

H-France Review Vol. 10 (December 2010), No. 195

Jane Conroy, ed. *Franco-Irish Connections: Essays, Memoirs and Poems in Honour of Pierre Joannon*. Dublin and Portland, Oregon: Four Courts Press, 2009. xix + 364 pp. Photographs, maps, notes on contributors, and index. €55 Europe; £50 UK; \$70 North America. (hb). ISBN 978-1-84682-212-4.

Review by Sarah Alyn Stacey, Trinity College Dublin.

It is with some circumspection that this particular reviewer approaches a collection of articles “in honour” of someone. The danger of finding between the covers a disparate collection of articles aimed at eulogy and memorialisation rather than the promotion of scholarship is uppermost in one’s mind and rightly so when such a collection makes claims to academic credentials. This collection of articles, highly diverse in both tone and content, successfully navigates a balanced course between honouring an individual of great merit and presenting significant scholarship in the field of Franco-Irish relations from the seventeenth century through to the present.

The thirty-four contributions which make up this volume have been brought together to honour Pierre Joannon on the occasion of his retirement as Chairman of the Ireland Fund of France. The collection opens with a foreword (appropriately entitled a *hommage* to Joannon on its first page) by Michel Déon, and this, together with the biographical chapter by Kinglesy Aikens (pp. 1-5) and the bibliography of Joannon’s works (pp. 7-14), leaves the reader in no uncertainty regarding the pivotal role played by Joannon in promoting Franco-Irish relations not only as Chairman of the Ireland Fund but in his own scholarly right: quite apart from his publications promoting a knowledge of Irish history in France (his *Histoire de l’Irlande* (Paris: Plon, 1973) and his *Michael Collins* (Paris: la Table Ronde, 1978) spring immediately to mind) he has engaged with a broad cross-section of “Irish matters”, from history to literature to politics, within an historical perspective ranging from the early modern period through to the present day and with the emphasis on highlighting Franco-Irish threads.

It is this broad spectrum of interests which is reflected in the range of contributions brought together in this volume. Diverse offerings by scholars from across the disciplines (but particularly history), politicians, diplomats, and artists sit side-by-side, reflecting the eclectic nature of Joannon’s entourage and various “encounters” in the course of his career. This eclecticism is heightened by the decision to order the contributions according to the alphabetical order of the authors’ surnames, so that, for example, a handwritten letter (reproduced in facsimile form, so emphasising the personal tone of the missive) to Joannon from Anne Madden and Louis le Brocquy (p. 216) faces the first page of Lara Marlowe’s political analysis of the failed referenda on the Lisbon treaty in 2005 and 2008 (pp. 217- 225); David Norris’s highly amusing and personal account of his first meeting with Joannon and his colourful reminiscences on various Joyce symposia (pp. 252-257) follow Grace Neville’s analysis of the Irish press coverage of De Gaulle’s visit to Ireland in May 1969 (pp. 238-250) and precede Patrick O’Connor’s history of the development of the Irish College in Paris (pp. 258-268); Seamus Heaney’s adaptation in English of Eugène Guillevic’s “Herbier de Bretagne”, an endeavour dedicated to Joannon in the light of his “political, cultural, historical, personal service” to France and Ireland and “friendship and feasting” (pp. 121-128), precedes John Hume’s very serious and thoughtful reflections on the Irish peace process; the fact that one of the centrally-bound photographs shows Heaney, Hume and Joannon together on

the day the latter was made a chevalier de la Légion d'honneur (2002) testifies to the subtle interweaving of elements which reinforces the coherence of the text.

A particular strength of the volume and one of its major unifying threads is the engagement throughout (at times quite subtly, at others explicitly) with the problematic nature of writing Ireland's history because of the ongoing political division which has characterised the country, notably since the Reformation. As philosopher Richard Kearney points out in the introduction to his article,

These various critical attempts to discern different ways of remembering and forgetting all acknowledge the stakes involved in any attempt to come to terms with one's national or cultural past. And given Ireland's complex history of violence and struggle such stakes are high indeed. Interpreting the wounds of history is never a simple matter. One need only recall the controversies surrounding questions of reliable and disputed memory in the Truth Commission on Bloody Sunday or the various commemorations of events like the Battle of the Boyne, the 1916 rising or the 1840s Famine, to be reminded of just how sensitive and contentious such issues can be (p. 136).

Further examples of such sensitive subjects are pointed up in the text and (unsurprisingly) primarily concern Irish-British relations. Early in the volume, for example, historian Thomas Bartlett's preamble to his discussion of the "Wild Geese" (a term originally signifying soldiers in the Irish regiments in French service from 1689 onwards, and later all Irish professional soldiers on the continent from 1600 to 1800) draws attention to the ongoing controversy regarding "Irishmen in British uniforms" from the 1840s to the present day, a controversy which has led to them being "collectively airbrushed out of the national story" (p. 17). For political reasons, notably their allegiance to the Stuart cause and the Catholic religion, the "Wild Geese" have received a markedly different treatment, being both hugely admired and celebrated in historical works, ballads, poems and novels. As Bartlett concludes, "The complexities of Irish history mean that Irishmen in British uniform belong there as much as Irishmen in French uniforms" (p. 30). The article by Eunan O'Halpin and Alice Harrison considers Irish French diplomacy during the Second World War and thereby flags up a further sensitive subject, the policy of Irish neutrality, although, as Bartlett has already reminded us, many Irish joined the British to fight Nazism and have received little recognition for it (p. 17). In humorous tone, David Norris highlights the very serious danger of perpetuating simplistic and biased historical stereotypes when he comments that love of France is so embedded in the Irish "that we have forgiven the French for the Norman invasion and blamed it as usual on the unfortunate English" (p. 251).

If the flagging up of these sensitive issues highlights a regrettable paradox (that a nation can be incapable of writing/hearing its true history because of ingrained political ideologies), it also reminds us of the significant privilege exercised by historians such as Joannon who write from outside the particular national parameters. It is this which makes their role in the writing of Irish history particularly significant. This point is made very well by Michael Lillis in the introduction to his article retracing the establishment of the 1985 Anglo-Irish Agreement and its repercussions on the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. Referring to Joannon's *Histoire de l'Irlande et des Irlandais* (Paris: Perrin, 2006), he commends it not only for being "up-to-date and sedulous in research and sober in judgement", but because it offers "a Continental European perspective which persistently broadens the context of Irish history beyond the cauldron of Anglo-Irish claustrophobia" (p. 197).

As this volume subtly demonstrates, the examination of Ireland's relations with France (and presumably with other nations, with still the unfortunate exception, it seems, of Britain) provides an inroad into contentious areas of Irish history and politics which, if looked at only in relation to the Irish context, would arguably receive a far less comprehensive and objective treatment. When Conroy comments in her "Introduction", "[i]t appears to be in the natural order of things that small countries pay more attention to their bigger neighbours than vice-versa (p. xiii)", she is, in fact, reminding us of the pragmatism that informs (necessarily) publications focusing on Franco-Irish research: by placing

Ireland's history in its broader global context, we are permitted to transcend the ideological obstacles that have frequently undermined the proper recording and interpretative process of the past.

Given the European focus of the volume and its subtle engagement with the problematic of writing Irish history, a greater engagement with French attitudes towards the writing of the past would have been welcome. A subject of primary importance in this respect is the approach of the French to the two World Wars, two major events in the construction/ destruction of notions of European identity which also merit greater comment in the volume. If for French historians these remain periods of primary significance for ongoing research characterised by a prevalent revisionism even in the face of the subversion of the most comfortable myths (as demonstrated recently by the revelations regarding the role of the Vichy government in promoting anti-semitism), this has not been the case in Ireland. If the role of the Irish soldiers in the First World War has now become an acceptable field of study (thanks notably to the pioneering work in the 1990s of journalist Kevin Myers long before the topic was embraced by "academic" historians in Irish universities), there remains, as Bartlett reminds us "residual hostility" regarding their commemoration and those who fought in the Second World War have fared even less well: "there has been until very recently very little recognition for, or indeed, study of, those Irish who fought in the British armed forces in the Second World War" (p. 17).

A significant development in this field needs to be mentioned, its omission undoubtedly due to the timing of the volume's publication: in June 2009, the French Department of Trinity College Dublin (which since 2008 has been holding a series of conferences on Franco-Irish relations in the Second World War) negotiated the acceptance by the University of a Roll of Honour of the Irish men and women who died in the British forces in the Second World War. A second copy of this document, compiled by Yvonne McEwen (Centre for the Study of The Two World Wars, University of Edinburgh), was presented to the Assembly at Stormont with the agreement of all political parties in November of that same year. This unique document is clearly of considerable significance to many of the political and historical matters broached in this volume of essays.

This collection of essays is, then, a fine and fitting tribute to Pierre Joannon, an individual who has done so much to promote awareness of the complexities of Irish history and to promote Franco-Irish relations (as Brendan Kennelly calls him in his piece, he is a "[q]uiet bridge-builder"). It is also a most significant contribution to a growing body of work on Franco-Irish relations, not least because it demonstrates the need for interdisciplinary approaches to the subject to appreciate better both the far-reaching cultural influence of such relations and also the national histories and identities specific to France and Ireland respectively. At a time of diminished funding in the Irish and French universities, the volume is also a timely reminder of the central place of the Arts and Humanities (not least that of European Languages) in the promotion of a better understanding of national identity.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Michel Déon, "Avant-propos"

Jane Conroy, "Introduction"

Kingsley Aikens, "Pierre Joannon"

"Published Work by Pierre Joannon"

Thomas Bartlett, "Ormuzd abroad ... Ahriman at home: some early historians of the "Wild Geese" in French service, 1840-1950"

John Bruton, "Beyond the nation state: America and the European Union"

Jane Conroy, "'The French are on the sea': mapping the Irish coast, 1690"

Denis Corboy, "Journey to Europe, first shoots: a personal memoir"

Louis Cullen, "Richard Warren, Andrew Gallwey and the smugglers of Rush: an entrepot in Belle-Ile-en-Mer, 1766-70"

Seán Donlon, "Graham Greene and the GPA Book Award"

Garret FitzGerald, "Irish-French relations, 1999-2009"

Jacqueline Genet, "From dialectics to Unity in the poetry of Yeats"

Frédéric Grasset, "The illustrious hidden ambassador"

Maurice Hayes, "Speaking the General's granny"

Seamus Heaney, "A herbal", adapted from Eugène Guillevic's 'Herbier de Bretagne'"

John Hume, "Reminiscences and reflections on the long road to peace"

Richard Kearney, "Memory and forgetting in Irish culture"

Brendan Kennelly, "'Bridge-builder', for Pierre Joannon"

Dermot Keogh, "Ireland and France in the twentieth century-contrasting and conflictive relationships"

Sylvie Kleinman, "What did the French ever do for us? Or, some thoughts on French archives as realms of Irish memory"

J. J. Lee, "De Gaulle and de Valera: notes towards a comparison"

Michael Lillis, "Footnotes to the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985"

Anne Madden and Louis le Brocquy, "Personal tribute"

Lara Marlowe, "France, Ireland and the failed referenda of 2005 and 2008"

Jane McKee, "A sense of place in the writing of Romain Gary"

John Montague, "'Vendange', pour Pierre Joannon"

Grace Neville, "'Guest of the Nation': Charles de Gaulle's visit to Ireland in the Irish press (1969)"

David Norris, "An encounter"

Patrick O'Connor, "The Irish College in Paris: from penal days seminary to Irish cultural centre"

Eunan O'Halpin and Alice Harrison, "The French legation in Dublin in comparative perspective, 1939-45"

Sheamus Smith, "Cannes Film Festival and the Irish"

Ben Tonra, "L'entente européenne"

Kevin Whelan, "A nation in waiting? The Irish in France in the eighteenth century"

C. J. Woods, "Notes on some Irish residents in Paris"

Sarah Alyn Stacey
Trinity College Dublin
salynsta@tcd.ie

Copyright © 2010 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172