weekly for just under three years in the 1930s.

Not because of the book itself, which gives a fascinating glimpse of a part of the revival movement long ignored by historians, but because the evident vigour of the publication seems to reach down the years to mock its latter-day successors: *Saol*, a monthly published by Bord na Gaeilge and called 'Pravda' in some quarters; *Anois*, the weekly published by Gael-Linn which is nicknamed Ainnis ('Misery') in others, and *Lá*, the Belfast-based weekly which seems unable to distinguish propaganda from genuine reportage.

An t-Éireannach was different, and although it did succumb to Gaelic propagandising at times, it also had a much wider agenda. It was the first weekly newspaper to be published in Irish and it set out from the beginning to empower impoverished and dispirited Gaeltacht communities by informing them of what was going on in the wider world and by seeking to inform the wider world about the Gaeltacht.

As Ó Ciosáin points out in his introduction, the words 'Gaelic, Catholic, Conservative,' are often bandied about whenever nationalism is

discussed in this country. The story of *An t-Éireannach* is proof that such automatic assumptions are not always true.

It was founded by Seán Beaumont, a Presbyterian socialist who was helped by Tomás Ó Flaithearta (brother of Liam) a Trotskyist. It was aimed at the working class and the 'cosmhuintir' in the Gaeltacht and usually found itself in agreement with the policies of the Republican Congress, a coalition of republicans, communists and trade unionists formed in the 1930s.

It is no surprise, therefore, that it was ignored or resented by many in Conradh na Gaeilge, who had little sympathy or understanding for what it was trying to achieve and whose political inclinations were much further to the right.

As a result it was written out of the official histories of the revival movement: according to Williams and Ni Mhuiríosa in *Traidisiún Liteartha na Gaeilge* (1979), the first weekly newspaper in Irish was *Inniu*. Ó Ciosáin has more than compensated for the lacuna, however; his book gives a vivid account of the period and of the financial and other difficulties which beset the paper from the start.

It is an account liberally sprinkled with illustrations and references culled from the pages of the paper, such as the series of satirical letters published under the title 'Litreacha Don Mhol Ó Thuaidh' (Letters for the North Pole).

These include satires on General Duffy and the 'Léinteacha Salacha', curious attacks on jazz music and healthy irreverent stabs at the pretensions of the Gaeligeoir establishment. The reader is advised in one case that if he has mastered the new Civil Service brand of official Irish he will have no trouble with ancient Egyptian; in another we get the following exchange:

"Ask me a question beginning with cad," arsa an cigire,

"Who (hew) are yez coddin'," arsa an páiste.

But the paper's true note is one of anger and desolation at the large-scale emigration from Gaeltacht areas during the 1930s. Whenever a Taoiseach or a Minister delivered a speech resplendent with talk of Gaelicising the nation - to fulsome praise from the Gaeligeoirí - *An t-Éireannach* was there to point at the gap between rhetoric and reality.

It was a lonely message: to many revivalists, the Irish tongue was a kind of national spiritual mantra, an abstract effort to save the 'soul of the nation' that had little to do with saving the communities where the language was still spoken.

Uinsionn MacDubhghaill

The Kilcolman Notebook
by Robert Welch
Brandon
128 pp, 6.95

It has been said that Ezra Pound wrote his *Cantos* as if completely unaware of anything else published between his own work and that of William Shakespeare. So much of what is produced appears to be mainly a progression from what preceded it.

Surprisingly, given that he's a Professor of English Literature, there is the same sense of a rootless burst of pure creativity in Robert Welch's *The Kilcolman Notebook*. This is, I presume, his first work of fiction - the Brandon notes do not tell us.

Initially I found this somewhat irritating. A short introduction by an expert on Elizabethan history, comparing the real-life relationships between Edmund Spencer, Sir Walter Raleigh and Queen Elizabeth and their attitudes towards the jewel in their dominions with the way in which those attitudes and their own relationships - sexual, spiritual and courtly - are explored in this engaging novel would have been a useful tool for the layperson.

Yet therein lies the novel's charm. I didn't learn anything about history from the book, but I did gain intriguing insights into its three main characters. That these three have little or nothing necessarily to do with the historical personages on whom they were based is ultimately the novel's strength.

This is a free-standing piece. There is a sense of 'before the Fall' about it, if we take *Ulysses* as the Fall, the traipsing into the literary desert that Virginia Woolf rather mournfully predicted. There is here a complete absence of the twentieth century, and indeed of any century since the Elizabethan era. With its sparse, deliberate, even awkward prose, it evokes simultaneously a pre-civilisation and post-apocalyptic landscape. The only similar work that springs to mind is Neil Jordan's *The Dream of the Beast*.

With Hollywood currently teaching us that there is good to be found in everything, even the Holocaust, how nice for once to have no obvious message thrust upon us, just to be made alert. A fascinating work then, though not for the faint of heart.

Anthony O'Keeffe

Two Pints, Your Honour

Under the tv the players sit,
 Cards in their hands,
 Smiles on their lips.
 Little infidelities simmer,
 Men watch women
 Sip vodka, cross their legs,
 Stretch.
 Trophies adorn the shelves
 Proud pictures of Derry boxers
 Share pride of place with
 Famous horses, football teams,
 Painted hankies from Long Kesh.
 This is a man's bar but
 Women are allowed in now,
 And in the snug
 The widows whisper
 Hatred of the singing wives.
 Here there is no need for metaphor,
 Lives are lives,
 And the light is bright
 And, as Hughie says,
 "Well, sure, you weren't too bad
 Last night".

By Seamas Keenan

Title: Irish Reporter, No. 14

Date: 1994

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