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Enjeux contemporains en études irlandaises – In
Memoriam Paul Brennan

Introduction

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Introduction

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In 1994, the Irish Studies Research Centre of the University of Caen Lower Normandy invited John McGahern, as his novel *The Barracks* was one of the set works for the *Agrégation*. The Irish writer was delighted to meet Prof. Paul Brennan who was the head of the Research Centre. They had much in common: both were born in the 1930s in the North West of the Republic of Ireland into large Catholic families; both had a father who was a Garda.

Addressing a packed lecture theatre, McGahern recalled the places of his childhood, and in particular the narrow rutted lanes he would walk around his home. He gave an accurate description of a crossroads on his way to school, of a Calvary, a run-down thatched cottage, and of certain fruit trees. At the end of his talk, Paul Brennan, who was obviously deeply moved, told us: “I know the places he is talking about. I remember them very well. It’s unbelievable, so many years on, whereas nothing in my surroundings is likely to bring those places back to life, to hear about that lost hamlet in the middle of nowhere I had forgotten about.” The thing is, since he had grown up in rural Western Ireland, Paul had come a very long way.

Born on June 24, 1939, Paul Brennan was the sixth child of Margaret and Patrick Brennan. After earning a BA in History from NUI Galway, Paul left Ireland for France in 1963 and read for an English degree at the Sorbonne. He met Nicole in 1965 and they married shortly after. In May 1968, they both took part in the student protests, showing a passionate social commitment and their determination to assert their beliefs. Paul embarked upon an academic career in France, wrote a Doctoral thesis and a *Thèse d’État* on “The State in Ireland in the first half of the nineteenth century” which earned him the position of a Professor at the University of Caen in 1993 and at Paris 3 – Sorbonne Nouvelle in 1998. He shared his intimate knowledge of Ireland, its culture and history with his students and the many Doctoral candidates under his supervision.

A tireless scholar, he soon became recognized as an eminent specialist of Irish “*civilisation*” – a French discipline combining history and cultural studies. In

addition to the many academic responsibilities he took on, he was the President of the Société Française d'Études Irlandaises (SOFÉIR) for 6 years, one of the pillars of the journal *Études Irlandaises*, and a formidable international networker. Endowed with an unfailing energy and an exceptional working capacity, he served on the boards and juries of the Conseil National des Universités (CNU), was the vice-president of the CAPES (the competitive exam required to teach in secondary schools), and also advised the French Department of National Education on the reform of the foreign languages curriculum. However, those heavy duties and attending worries never dampened his cheerful temper and good nature. Even in the most adverse circumstances, he succeeded in remaining faithful to the ideals he believed in and in keeping his enthusiasm and humour intact.

Each summer, Paul and Nicole spent one month in Connemara. Their house was open to all; they enjoyed hosting neighbours, relatives, Irish and French friends and American visitors. Those convivial evenings offered the chance to talk, sing and recite poetry. Paul's niece Muireann O'Cinneide remembers the summer of 2003 in that house. Paul told the story of the political tensions Nicole risked causing in Paris by serving up an orange cake to a Northern Irish Protestant. Smiling, he said: "I tried to pretend it was lemon cake, but Nicole would not have her cake incorrectly identified!"...

Paul and Nicole were the parents of Philippe and grandparents of Maxime, but the grandfather never had the joy to meet his granddaughter Alice who was born shortly after he died. Paul was laid to rest in the cemetery where his parents were buried; Nicole would join him in the grave two years later.

A driving force behind the remarkable development of Irish Studies in France, Paul Brennan's presence is still felt among us, and his memory was revived in particular during the conference organized by the Irish Studies Research Centre in Caen on November 22-23, 2013 to mark the 10th anniversary of his death. This volume, which was inspired by that conference, aims at revisiting Paul's areas of specialization and to assess the advances made in research areas he had contributed to open up in Irish Studies.

This volume offers a sample of the latest scholarly work on State-building, Northern Ireland, Europe, Irish political parties, justice, the education system, the economy, religion and secularization, and seeks to reflect the light shed on these areas by the historiographical developments of the past ten years.

Paul Brennan also widened the scope of Irish Studies in France to include cultural issues. A friend of Michael D. Higgins whom he had met at University College Galway, he had followed with great interest the first-time formulation

1. We wish to thank Dr Muireann O'Cinneide, Lecturer in English at University College Galway and niece of Paul Brennan, for providing us with biographical information and anecdotes.

of a cultural policy by the current President of the Republic of Ireland who was Ireland's first Minister of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht in 1993. "L'Imaginaire Irlandais" festival which took place while he was in office was the opportunity for France to apprehend his policy of encouragement of creativity and revitalization not only in music, but also in the film industry, the visual arts and the Irish language. Paul Brennan encouraged the development of scholarship in this field and supervised quite a few PhD theses on the revival of the Irish cinema in the 1990s, the rehabilitation of the Gaelic language, the history of Irish cultural policy, but also on unique and controversial measures such as Aosdána, the Irish academy, created by Anthony Cronin and Charles Haughey and subsidized by the State to support its artists.

Opening the first section devoted to Irish politics, Pauline Collombier-Lakeman's paper complicates and goes beyond Paul Brennan's analysis of Ireland's relationship with Great Britain as envisaged by the Irish Parliamentary Party before independence. Eric Meynard then revisits the creation of An Garda Síochána, the new police force of the Irish Free State. Agnès Maillot analyses the place for the legacy of Sinn Féin in the narrative of the collective memory as shaped by the representatives of the Free State and of Éire. Steven O'Connor then adds to the scholarship on neutral Ireland's participation in the Second World War by examining the social background and the motivations of the Irish who volunteered to serve with the British forces. This section closes on a very contemporary study which endeavours to see whether the relationship between Irish citizens and the State has been affected by the recession.

The second section concerns economic and social issues. Vanessa Boulet sheds new light on the pivotal moment the late 1950s represent for the Irish economy. Valérie Peyronel shows the late fruit of the policy of modernization of the Irish economy initiated in 1958: the development of clusters and networks which contributed to the economic achievements of Celtic Tiger Ireland. She points to the questions raised by the emergence and the development of those structures. Other networks in 21st-century Ireland are those encountered by female migrants to Ireland, and Marie-Jeanne Da Col Richert reveals the full extent of the discriminations they endure as they try to settle in Ireland.

The life, the situation of the Irish Catholic Church and the relationship between Church and State are the topics of the next section. Imelda Elliott revisits the attitude of the Catholic Church towards the modernization of secondary education in the early 1960s. Karin Fischer takes the study of the State-Church relationship in the field of education up until the 2000s, retracing the history of the "illusion of neutrality" of the State (neutrality being understood as separation between Church and State) in Irish political discourse concerning education, and reveals "strategies to avoid confronting the issue of state neutrality, its meaning

and the gap between theory and practice.” Looking into the historiography of lives of saints and examining the organized worship of St Patrick and St Brigid, Catherine Maignant takes us through a history of the instrumentalization of the great national saints and looks into the effect on the worship of the two saints of the new distance between State and Church. In the wake of the revelations of abuse which shattered confidence in the Irish Catholic Church, Nathalie Sebbane highlights the achievements of survivor advocacy group Justice for Magdalenes in their attempt to obtain apologies and compensation.

We were delighted and very much honoured to welcome as our guest of honour philosopher, journalist and John Henry Newman Scholar of Theology Mark Dooley who offers here a testimony and an analysis of the origins of the moral crisis that brought the Irish Catholic Church to its knees. When he was a lecturer in philosophy at NUI Maynooth, the seminarians who followed his courses asked him indeed to draw to the attention of the public *via* the press the extent of the culture of clerical disobedience that pervaded the national seminary. Mark Dooley’s columns drew the attention not only of the public, but also of the Catholic hierarchy and of the Vatican just before the Apostolic Visitation to Ireland. Mark Dooley concludes his analysis by pointing to the conditions in which the Irish Catholic Church can be reclaimed.

The peace process in Northern Ireland being at the core of Paul Brennan’s research interests, Joana Etchart’s paper makes a discerning assessment of its achievements, distinguishing between peace and reconciliation, and pointing to areas where peace-building initiatives have failed. H el ene Alfaro on the other hand shows the central role of a new international cultural tourism and cultural marketing policy in post-Agreement Belfast in dissolving historic tensions and rebranding Belfast.

Although he was a specialist of “*civilization*”, Paul Brennan has always entertained and fostered a keen interest in literary studies. Having befriended a number of Irish writers, he succeeded in leading colleagues and Doctoral students in diverse and stimulating projects. The literary section of this volume opens with a paper devoted to the most famous of Paul Brennan’s college friends, Michael D. Higgins. Alfred Michael Markey looks at the defence of the figure of the public intellectual in Michael D.’s political journey in the context of Irish intellectual traditions. A driving force, like Paul Brennan, of French-Irish academic relationships, Grace Neville offers, as a tribute to his memory, nine representations of the West of Ireland in travel literature between the late 18th century and early 19th century, and looks at the attitudes to the past that emerge from them. Other articles trace a journey through contemporary literature, revisiting the poetry of W. B. Yeats (Aoife Lynch), the short stories of Bernard MacLaverty, William Trevor and Colum McCann (Claire Majola-Leblond), the poetry of Bobby Sands

(Fiona McCann) and the representation of childhood in Irish novels (Sylvie Mikowski).

In an academic context that is darker and more tense than when Paul Brennan was around, the conference which inspired this volume was a moment of stimulating and fruitful exchange. It was thus faithful, in spirit, to the memory of the man who brought together the French community of Irish Studies scholars in November 2013. It is our hope that this publication, which includes a selection of the Caen conference papers and also contributions of other scholars than those who attended the conference, will provide an opportunity to appreciate the progress made in the research fields opened by Paul Brennan thanks to the work of a new generation of young Irish Studies scholars and Doctoral students in France and abroad.