IMAGES IN CONFLICT : VISUAL

IMAGERY AND THE TROUBLES IN

NORTHERN IRELAND (1968 - 1981)

BELINDA LOFTUS

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CHAPTER 7 : ARTISTS

Invisible Art

From time to time in the course of my work on this thesis I have

found myself explaining its subject-matter to art-critics and members

of art-institutions in Ireland, both north and south of the border.

After a number of these encounters I could predict with absolute

accuracy what the response would be when I mentioned my inclusion

within the scope of my research of images of the Northern Ireland con-

flict made by professional artists. Every time I would be assured

that I was pursuing a non-subject, for such images scarcely existed.

This has also been the attitude assumed in the handful of published

comments on the general role of professional artists in relation to

the present troubles.[1]

The inaccuracy of this general assumption should become apparent

in the course of this chapter, particularly if it is borne in mind

that the works discussed in it are only a cross-section of the fine-

art imagery produced in relation to the Northern Ireland conflict.

Why then is the belief in the lack of such images so persistent?

One can in part attribute it to practical reasons. A fair pro-

portion of the works discussed in this chapter have never been exhibi-

ted. Moreover there has been no general show on artists' reactions to

the troubles comparable to the numerous exhibitions on themes such as

Ulster portraits and Ulster landscapes. Individual artists have often

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1. Such as T.P. Flanagan's article "The Artists in Northern Ireland"
   in The Arts in Ireland, Dublin, vol 1, no 1, Autumn 1972, pp.
   36-44; Mike Catto, "Notes from a Small War, Art and the Troub-
   les", in his Art in Ulster : 2, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1977,
   pp.124-144, and "Making Sense of Ulster", Art & Artists, Feb
   1980, pp.10-13; and Joe McWilliams, "Violence and Painting in
   Northern Ireland", CIRCA, Belfast, no 4, May/June 1982, p.7.

kept their works on the subject hidden from public view. Sometimes one or two may be included in a one-man show. Very occasionally a whole one-man exhibition has been devoted to this theme.

However the chief reason for the belief that there has been little fine art work relating to the Northern Ireland conflict appears to be a set of attitudes about what the relationship between fine art and the present troubles can be and should be. These attitudes are held in common by artists, art-critics and members of art institutions. They are made very clear in the arguments offered for not exhibiting troubles art work, and for the lack of such art work in the first place.

Various reasons for the reluctance to exhibit works relating to the Northern Ireland conflict have emerged from conversations with artists in the province. Gallery-owners and administrators have feared that at best such works would prove unsellable and at worst they would provoke further conflict, including possibly an attack on their premises. Artists have felt that such images might increase the province's confusion by adding to the already vast amount of comment on the political situation, and that they were unlikely to be assessed as good art.[1]

In actuality the fears about the provocative nature of art works relating to the Northern Ireland conflict have been generally unfounded. On only one occasion to my knowledge have works on this theme provoked a major rumpus because of their subject-matter,[2] and although art galleries in the province have been the target for bombs, none of these attacks appear to have been provoked by the nature of the works shown by them. Nor have works relating to the troubles proved difficult to sell. Indeed in some cases it seems likely that both their

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1. When in 1972 the Arts Council of Northern Ireland requested opinions from approximately fifty of the province's artists about the feasibility of an exhibition of troubles works, the two dozen or so who replied generally shared this last fear, and the project was abandoned.
2. See below, pp.879-883.

purchase and their commission has been encouraged by the desire, sha-

red by local inhabitants and visitors to the province (notably the

British Army), to acquire souvenirs of the dramatic events of the

past thirteen years. The fear that works on this theme would be

classified as bad art has been far more justified. Very few artists

have made works relating to the present troubles without incurring at

best puzzlement and at worst stringent criticism of their political

and aesthetic quality from fellow-artists, art-critics and members of

art institutions.

In general these criticisms have accused art works about the

troubles of being too superficial or too propagandist. Very simil-

lar lines of argument have been employed by those attempting to

explain why there has been (supposedly) so little output on this theme.

It has been repeatedly suggested that artists have been too close to

the events of the past thirteen years for the processes of absorption

and reflection required in the production of fine art images;[1] that it

is too easy for art works relating to this subject to be assimilated

as propaganda by one side or the other;[2] that artists should be and

generally are, superior to the kind of bitter politics to be found in

Ulster;[3] and that anyhow the vast array of media images have covered

the troubles very effectively, leaving the artist little in the way

of a significant role.[4]

Embedded in the belief that there have been few art works about

the troubles, the theories about the causes of this, the reasons

proferred for not exhibiting such work, and the criticisms of it when

1. "In London this summer, talking to the Ulster artist William
   Scott he reminded me that Picasso's great mural Guernica was
   painted in Paris away from the event which motivated it."
   (Flanagan, op cit, p.44).
2. "One's images could appear partisan and attract either unwanted
   support, or aggressive criticism." (McWilliams, op cit).
3. An attitude particularly strongly apparent in Mike Catto's "Mak-
   ing Sense of Ulster."
4. This was a comment made by a very significant proportion of the
   artists who talked to me about their work relating to the troubles.

shown, are three very considerable misapprehensions about the nature of art in relation to political violence. The first of these is that when discussing the relationship between art and violence it is necessary at the same time to assess the quality of such art. This dual approach, implicit in the analyses already mentioned, derives from the evaluative, market-oriented style of English art history, and has been particularly strong in Northern Ireland, where most writing on local art has been in the nature of art criticism rather than art history. It is an approach which serves only to confuse an already complex issue. In this chapter I shall analyse the handling of the troubles by artists who can be considered as professionals, by virtue of the training which they have received, or their acknowledgement in terms of public exhibition of their work. Their standing within the professional artworld, and the quality of their works on this theme is a separate matter which I leave to the art-critics.

The second major misapprehension is that in order to handle the theme of political violence the artist has to proceed overtly, with representations of soldiers, bomb victims, flags and so on. Clearly it is fatally easy to go to the opposite extreme, by labelling virtually all art work produced in a conflict area like Northern Ireland as being about that conflict. In this thesis I have tried to strike a reasonable balance by representing as art works about the troubles, pieces so described and analysed by their makers, and critically reassessed as such by myself, through direct confrontation with the original wherever possible, and consideration of its position within the political and cultural context in Northern Ireland. Many of the works surviving this process of interrogation are oblique rather than overt comments on the northern conflict. It may be because of this

that they have been ignored or forgotten, although many of them

have been publicly displayed.

The third main misapprehension lies in the belief that the

fine artist is an individual creator inhabiting a kind of vacuum

in which he or she moves freely, untrammelled by involvement in a

political and social situation, a local visual tradition or inter-

national art conventions.[1] This belief, which results in discus-

sion of the art work purely in terms of its status as the product

of an individual creativity, prevails throughout the western art

world. It derives ultimately from the view of the artist as a

lonely, embattled creator, pursuing his individual vision, promul-

gated by subscribers to romanticism from the late eighteenth cen-

tury onwards. Even in cosmopolitan art centres like London or New

York it is doubtful whether there are any artists who live this

kind of disembodied existence, and in a small-scale, marginal area

like Northern Ireland, where formalised art-life is small, and indi-

vidual involvement with the community inescapably strong, such a

life is clearly impossible.

In this chapter I shall therefore start by analysis of art

works relating to the Northern Ireland troubles with three sections

titled History Paintings, Portraits of Leaders and Heroes, and Art

institutions. In these I will outline the kind of cultural and

political identities available to Northern Ireland artists as a result

of the way in which the fine arts have developed in the province. Then,

in two sections titled Catholic views? and Protestant views?, I shall

look at works relating to the present troubles by artists from the

province's two religio-political communities, employing a method of

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1. A belief summed up by the following sentence in Mike Catto's
   "Making Sense of Ulster":

   "Since a controlled iconic version of history is essential to
   those who have manipulated political power in the North and
   South of Ireland in this century, there is an understandable
   distrust of the sheer open-endedness of art."

analysis which attempts to ascertain the interplay of local and international cultural and political elements in their work, while leaving open the question of their individual creative handling of those elements. In the following section, titled Outsiders, I shall turn to consideration of a number of artists outside Northern Ireland who have made art works relating to the present conflict there. I will emphasise how their distinctive views of the Ulster troubles are shaped not only by geographical distance, political climate and personal inclination, but also by the way their art institutions direct them towards very different concepts of the nature of art and its political function. Finally, in the Conclusions I will argue that the approach to the relationship of art and political violence employed in this chapter demonstrates the need for a greater awareness in such discussions of the mediating effect of cultural traditions and conventions in which both art and politics play a part, and through the screen of which political events are perceived, or obscured.

History paintings

In Chapters 2-5 it became apparent that works by Northern Ireland artists attempting to deal with the present troubles have often been crucially affected by the traditions of popular imagery operating in the province's two communities. I now propose to consider the kind of political and artistic identities made available to such artists as the result of the way in which the fine arts have developed in the province. In order to do this I will look first at the development in Ireland of two artistic genres which in western art tradition frequently carry an overt political emphasis. These may be loosely

categorised as history paintings, and portraits of leaders and heroes. It will be my aim to show that not only have these genres been handled in significantly different fashions by artists from the two communities in Ireland, but that they have been differently appropriated and validated by those communities. In the subsequent discussion of art institutions I will offer an assessment of the extent to which that process of appropriation and validation has been affected by the development of artworld organisations in Ireland.

It was in the second half of the eighteenth century that contemporary events and episodes from national history first began to be significantly featured alongside religious subjects, classical scenes and portraits in the work of European artists.[1] Painters working in Ireland were not slow to adopt this newly-fashionable subject-matter. Amongst the earliest work by the Cork-born artist James Barry was a scene of St Patrick baptising the King of Cashel. According to legend:

> "The barbarian prince, when the apostle concluded his
> exhortation called loudly to be baptized, and such was
> the hurry of the one, and the fortitude of the other,
> that when the Saint, implanting his iron shod crozier
> in the ground, struck it unwittingly through the con-
> vert's foot, he uttered not one murmur, nor yet moved
> a muscle, but conceiving it to be a part of the cere-
> mony, stood and was baptized." 2

On moving to Dublin from his native Cork in 1763 Barry chose to submit this picture for exhibition by the Royal Dublin Society. The painting met with great success. The Society awarded him £10 as a

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1. A succinct and stimulating discussion of the development of history painting in Britain can be found in Roy Strong, And when did you last see your father? The Victorian Painter and British History, Thames & Hudson, 1978.

2. Alan Cunningham, The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors & Architects, vol II, John Murray, 1830, p.64.

recognition of its merit, and it was subsequently acquired by some

members of the Irish House of Commons who presented it to their

assembly. For long it was believed that the painting was burned in

a fire in Parliament House in 1792. However recently a very damaged

work has appeared in Dublin which seems to be Barry's original paint-

ing and there is also an oil sketch of the same subject in the pos-

session of An Taisce.[1] Moreover the lengthy disappearance of this

picture did not entirely negate its influence on subsequent Irish

art. Barry's career was well-recorded[2] and appears to have been

widely-known in early nineteenth century Ireland.[3] Possibly because

of this, or possibly because the legend of St Patrick's baptism of

the King of Cashel was in itself an oft-repeated part of Irish tra-

dition, it was a subject which reoccurred intermittently in Irish

painting and sculpture throughout the century.[4]

However Barry himself painted no more scenes from Irish his-

tory. This was not from a lack of interest, for his reading notes

contain many passages transcribed from books dealing with early Irish

history.[5] Nor was it due to lack of encouragement for he was urged to

depict such scenes by at least one of his Irish contemporaries, the

historian O'Halloran.[6] The key to his abandoning of native subject-

matter lies in his patronage by the Anglo-Irish politician Edmund

1. Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, The Painters of Ireland c.1660-1920, Barrie & Jenkins, 1979, p.105.

2. His Works were published in 1809, only three years after his death.

3. The Belfast Monthly Magazine, vol 2, no 9, 30 April 1809, p.306, listed Barry's Works under the heading of New Publications.

4. See Jeanne Sheehy, The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past, Thames & Hudson, 1980, p.75 and Cyril Barrett, "Irish Nationalism & Art, 1800-1921", Studies, Dublin, Winter 1975, p.403.

5. See David Irwin, Neo-Classical Art, Faber, 1966, p.98.

6. O'Halloran's letter to Barry in 1791 was printed in The Nation Dublin, 2 Dec 1843, p.122.

Burke, whose political and aesthetic theories turned the young artist to making paintings and prints relating to American rather than Irish affairs.

It was two artists of English extraction, Francis Wheatley and Thomas Robinson, who made paintings recording some of the tumultuous events which took place in Ireland at the end of the eighteenth century. Wheatley painted large eye-witness scenes of volunteer reviews, of which the most important is Volunteers at College Green (ill 230)[1] in Dublin in 1779,/and he also depicted Henry Grattan speaking in the Irish House of Commons in 1780 on the motion "That the people of Ireland are of right an independent nation and ought only to be bound by laws made by the King, Lords and Commons of Ireland." These events had considerable impact at the time, and were seen by later Irishmen as important historical and emotional landmarks. Yet Wheatley's paintings, despite his fondness for the theatre, lack dramatic impact. Lucid, attractive, gay, even lively, they are agglomerations of individual figures and details rather than coherent, exciting events held together by the significant gestures of the main actors. Indeed, in the House of Commons painting, Grattan is submerged in a sea of other figures, his pointing hand lost against his white waistcoat, potential focus on him dissipated by the apparent inattentiveness of his listeners.

Wheatley's sense of drama may have been inhibited by his actual presence at these two occasions - contrast his imaginative reconstruction of the Gordon riots a few months later - and also by his intention to make the paintings pay their way through exhibition, raffling and the sale of engravings, the market for which would

1. On Wheatley's other volunteer paintings,
    see Crookshank and Glin, op cit, pp. 154 - 5   and Brian de
    Breffny (ed) The Irish World, Thames & Hudson, 1978, pp.140-
    141.

230. Francis Wheatley/A view of College Green with a
meeting of the Volunteers on 4 Nov 1779 to
commemorate the birthday of King William III/
oil on canvas/72 x 128 ins (182.9 x 325.1 cms)/
National Gallery of Ireland.

naturally be increased by the number of likenesses he could pack in.[1] The three procedures were successfully carried out with the first painting, which became sufficiently well known to influence other Irish works of the period (ill 231), but the second ran into difficulties and was only engraved in the early twentieth century.

A few years later Thomas Robinson made a similar attempt to record contemporary Irish events. Born in Windermere,[2] Robinson came initially to Dublin, hoping perhaps to find there a market for portraits painted in the style of the English George Romney, whose pupil he had been.[3] In 1793 he moved north. At the time of the rebellion 1798/he was living in Lisburn and decided to depict the nearby Battle of Ballynahinch, which took place on 13 June 1798, and in which the United Irish forces in the North, led by a Lisburn draper, Henry Monro, were decisively defeated by the government troops under Major-General George Nugent. By November of the same year his painting of the battle (ill 231) was exhibited with other pictures at the Exchange Rooms in Belfast.

In his advertisement for this exhibition in the Belfast News Letter,[4] Robinson proclaimed that the "Picture contains many original portraits and is a faithful representation of the Field of Battle and its events." This is a very accurate summary of its character. Like Wheatley's paintings, the many recognisable faces included in it were designed to promote various kinds of fund-raising involving the painting itself, and to encourage local patrons to commission portraits from the artist. The advertisement went on to say that

1. Mary Webster, Francis Wheatley, Paul Mellon Foundation for British Art/ Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970, pp 52-5.

2. Crookshank & Glin, op cit, p.166.

3. Anne Crookshank and the Knight of Glin, Irish Portraits 1660-1860, (exhibition catalogue), Paul Mellon Foundation for British Art, 1969, pp.60-1 and fig 12.

4. 6 Nov 1798.

231. Thomas Robinson/The Battle of Ballynahinch/1798/
     oil on canvas/54³/4 x 84 ins (139 x 213.5 cms)/
     Aras an Uachtarain.

admittance to the exhibition was "one British Shilling" and that

"The above-mentioned Picture will be disposed of by Raffle; Sub-

scriptions (taken by Mr Robinson) one Guinea each. Subscribers

free to the Exhibition." On 13 November a further advertisement

proclaimed that the exhibition would continue a week longer, and

that Robinson, intending to remain in Belfast for some time, would

undertake portraits at the rates of 5gns for a three-quarter view,

7gns for a Kit-Cat and 12gns for a half-length.

Probably because of this desire to appeal to as wide a market

as possible, the painting is episodic, generally accurate,[1] and

with no great feeling of personal commitment to the events it

depicts, apart from what appears to be a careful pro-government

stance. However Robinson's careful tailoring of product to market

appears to have paid off. It was warmly acclaimed in the Belfast

News Letter,[2] there were about sixty subscribers to the raffle for

the painting, and the winner was the second Marquis of Hertford.

Bishop Percy, friend and patron of Robinson, wrote to his wife on

23 December 1798, that:

> "the picture will now be hung up in the Marquis's house
> at Lisburn to be viewed by all who were at the battle of
> Ballynahinch, many of whom had their portraits drawn in
> it."

Success is the keynote. Yet a warning touch of bathos follows,

which indicates the precarious and fluctuating role of the artists

at this time. For the bishop adds:

> "Robinson has painted three urns for my glen. This
> has the happiest effect imaginable." 3

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1. On its general accuracy see Crookshank & Glin, Irish Portraits,
      p.61. One inaccuracy, noted in Public Record Office of Nor-
      thern Ireland, (hereafter PRONI), The '98 Rebellion, HMSO,
      Belfast, 1976, facsimile 87, is that the death of Captain
      Evatt shown in the centre of the picture took place at a dif-
      ferent stage of the battle.
2. 6 Nov 1798.
3. BM 32 335/116, quoted in W.G. Strickland, A Dictionary of Irish
      Artists, Maunsel, Dublin, 1913, entry on Robinson.

Indeed in the subsequent careers of the Marquis of Hertford and Thomas Robinson we can see how political and artistic decline went hand in hand in Northern Ireland. The Marquis, who, in the early days of the Volunteer movement had spoken vigorously in the English House of Commons in support of their claims for economic and religious justice in Ireland, from the late 1780s increasingly turned his interest to events elsewhere.[1] He was a forerunner of the aristocratic exodus from Ireland that followed the events of 1798 and the Act of Union in 1801.

For an artist such as Robinson this aristocratic exodus was disastrous. The Belfast middle classes were not antipathetic to culture; indeed in the period of peace and prosperity which followed the Act of Union in the North, cultural institutions flourished in the city. But they did not support the new style of history-painting as Thomas Robinson had hoped they would. Technically he had been on the winning side in 1798 - but his work thereafter bears the smell of defeat. In 1804 he painted another vast picture variously entitled Review of the Belfast Volunteers or The Entry of Lord Hardwick into Belfast as Lord Lieutenant, 27 August 1804.[2] In July 1807 he exhibited it in the Old Exchange Rooms and tried to dispose of it by lottery.

Despite a glowing notice in the Belfast News Letter,[3] general enthusiasm for the painting appears to have been lacking, so Robinson took the picture with him when he removed to Dublin in 1808 and exhibited it at the Society of Artists in 1809 as A Military Procession in Belfast in honour of Lord Nelson. To this end he changed

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1. DNB,
2. Reproduced Crookshank & Glin, Painters of Ireland, pp.168-9.
3. 31 July 1807.

the background from a realistic representation of Donegal Place to

an idealised view. No such event as a procession in honour of Lord

Nelson took place and there was never any statue of him in Belfast.

Despite the changes the picture remained unsold, and was eventually

given to the Belfast Harbour Commissioners by Robinson's son in

1852.[1]

It is a sad and troubling episode. The picture had been origi-

nally intended to commemorate a real event, and

> "to hand down to future generations the likenesses of the
> principal inhabitants assembled in one of the most beau-
> tiful parts of this improving town." [2]

From the key that is still preserved with it, one can still

identify many of Belfast's notable inhabitants at that time, includ-

ing the artist himself, gazing hard and sidelong at the viewer. Des-

pite alterations the picture still retains an atmosphere of friend-

ship, a feeling of civic consciousness, a sense of occasion. And

although it clearly owes much to Francis Wheatley's earlier painting,

it is also, with its framing architecture and gaily coloured flags

and uniforms, an authentic record of the sense of theatre, of acting

out, which constantly spilled over into the real life activities of

the Volunteers. But by the substitution of a fictitious statue,

completely alien to the original meaning of the occasion, the reality

of the scene is falsified. Dead bronze replaces living flesh and it

is a significant loss of nerve.

Not only did the exodus of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy from

Ireland following the Act of Union diminish the potential support

for paintings of Irish history; it was also one of a succession of

developments which encouraged a division in that support. In the

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1. S. Shannon Millin, Sidelights on Belfast History, W & G. Baird,
     Belfast, 1932, p.101.
2. Recorded in the Belfast News Letter, 28 Aug 1804.

late eighteenth century English artists like Wheatley and Robin-
son, and the native Catholic Barry were able to find equal enthu-
siasm for their pictures of Irish history amongst the Anglo-Irish
aristocracy. To a certain extent the same was to be true of artists
whose history paintings were directed at the Irish middle-classes in
the nineteenth century. But as political and religious divisions
increased, following the succession of rebellions in 1798, 1803, 1848
and 1867, and the various campaigns for and against Catholic emanci-
pation and home rule for Ireland,

so Irish artists either abandoned the genre of history-
painting altogether, or produced the kind of scenes which could be
appropriated equally easily by Protestants or Catholics, or tailored
their work to the cultural and political tastes of one or other com-
munity. It is this last group of artists that will largely concern
us here.

It was undoubtedly the country's Catholic community who exhibi-
ted the stronger taste for scenes of Irish history throughout the
nineteenth century. By the middle of the century Daniel O'Connell's
supporters in the Young Ireland movement saw Irish nationalism as
strongly dependent on Irish culture.

> "It is the summary name for many things. It seeks a litera-
> ture made by Irishmen, and coloured by our scenery, manners
> and character. It desires to see art applied to express
> Irish thoughts and belief. It would make our music sound
> in every parish at twilight, our pictures sprinkle the walls
> of every house, and our poetry and history sit at every
> hearth. It would thus create a race of men full of a more
> intensely Irish character and knowledge, and to that race it
> would give Ireland." 1

1. The Nation 1844, quoted in Dr M.W. Heslinga, The Irish Border
   as a Cultural Divide, Van Gorcum, Assen, 1971, p.185.

In pursuit of these aims members of the Young Ireland group
made strenuous efforts to encourage contemporary Irish artists to
paint scenes from their country's history. In a short article in
The Nation,[1] their spokesman Thomas Davis listed events appropriate
for depiction. These ranged from the arrival of the earliest Irish
settlers (the landing of the Milesians), through their conflicts
with subsequent invaders (Brian Boru reconnoitring the Danes through
Clontarf), to the efforts of the Anglo-Irish patriots in the eigh-
teenth century (Grattan moving liberty), and the conspiracies of the
United Irishmen (Tone, Emmet and Keogh in Rathfarnham garden). Recent
or contemporary scenes, such as Father Matthew administering the
pledge in a Munster county, were also included.

The Young Irelanders took a number of practical steps to
encourage the production of works on these themes. In their widely
read and influential journal The Nation they constantly praised the
work of Irish artists such as Barry, Forde, Maclise, Hogan and Mul-
ready. They displayed suitable history paintings at their own
ceremonial occasions (Thus the scene of Grattan addressing the
Irish parliament produced by Nicholas Kemmy for a descendant of the
orator, was hung over the president's chair at the elegant banquets
of the Eighty-Two Club.)[2] And both through the Repeal Association,
the political organisation which they helped to marshal in support

1. Reprinted in Thomas Davis, Essays and Poems with a Centenary
    Memoir, 1845-1945, Gill, Dublin, 1945, pp.113ff.

2. Charles Gavan Duffy, Young Ireland, A fragment of Irish His-
    tory, 1840-5, T. Fisher Unwin, 1896, vol 1, pp.151-2. There is
    a somewhat muddled collection of correspondence and accounts
    relating to the painting in the Public Record Office of Nor-
    thern Ireland which makes little clear beyond the fact that
    Kemmy was working on it in 1842 for Grattan, and that great
    care was taken over its accuracy, existing portraits of the
    protagonists being endlessly consulted. The Eighty-Two Club
    was formed by the Young Irelanders in an attempt to rally
    behind O'Connell those Protestants and Catholics who held
    aloof from the more popular Repeal Association. In its ima-
    gery it strongly emphasised the traditions of the Anglo-Irish
    patriots in the eighteenth century.

of O'Connell's campaign for the repeal of the Act of Union, and

through cultural organisations in which they were involved, the

Young Irelanders offered prizes to artists who produced suitable

depictions of Irish history. The prizes offered by the Repeal

Association in 1843 for paintings, sculptures, engravings and

architectural design[1] do not appear to have been awarded. By this

time however the Young Irelanders were joining Protestant artists

and scholars in a number of organisations designed to foster the

visual arts in Ireland. In 1844 William Smith O'Brien was elected

to the Royal Dublin Society, formerly a Conservative camp, and at

the same time, mainly by the influence of Thomas Davis and John

Pigot, a society representative of every kind of political view-

point was formed for the establishment of a National Gallery of

Ireland.[2]

The initial impetus for this society seems to have derived

from members of the Royal Irish Art Union, the familiar triumvi-

rate of Thomas Davis, George Petrie and Frederick Burton as usual

playing key roles, although Stewart Blacker was the most important

leader.[3] The Art Union itself had Young Ireland links (Davis ser-

ved on the committee and the works of Burton and Petrie figured

among its purchases, engravings and prizewinners), and declared its

intention of encouraging Irish art by means which they had advoca-

ted, awarding cash prizes to outstanding artists in various fields,

purchasing and exhibiting works for distribution as prizes to its

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1. See the advertisement in The Nation, Dublin, 2 Dec 1843, p.1.

2. Duffy, op cit, vol I, p.70 and p.126, and vol 2, p.35 and p.45;
   William Stokes, The Life & Labours in Art & Archaeology of George
   Petrie, LLD, MRIA, Longmans, 1868, p. 163 and p. 208: and Grace
   Calder,   George Petrie and the Ancient Music of Ire-
   land, Dolmen Press, Dublin, 1968, p.128.

3. Third Annual Report of the Royal Irish Art Union, Dublin, 1842,
   p.13; and Fourth Annual Report, 1843, pp.9-11 and p.56.

subscribers, and in addition providing an annual engraving to each

subscriber. In some ways it achieved considerable success. It

managed to weather the Parliamentary inquiry into Art Unions in

1843 and produced figures which demonstrated a far healthier finan-

cial state than its English counterparts. It also played a signi-

ficant role in the increase of art purchases in Ireland.[1] But it

was frequently criticised for its lack of support of native artists,

its failure to foster the development of print-making in Ireland and

its policy of selecting the works to be distributed to prize-winners,

rather than allowing them to make their own choice.[2] It seems to

have come to an end in 1847. Its demise/probably hastened by the
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formation of a rival National Art Union in 1845, committed to the pro-

duction of its engravings in Ireland, and aimed at a more popular mar-

ket, with an annual subscription of 5s rather than a guinea, selection

of prizes by the winners, and the intention of improving the taste of

the manufacturing classes.[3]

How far were the criticisms of the Royal Irish Art Union as

failing to encourage 'National Art', and as elitist, justified? Cer-

tainly non-Irish works figured amongst its awards, particularly in

later years,[4] but nonetheless it did give a certain amount of

1. Fifth Annual Report, 1844, and The Nation, 14 Dec 1844, p.154.

2. Strickland, op cit, and the following references in The Nation:
   14 Dec 1844, p.154; 4 Jan 1845, p.202; 22 Feb 1845, p.331; 28
   Aug 1847, pp.746-7; 19 Feb 1848, p.118.

3. The Nation, 6 Dec 1845, p.123 and p.127. The new venture met
   with little success however. It had to bring a Scottish
   engraver over to Ireland to make its subscribers' print (The
   Nation, 11 Sept 1847, p.775), and it was soon distributing
   engravings of non-Irish subjects (The Nation, 19 Feb 1848, p.
   118). The Art Union of Ireland, established in 1858-9, ran
   into similar problems, although it managed to survive until
   at least 1863-4.

4. Cyril Barrett, in his article on "Irish Nationalism and Art 1800-
   1921", points out that in 1844 "the only vaguely nationalistic
   engraving offered by the Royal Irish Art Union to its members was
   Burton's 'The Aran Fisherman's Drowned Child'. The others were

encouragement to Irish artists, such as Burton, Petrie, N.J. Crowley, G.F. Mulvaney, H. O'Neill and Daniel Maclise, approximately half of whom were permanent residents, and to such 'national' subjects as Red Hugh O'Donnel,[1] Emigrants leaving Ireland,[2] St Patrick baptizing Aengus,[3] and The Limerick Piper.[4] The criticism of the Royal Irish Art Union for its elitism appears to have been more justified. Indeed by 1845 William Smith O'Brien, with his sharp eye for the taste of ordinary Irish Catholics, was writing to Thomas Davis:

> "I wish much that you could get something done by the Repeal Association towards providing good prints, very cheap, for the poor. I observe in almost every cottage where absolute destitution does not exist a disposition to hang up prints on the walls. Generally they are wretched productions, having neither grace nor truth. Could we not induce some competent artist to give us lithographic sketches, which could be circulated to hawkers and pedlars at a low price? Religious subjects appear to be the most popular - military come next. Temperance prints also are not uncommon. It would be well to invite proposals, with a view to see what sort of artists we should get." 5

However Davis lacked the common touch. His chief concern was to win over the Protestant middle-class by cultural means, and his fastiduousness made him retreat from contact with the peasants. Thus, while he could see that the artist should study the objects of daily life, not linear examples - "Better for him to draw chairs and tables, bottles and glasses, rubbish, potatoes, cabins or kitchen utensils than draw from the lines laid down by other men" - his

'Fortune-telling by cup-tossing' by N.J. Crowley, 'Peep into Futurity' by Maclise, and 'Belisarius' by Shee. In 1844 they also offered two lithographs; 'The Flower Girl' by R. Rothwell, and 'The Homage of the Heart' (a Highland shepherd praying in the mountains) by T.J. Mulvaney. And this, when the Repeal Movement was at its height!"
1. Prize-winning composition in outline by S. Watson in 1846 (Strickland).
2. Prize work by W. Brocas purchased in 1842 (Strickland).
3. Prize-work by G.F. Mulvaney purchased in 1845 (Strickland).
4. See below, pp. 748-750.
5. Quoted Duffy, op cit, vol 2, p.153.

concepts of human form were shaped by the Greek perfection of Flaxman's drawings, and he advised the student to study classical casts rather than Irish peasants, who seemed to him:

> "an indifferently-made, ordinary, not very clean, nor picturesquely-clad people..." 1

And although he admitted that an alternative list of suitable Irish subjects for the painter could have been obtained "from the Poor Report, Carleton, Banim's or Griffin's stories, or better still, from observation,"[2] he chose instead to publish one in which historical, military and religious subjects predominated.

Some attempts were made by the Young Irelanders to educate the popular eye. A Pictorial History was launched, with texts by John Cornelius O'Callaghan and illustrations by Henry MacManus, lithographed by W.H. Holbrooke.[3] Despite a lengthy and very interesting advertisement for the project, the burden of which was:

> "that an attempt should be made to render Ireland and Irishmen known to themselves and the civilized world, through better sources for information than foreign libels, anti-national piles of stone and alien caricatures." 4

Only four prints - of the Siege of Limerick, Patrick Sarsfield, the Battle of Clontarf and Brian Boru - seem to have appeared. Possibly their relatively high price - sixpence plain and a shilling coloured[5] - made unattractive what Strickland characterised as

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1. Davis, op cit, p.117.

2. Ibid, p.113.

3. Duffy, op cit, vol I, p.126. Holbrooke seems to have specialised in nationalist lithographs. See the entry on him in Strickland, op cit.

4. The Nation, 2 Sept 1843, p.737.

5. The Nation, 2 Dec 1843, p.1. See also the article on "Seditious Pictures" in p.120 of the same issue.

"roughly-done catchpenny productions." The need for illustrations was never entirely forgotten and the Royal Irish Art Union was encouraged to introduce a prize for them, but the books urged as suited to the draughtsmen's pen were always learned histories or middle-class novels, the style held up for admiration the elegant linear work of Flaxman, or Retsch or Maclise.[1]

One should not under-estimate the achievements of the Young Irelanders in stimulating the production of Irish history paintings during this period. Artists closely associated with them produced works which have continued to act as cultural touchstones for both leaders and followers in the struggle for Irish independence. Henry McManus's pungent little painting Reading the Nation[2] was in the collection of the former Young Ireland leader Charles Gavan Duffy until it was bequeathed to the National Gallery of Ireland in 1903; J.P. Haverty's painting of O'Connell and his contemporaries: the Clare election 1828, was presented to the National Gallery of Ireland in 1950 by the then Taoiseach or Prime Minister, Eamonn De Valera; and the same artist's painting of O'Connell addressing the great repeal meeting at Clifden was favourably reviewed by The Nation in 1845,[3] shown in the Dublin Exhibition of 1853,[4] displayed at a nationalist dinner in 1864, and can now be seen in O'Connell's family home, Derrynane Abbey, in Co Kerry.

1. The Nation, 1 Feb 1845, p.266; 19 April 1845, p.457 and 29 Nov 1845, p.106. Davis had works illustrated by Flaxman and Retsch in his library.

2. Reproduced in de Breffny, op cit, p.203.

3. Barrett, op cit, p.401.

4. The Nation, 19 July 1845, p.665.

This last painting strikingly resembles images of Christ with his apostles preaching to crowds in the wilderness; similarly Haverty's lithographs of the Seven Sacraments,[1] set as they are in the open countryside or the family home, are very close to traditional scenes of the life of Christ. It is difficult to tell how conscious this was. Both the practice of the Catholic religion in penal times, and of nationalist politics in Haverty's own day was often, of necessity, confined to such settings. Moreover, as an artist working in oils for lithographs, Haverty's style tended to be soft, blurred and somewhat sentimental, a factor which might have inclined him towards the imitation of similar religious paintings or prints.[2] A certain element of intention in the settings adopted for these scenes seems to be indicated however by a few phrases in his catalogue for them:

> "if the artist could boast for his undertaking, an
> inducement beyond the mere novelty and picturesque
> character of his subjects, it was, perhaps, a latent
> hope that they might contribute to the development of
> domestic Irish History, where, probably, it may best
> be sought, - in the religious rites of the people.
> Home is at once the test and the reward of character
> - and Religion may be termed a nation's home..." 3

Indeed by producing works which recorded and crystallised the fusing of nationalist and religious sentiment during this period, artists like Haverty provided images which were to crucially affect the future development of patriotic feeling in Ireland. In Haverty's
(ill 232)
Penance,/or Petrie's Last Round of the Pilgrims at Clonmacnoise (ill 151) or J. Howard Burgess's Pilgrims at the High Cross at Arboe, Co

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1. In the National Library of Ireland.
2. Haverty made a series of oil-paintings of the Seven Sacraments
   before he lithographed them. The whereabouts of these is now
   unknown, although there is in a private collection in Northern
   Ireland a much over-painted picture of the Penance scene which
   may possibly be by his hand. However he was a much-copied
   artist so the attribution must remain open.
3. Catalogue Raisonné of the Seven Sacraments in Ireland, including
   the reception of a Nun, together with Portraits of Eminent Irish
   Characters, painted by J. Haverty, RHA, N. Clarke, Dublin, 1830.

232. J.P. Haverty/Penance, in The Seven Sacraments,
painted and lithographed by J. Haverty, 1846/
lithograph/6 3/8 x 8 7/8 ins (16.2 x 22.5 cms)/
National Library of Ireland, JLB.763/Photo:
NLI

Tyrone,[1] or Frederick Burton's The Blind Girl at the Holy Well,[2]

we see humble Irish Catholics practising their religion at their

country's ancient Christian monuments and sites. These three ele-

ments of peasantry, pious religiosity and ancient relics, were

generally beloved by the mid-Victorian public, and were frequently

repeated in paintings of the period without any nationalist signi-

ficance. Indeed both Petrie and Burton were from the Protestant com-

munity, and politically committed to the retention of the union with

England. But certainly Haverty and Petrie intended to imply in

their pictures that the Irish peasants in their religious practices

were linking themselves to the ancient traditions of their country

in a way which endorsed their national identity. And their inten-

tions were clear to many of those who saw these works, both at the

time and subsequently. To this day the priest saying mass for his

faithful congregation out in the countryside in the penal period, is

a theme frequently represented on the banners of the Ancient Order of

Hibernians, and on prints or paintings hanging in Irish Republican

homes. It remains a summary image for the Irishman's sense of

belonging to an ancient, native, persecuted Catholic race.

There are however certain notable deficiencies in the paintings

of Irish Catholic history produced during this period. There were

no paintings of political challenge. The imprisonment of O'Connell,

or, at a later date, of the "Manchester Martyrs", were not for example

recorded by Irish artists. Nor were the terrible sufferings brought

by the Famine years in 1840s, sufferings greatly increased by English

maladministration. Apart from An Irish family discovering a blight in

their store (1847), by Daniel Macdonald, or McDaniell or Macdonnell,[3]

1. Reproduced in Crookshank and Glin, The Painters of Ireland, p.201.
2. Reproduced in Sheehy, op cit, p.42.
3. See Barrett, op cit, p.401 and Irish Art in the 19th Century
   (catalogue of Rosc 71 exhibition), Cork, 1971, p.97.

the chief visual records of these terrible years are the engravings

in the Illustrated London News, and the paintings of the Scottish

artist Erskine Nichol. This is in strong contrast to the kind of

committed, challenging, political history paintings being produced by

artists like Goya and Delacroix in other European countries in which

the nineteenth century was marked by nationalist and republican

struggles.

Moreover, as Cyril Barrett correctly emphasises,[1] the Irish

history paintings of this period were often swamped by the enormous

number of other pictures exhibited alongside them - and they dis-

appeared. Thus of the dozen or more nationalist history paintings

listed by Barrett as having been shown at the Irish exhibition at

South Kensington in 1888, only one is now preserved in the National

Gallery of Ireland.

The reasons for the deficiencies in Irish history painting in

this period appear to have been both political and artistic. For

all the would-be rebellious republicanism of small groups like the

Young Irelanders, or the Fenians during the nineteenth century, the

major Irish nationalist movements of this period were at pains to

emphasise the constitutional, legitimate nature of their protests.

And although the Protestant ascendancy no longer controlled the

country's cultural organisations to the extent they had in the past,

it is clear that the sizeable number of Irish Catholics now organis-

ing and attending both temporary and permanent displays of Irish art

preferred their history-pictures to present side-long, unprovocative

attacks on the political status quo, or not to raise the national

question at all.[2]

1. Barrett, op cit, p.402.

2. This point is well argued in Barrett, op cit, pp.406-409.

Moreover Irish Catholic history painting during this time lacked the involvement of the country's most effective artists, who were lured away by the far superior rewards available elsewhere. Daniel Maclise's <u>Marriage of Strongbow and Eva</u> (ill 49)[1] was produced as a design for the great scheme to decorate the Houses of Parliament in London. There were no equivalent commissions available in Ireland. And Maclise had been able to establish both his financial security and his ability as an historical artist through his work as an illustrator for London publishers.[2] Such employment was only rarely available in Ireland, for until the last quarter of the century, the majority of illustrated books and journals dealing with Irish subject-matter were published in London, not Dublin, Cork or Belfast. Similarly Frederick Burton, of whom the Young Irelanders had high hopes, and who drew for them the title-page for their collection of writings titled <u>The Spirit of the Nation</u> (ill 152) seems to have painted subjects like <u>The Aran Fisherman's Drowned Child</u> because of an ethnographic rather than a nationalist interest,[3] and was lured away from Ireland by promises of a more prosperous existence elsewhere, making copies in Germany, and eventually becoming a highly successful director of the National Gallery in London.[4]

If patronage of history paintings by Ireland's Catholic middle classes in the nineteenth century was sporadic and uncertain, its sponsorship by the country's Protestant community was virtually non-existent. This was particularly noticeable in Belfast, where increasingly the country's Protestant wealth was concentrated. No scenes of

1. See above, pp.154-6 for a discussion of this painting.
2. On Maclise's work as an illustrator see Richard Ormond and John Turpin, <u>Daniel Maclise</u> (exhibition catalogue) Arts Council of Great Britain, 1972 and John Turpin, "Daniel Maclise, Disraeli & <u>Fraser's Magazine</u>", Éire-Ireland, Minnesota, vol 15 no 1, Spring 1980, pp.46-63. On the relationship between illustrations and history painting during this period see Strong, <u>op cit</u>, <u>passim</u>.
3. See above, pp. 154-156.
4. Barrett, <u>op cit</u>, p.404.

THE RELIEF OF D'ERRY.

JULY 30th 1689.

Presented with the "BELFAST WEEKLY POST."

of 18th Aug 1883

233. The Relief of Derry, 30th July 1689, supplement
to the Belfast Weekly Post of 18 Aug 1883/black
and white/lithograph/10¹/4 x 16¼ ins (26 x 42

Irish history seem to have been commissioned or bought to hang on the walls of the splendid mansions built by the city's leading businessmen. This deficiency became particularly noticeable when from the end of the nineteenth century they helped to finance more elaborate banners for the Orangemen, and their brethren in the Apprentice Boys and the Royal Black Preceptory. The local sources to which the painters of those banners could turn for inspiration were scanty. Their Williamite scenes had to be based on the works of English, and Dutch painters, engravers and medallists,[1] or, in the case of the Derry siege, the lithographs issued by Belfast print-makers from the 1860s onwards (ill 233).[2] For the events in their own subsequent history there was nothing they could turn to, no paintings of the Battle of the Diamond, or of the early parades of the Orange Order, or of the great Protestant meetings of the mid-nineteenth century. Even the commercial and industrial history of their city was scantily recorded.

For successive generations of Northern linen manufacturers the favourite images of their industry were the eighteenth century prints of its rural beginnings made by William Hincks for members of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy involved in its early development (ill 234). They were shown in the textile section of the Industrial Exhibition in Belfast in 1876, they appeared on the walls of successful manu-facturers' suburban mansions in the 1902s[3] and they continue to hang in houses belonging to men whose factories now make terylene shirts

1. See above, Chapter 2.

2. The earliest I have seen is a chromo-lithograph of the Relief of Derry issued by James Magill in Belfast in 1861.

3. See the Robert Welch photos 10/37/4-10 dated 1924 of Strathearn, in the Ulster Museum.

234. William Hincks/Beetling, Scutching and Hackling
Flax, 1783/grey on white/stipple-engraving/11^3/4
x 15^3/4 ins (30 x 40 cms)/Ulster Folk & Transport
Museum.

or nylon carpets. Occasionally one finds a nineteenth century draw-
ing or advertising poster of a mill, but always the buildings are
neat, spotless and apparently uninhabited.[1] Representations of the
ship-building industry are equally rare and one-dimensional. There
were various marine painters working in Belfast during the late nine-
teenth and early twentieth century, notably the extremely competent
J. Glen Wilson,[2] but their works are always of completed ships, never
of the building processes involved.

For a rare example of a local painting of work in progress we
have to turn to Samuel McCloy's Blacksmith's Shop of 1875.[3] It is of
course a rural rather than an industrial scene. This is not entirely
false. Professor Green has described the important role played by
blacksmiths, along with millwrights and clockmakers, in the early days
of industrialization in Northern Ireland[4] and forges remained impor-
tant in the province's rural towns till the Second World War. Just
so it was not entirely unrealistic for the Portadown weaver Robert
Donnelly, whose poetry welcomed the arrival of mechanization, to pro-
tray servants smaller than the master in his primitive broadsheet
picture of Moyallin House.[5] To this day their exist small mill-
villages such as Edenderry in which the factory-owner is regarded as

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1. See H. Magenis' meticulous pencil drawing of Owen O'Cork's Spinn-
   ing Mill, dated 1864, in the local history collections of the
   Ulster Museum, and the poster of the Island spinning-mill at
   Lisburn, probably dated from the 1890s, in PRONI (D1436).

2. There are paintings by him in the Ulster Museum and the Belfast
   Harbour Commissioners Collection. On his work see Eileen Black,
   James Glen Wilson (1827-1863) (exhibition catalogue) Ulster
   Museum, 1980.

3. Exhibited at the Bell Gallery in Belfast in approximately 1975
   and now in a private collection in Northern Ireland.

4. See his article on "Business Organization and the Business Class"
   in J.C. Beckett and T.W. Moody, Ulster since 1800: political
   and economic survey, BBC, 1954, p. 114.

5. In Armagh County Museum, along with another drawing of Eden Hall
   which includes a railway station and factory (reproduced in
   W.H. Crawford, Domestic Industry in Ireland : the experience of
   the linen industry, Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1972, p.66.)

the father-figure, and quite literally, as in Donnolly's picture, the

measure of all things. What is significant is that one might have

expected more of McCloy, who was one of the Irish painters whose

style came closest to the pre-Raphaelites.[1] His failure and the

failure of others to observe the industrial development which was

taking place, particularly in Belfast, may be attributed to various

factors. In the first place it was still difficult for the profes-

sional artist to earn a living in Northern Ireland. McCloy, a native

of Lisburn, after apprenticeship to the Belfast firm of engravers of

James and Thomas Smyth, and study at the city's School of Design, had

left for further education in London, followed by a teaching job at

the Waterford School of Art. He only returned to Belfast twenty-

five years later for a stay of ten years, after which he want back to

London.[2] The Blacksmith's Shop, painted at the beginning of this

return visit, has the warm and pleasant glow of an emigrant's child-

hood memories, rather than the direct observation and fresh living

colour of some of his other scenes.

The purchaser, like the artist, spent little time in Northern

Ireland. Sir Richard Wallace, grandson of the second marquess of

Hertford who had won Robinson's Battle of Ballynahinch (ill 231),

bought the picture during an electioneering trip to Northern Ireland
during the 1870s (the family by tradition provided the parliamentary
representative for McCloy's native town of Lisburn).[3] The purchase

seems to have been part of a general attempt to curry political favour

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1. See his Daydream, acquired by the National Gallery of Ireland,
   in 1974.

2. See the entry on McCloy in Strickland, op cit, and Eileen Black
   Samuel McCloy (1831-1904), (exhibition catalogue), Lisburn
   Museum, 1981.

3. DNB

by cultural patronage. Wallace bought at least one other painting

by McCloy, titled Irish Festival, and gave generous support to such

events as the 1876 Industrial Exhibition in Belfast[1] but he soon

disappeared back to Paris and he or his successor must have ceased

to value McCloy's work, for it was recently on the art market in Nor-

thern Ireland, not in the magnificent Wallace Collection in London.

More mundane depictions of local industry were also lacking in

Ulster, for trade unions were slow to develop in the province, and

until the closing years of the nineteenth century they appear to have

carried few of those banners with elaborate industrial scenes and

emblems which were such a feature in mainland Britain and Southern

Ireland from the 1830s onwards.[2]

Not only were there virtually no nineteenth century depictions

of the history or contemporary achievements of Northern Ireland's

Protestant community. There were also very few works in which they

celebrated their religious ethos. Whereas Irish Catholics could see

their religious traditions recorded in the works of artists like

Petrie, Haverty and Burton, and attended churches which were occa-

sionally adorned with altarpieces recording New Testament scenes,

like the Piccione paintings in St Malachy's chapel (ill 153), there

were no Protestant equivalents. Ornament, especially carved orna-

ment, was lavished on the splendid ecclesiastical and civic edifices

raised by Belfast's Protestant community in this century, but figures

were generally abhorred.[3]

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1. See the catalogue of the exhibition in the Linen Hall Library,
    Belfast.

2. See Belinda Loftus, Marching Workers, Arts Councils of Ireland and
    Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Belfast, 1978, pp.19-36 and John
    Gorman, Banner Bright, Penguin, 1976.

3. See Charles Brett, Buildings of Belfast 1700-1914, Weidenfeld &
    Nicolson, 1969, p.39 and pp.56-8.

Once again the extent of this lack is confirmed by the religious paintings used as models by Orange banner-painters from the late nineteenth century onwards. They turned to religious high art for their inspiration but it was not local religious high art. Their sources were almost invariably prints after English academic paintings like M.M. Hughes' My Faith,[1] or Thomas Jones Barker's The Secret of England's Greatness, (ill 70), which dates from about 1860 and was engraved in 1864,[2] or Searching the Scriptures by T.C. Thompson, an artist who was born in Belfast and trained in Dublin, but made his career in London. This last pictured is now in the Ulster Museum, and was recently copied for the banner of the Sandy Row Orange Lodge no 514, Joshua's Loyal Defenders. (Several of the warding staff in the Museum are Orangemen from nearby Sandy Row). This was completely above board, but a few years ago museum staff, worried by the absence of one of the landscape paintings in their collection, were at first startled to see a copy of it on a new banner used in the Twelfth parade, and then amused by its speedy reappearance amongst their collections.

The desire to emulate the achievements of the fine artists is clearly strong. Indeed I know of one Orange banner from the Ards peninsula on which the miraculous draught of fishes is painted in a style strongly reminiscent of the Raphael cartoons. But unlike their counterparts in the Ancient Order of Hibernians and other Catholic nationalist organisations, Orange banner-painters have been unable to turn to representations by local nineteenth century artists of their own historical and religious traditions.

1. See above, p. 200.

2. Discussed in 'This Brilliant Year', Queen Victoria's Jubilee, 1887 (exhibition catalogue), Royal Academy, 1977, p.31. The painting is in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

To a limited extent this situation changed in the twentieth century. While the Catholic community received from Irish artists a few, generally sidelong subject-paintings relating to the tumultuous cultural and political developments which took place in their country from the 1890s onwards, the Protestants also began to see some of their history and their industry recorded by artists from their community. But their acceptance of those works often remained tentative and grudging.

Between the 1890s and the 1920s Ireland witnessed a cultural revival, violent internal political and social conflict, an armed rebellion against the English in 1916, further conflict with English forces in 1919-20, the partition of the country in 1921 into the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland, and civil war within the Free State in 1921-22. Yet the artists witnessing and at times involved in these events produced very few history paintings related to them.

It might well have been expected that Jack Yeats would have made pictures employing scenes from Irish history past and present during the turbulent cultural and and political developments in Ireland at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. His father, the painter John Butler Yeats, was familiar with republican circles and painted the veteran Fenian leader, John O'Leary. His brother, the poet W.B. Yeats, was heavily involved in the Celtic literary revival, and helped to urge on the republican movement, with his play Cathleen ni Houlihan.[1] His sisters were prominent in the craft industries of the period which fostered the return to Celtic ornament.[2] But Jack Yeats's own response to Celtic revivalism and to the political

1. See above, pp. 165-168.

2. See above, pp. 493-494.

events of the ensuing years was initially tentative and sidelong.

Yeats's first full awareness of the republican movement came in 1898 when he was present at the Sligo centenary celebrations of the 1798 rebellion, and painted a watercolour sketch of a local figure dressed up as Robert Emmet.[1] From this time he increasingly turned to Irish subject-matter, including republican scenes such as an IRB Meeting in 1905,[2] and the lying-in-state of O'Donovan Rossa in 1915.[3] Yet while these records have a certain eye-witness value, none of them were more than mere sketches. Despite Bruce Arnold's assertion that working for English illustrated papers gave Yeats a lasting fondness for the depiction of events[4] it is clear that public happenings, even of the level of significance of O'Donovan Rossa's funeral rites, had little appeal for him. This cannot be explained solely by a lack of permanent involvement in Irish affairs before his final return in 1910, nor by the need for a more settled political climate in which to paint works of this kind. Later essays, such as the Funeral of Harry Boland (1922)[5] or Going to Wolfe Tone's Grave (1929),[6] although they are full-scale oil paintings, by no means rank among Yeats's major works.

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1. Cuimneacha̋n, 1916 (catalogue of the exhibition celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Easter Rising), National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin 1966, p.89, and Jack B. Yeats centenary exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, 1971, p.29 (ill) and p.145. W.B. Yeats helped Maud Gonne to direct similar celebrations in Dublin. See Thompson, op cit, p.46.

2. Irish Art 1900-50, (catalogue Rosc 1975 exhibition), Cork, 1975, p.71.

3. In the National Gallery of Ireland. See Cuimneacha̋n, pp.31-2 and Jack B. Yeats centenary exhibition catalogue, p.25 (ill) and p.145.

4. Bruce Arnold, A Concise History of Irish Art, Thames & Hudson, 1969, pp.161-2.

5. In the County Museum, Sligo. See Cuimneacha̋n, pp.88-9 and Jack Yeats centenary exhibition catalogue, p.50 (ill) , and p.148.

6. Cuimneacha̋n, pp.87-8 and Jack Yeats centenary exhibition catalogue, p.63 (ill), and p.150.

What Yeats did learn as an illustrator, whether for the English papers or Gaelic children's readers or his own broadsheets and broadsides,[1] was a feeling for dramatic moment, conveyed by bold lines, strong silhouettes and an unerring sense of interval in the handling of worked and blank pictorial areas. His illustrative work also gave him a taste for urban incidents which was shared by no other Irish artist at the time, though it may have been encouraged by the beautifully painted, strongly realistic scenes of the seedier side of London life then being produced by Sickert and the Camden Town Group. It is this visually dramatic but emotionally complex and oblique handling of low-key, predominantly urban incidents which characterises Yeats's great paintings of the period immediately preceding and following the 1916 rebellion. No heroes roam the western bogs or gunmen shoot it out in the ruins of the GPO, but the women reflect on the conflict which surrounds them in the Dublin streets or at a country race-meeting.

In Bachelor's Walk, In Memory, a woman mourns those killed and injured by British soldiers while city life continues around her.[2] In Communicating with Prisoners (1924) a group of girls converse with republican women prisoners in Kilmainham Jail. The composition is lackadaisically simple, completed by a hoarding covered with incongruous advertisements, misty roof-tops, a great expanse of cloudy Dublin sky. The mood is similarly relaxed; the girls might almost be watching birds in flight or one of the many sporting events in which (ill 235) Yeats delighted. And in On Drumcliffe Strand/women edgily assess the republican figures in their midst, in one of Yeats's most ambitious

1. See Irish Art 1900-50, pp.70-1.
2. See above, pp. 170-171.

235. Jack B. Yeats/On Drumcliffe Strand/1918/oil on
     canvas/24 x 36 ins (61 x 91.5 cms)/National
     Gallery of Canada.

and haunting nationalist paintings. The scene depicted is Drum-
cliffe Races which took place in Yeats's native Sligo every August.
Although it is possible he went to the races he made no mention of
it and the painting is not known to relate to any specific incident.
Its date however is significant:

> "The expressions on the faces of the local people as they
> see the Volunteer and his companion approach may be indica-
> tive of the mixed feelings of the ordinary Irish people of
> the period, some of whom had sons or husbands at the front
> fighting in the Great War and others who were sympathetic
> to the fight for independence. It was not until the latter
> half of 1918, after this picture was painted, that Sinn
> Fein won a major political victory, and the general support
> of a people who were totally opposed to conscription." 1

The painting is permeated with an electric air of unease. The
twisting heads and shifting glances of the group who play out the
little drama are lit by the raking glare of the evening sun. Cram-
med into one corner of the foreground, pushed against the viewer's
attention, their disquiet is heightened by contrast with the idyllic
view behind them in which sidecars wend their evening way back to
the mountains which seem to have been for Yeats' symbol of the
unchanging, enduring nature of Ireland.

Not only were Yeats's paintings relating to the cultural and
political events of this period few and sidelong. They also remained
relatively little known. Bachelor's Walk was not exhibited until
seven years after its completion and remains to this day in a private
collection; Communicating with Prisoners was not exhibited until 1945,
and was acquired by the relatively inaccessible Sligo County Library
and Museum in 1962; On Drumcliffe Strand was also first shown in 1945
and was in private hands from then until 1964, after which it was
acquired by the National Gallery of Canada.

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1. Jack B. Yeats centenary exhibition catalogue, p.147.

Works by Yeats did provide political inspiration for some of

those who sought the establishment of an Irish republic in these

years, and since approximately the middle years of this century they

have helped to shape the more general concepts of national identity

held by a wide range of Irish men and women. But it was not the his-

tory paintings described here which had this impact.[1]

Like Jack Yeats, William Orpen was personally acquainted with

Irish political leaders of this period. He admired the work of Par-

nell and of the leaders of the Land League, particularly Michael

Davitt, whom he knew and painted.[2] He supported Larkin's work dur-

ing the great strike in Dublin in 1913.[3] He was opposed to the arm-

ing of Ulster, supported the republican gun-running through Howth,

and was appalled by the subsequent shootings by the British Army at

Bachelor's Walk.[4] Yet when between 1913 and 1916 he made three major

paintings relating to contemporary events in Ireland, his approach was

markedly sidelong, satirical and bitter.

The first of these paintings dates from 1913. Titled Sowing the

Seed it shows a young, nude girl, scantily draped in a cloak, scatter-

ing seed on the ground from which spring two joyful naked cherubs,

while a clothed middle-aged couple express shock and disgust. Orpen

variously interpreted this painting as being about the activities of

Sinn Fein, personified by the girl, or about the difficulties of

introducing modern education into Ireland.[5] The second painting,

1. On the works by Yeats which have been influential in shaping the
   Irish national identity see below, pp. 754-755.
2. Sir William Orpen RA, Stories of Old Ireland and Myself, Williams
   & Norgate, 1924, p.37ff and Bruce Arnold, Orpen, Mirror to an
   Age, Jonathan Cape, 1981, p.22.
3. Orpen, op cit, p.82ff and Arnold, op cit, pp.288-9.
4. Orpen, op cit, p.9 and Arnold, loc cit.
5. P.G. Konody and Sidney Dark, Sir William Orpen, Artist & Man,
   Seeley Service, 1932, p.166 and Arnold, op cit, pp.290-291.

Western Wedding was completed in 1914. In a rocky mountainous Irish landscape, a simple country couple receive a robed priest's blessing at the foot of a roadside crucifix. Standing around are the priest's assistants, the witnesses, a fat farmer and a woman on a white horse, a fiddler, some children, an old drunkard leaning against a wall with a litter of pigs at his feet and Orpen's new grey Rolls Royce. The half-reverent, half-mocking attitude towards Irish piety can also be found in The Holy Well, /which dates from 1916 and in which nudity is
(ill 236)
again used for shock value.

What these paintings appear to convey is Orpen's deep sense of the gulf that lay between his own sense of national and cultural identity, and the Sinn Fein stress on an Irishness centred in peasant, Catholic values. This gulf was not the result of the superficiality or lack of grasp of political affairs frequently attributed to Orpen by those who look too much at his published writings and too little at his work. Certainly he was confused by Irish politics, and, as an Anglo-Irish Protestant, about his own role in them[1] - but so were a great many Irish men and women in this period. Certainly he lacked knowledge of Irish peasants, and relied on his pupil John Keating to bring him back suitable costumes from the Aran Islands for use in these paintings.[2] But this confusion and lack of knowledge did not derive from an incapacity on Orpen's part. During the next few years he was indeed to demonstrate very effectively his ability to appreciate the values of humble men and women, and to grasp the complexities of contemporary politics. As an official artist for the British in the 1914-18 war he produced a whole series of deeply moving and dignified drawings of ordinary soldiers injured and shell-

1. Orpen, op cit, p.6ff and Arnold, op cit, pp.21-3.

2. Arnold, op cit, pp.292-6.

236. Sir William Orpen/The Holy Well/1916/oil on
canvas/92 x 73 ins (234 x 186 cms)/National
Gallery of Ireland

shocked on the Western Front, and two paintings of the Peace Confe-

rence at Versailles which display a devastating ability to use sheer

painterly skill to combine apparent subservience to official pomposity

with a ruthless attack on its manouevrings, hypocrisy and vanity.

The gulf which Orpen felt between himself and developments in

Ireland was rooted not so much in incomprehension as in a sense of

cultural rejection. When Keating made a heartfelt appeal to him to

return to Ireland, he told him flatly that he owed everything to

England.[1] Indeed it was in England that he had built up his very

successful career as an artist, while in Ireland he found his attempts

to improve art-education rejected, despite his long and fruitful work

as a teacher at the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art between 1902 and

1914.[2] Although his father and other relatives continued to live there

he spent only one day in Ireland between 1915 and his death in 1931.

And indeed his three major paintings on Irish themes were scarcely

known there until recent years. Sowing the Seed was acquired by Ade-

laide Art Gallery. The Western Wedding was shown in the New English

Art Club   in London in 1914 and disappeared following its pur-

chase by the Marquis Matsukata for his collection in Japan;[3] and The

Holy Well, which was in the NEAC exhibition in 1916, was finally

acquired by the National Gallery of Ireland in 1971. All three pic-

tures were illustrated in Konody and Dark's book on Orpen, published

in 1932,[4] but given the rapid decline in his artistic reputation after

his death, and the critical stance of these works, it is not surpris-

ing that Irish interest in them remained minimal until the recent

reappraisal of Orpen's work, marked by the centenary exhibition of

his work at the National Gallery of Ireland in 1978, and the publication

1. Arnold, op cit, p.301.
2. Ibid, pp.123-4.
3. It is believed to have been destroyed along with others of Matsu-
      kata's paintings in a London warehouse during the Second World
      War. A study for the painting was purchased by the National
      Gallery of Ireland in 1933. (See Irish Art 1900-50, p.57.)
4. See p.704, note 5.

of Bruce Arnold's major study of him in 1981.

Meanwhile although subjects from the history of Ulster's Pro-
testant community were suggested as suitable for the talents of mem-
bers of the Belfast Art Society in 1893[1] it was depictions of that
community's involvement in British history which were most prominent
in the early years of the twentieth century. On 1 July 1916, in the
opening hours of the Battle of the Somme an estimated 2,500 members
of the 36th (Ulster) Division were killed. By a kind of tragic irony
many of them were members of the Ulster Volunteer Force, formed to
resist British support for Home Rule in Ireland; and they went over
the top on the day which in the old-style calendar saw William III's
victory at the Battle of the Boyne.

A painting of this event (ill 237) was made by J.P. Beadle, one
of England's best-known depicters of military subjects. He had a per-
sonal interest in its subject for his wife came from Co Armagh, and
he was a cousin of a Colonel McNamara who died on 1 July 1916, lead-
ing the men of the First Royal Irish Rifles in this battle.[2] Beadle
was also well acquainted with Sir James Stronge, a leading member of
the Unionists in Ulster, and was in correspondence with him about
details of the painting. When it was exhibited at the Royal Academy
in 1917, it was viewed there by a Mr R.J. Woods, almost certainly on
the prompting of Stronge. It was subsequently purchased from Beadle
by a committee headed by Stronge[3] for a fee of £250 (reduced by the
artist from £500). One thousand coloured collotype reproductions of
it were prepared by a local printer. These were sold to defray the

1. Martyn Anglesea, The Royal Ulster Academy of Arts, Royal Ulster
    Academy of Arts, Belfast, 1981, p.30.

2. "The Ulster Division. Memento of the Somme Battle. Painting
    Unveiled in Belfast", Belfast News Letter, 2 July 1918, p.2.

3. The papers of this committee are in PRONI D1327/3/20.

237. J.P. Beadle/Battle of the Somme/1916/oil on canvas/
     42 x 76 ins (106.8 x 193.1 cms)/Belfast City Hall/
     Photo: B. Loftus.

cost of the picture's purchase, and to raise funds for the UVF Pat-

riotic fund, the UVF Hospital for Limbless Soldiers and the Ulster

POWs Fund. The painting itself was ceremonially handed over to Bel-

fast City Council and still hangs in the City Hall. Only half of the

coloured prints appear to have been sold, possibly on account of

their high price (£10 for a signed proof and £4 for an unsigned one).

However applications for permission to copy it on to orange drums

and banners were soon received[1] and it remains a frequent banner-

subject to this day.

Beadle was not the only painter to supply a pictorial memento of

the Ulster Division. The Belfast artist William Conor made an illus-

tration of their famous charge which was sold for £4.14s 6d. Colou-

red prints of the picture for framing were available for 6d each, and

Christmas postcards for 1d, all the proceeds going to the UVF hospital

fund.[2] Indeed Conor was employed by the British government as an

Official War Artist in both World Wars, his task being to record

Ulster's contribution to the war effort, a task which gained him a

certain amount of local recognition.

It was also Conor who was employed to record the official

establishment of the Northern Ireland statelet, although the manner

in which he obtained the commission, and the way in which he was trea-

ted by his patrons, tells much of the attitude towards artists of the

ruling Ulster Unionists during this period. It was the successful

Ulster emigré artist, Sir John Lavery, who suggested to the new rulers

of Northern Ireland that Conor should be employed to record the opening

of the province's first parliament by King George V on 22 June 1921

1. ibid.

2. Judith C. Wilson, William Conor, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1981,
       pp.14-15.

(ill 238). On the day of the opening Conor sat in the press gallery sketching away,[1] but then had to present a pastel draft to the Marquess of Dufferin and Ava for criticisms, which duly came:

> "the figure of His Majesty is too broad in comparison
> with his height - it would do no harm to make him a
> little taller even if it is not true to life - Her
> Majesty shan't, I think, be represented in a hat as
> the ladies-in-waiting are in hats. The Members of the
> House of Commons must be facing His Majesty, even if it
> means that their faces cannot be seen.
> The colour of the coats of the parliamentary officers
> in the picture are not correct, they are too light a
> blue.
> I shall be so glad to give you all the assistance I
> can in the way of detail. I think that Sir F. Money-
> penny's position in the picture, though not that which
> he actually occupied, should be retained. I think Lord
> Londonderry must be shown as sitting in the front bench
> of the Senate and not with the House of Commons Members."[2]

Conor clearly ignored the Marquess's suggestions, and appears to have relied instead on his own records and a black and white photograph of the occasion.[3] It was not however a painting of which he was proud, and indeed it lacks a sense of occasion.

More problems arose over the payment for the picture. Conor had reluctantly agreed to the low fee of £200 but was not to receive even that. Incredibly, the committee responsible for the commission had decided to raise the money by subscriptions from the members of the new House of Commons and Senate, and although these included some extremely wealthy men, they contributed no more than £131 6s 0d, which was duly paid to Conor. It seems that their meanness derived not so much from an antipathy to Conor's picture, as an antipathy to any kind of picture at all.[4]

1. Rachel B. Field, "A wallsketch settled the career of William Conor" The Northern Whig, Belfast, 4 July 1960, p. 2.
2. Quoted Wilson, op cit, p.19.
3. Presumably the same as the photograph of the occasion reproduced
   in Richard Broad et al, The Troubles, Thames/Macdonald Futura
   1980, p.93.
4. Wilson, op cit, p.20.

238. William Conor/The Opening of the First Northern
     Ireland Parliament, 1921/oil on canvas/35^5/8 x
     55^1/4 ins (90.5 x 140.4 cms)/Parliament Buildings
     Collection, Stormont, Belfast/Photo: Blackstaff
     Press.

In 1932 Conor was given a second commission for a large his-
torical work. Probably as the result of prompting by Arthur Deane,
the energetic curator of the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery, Sir
Robert Baird, proprietor of the Belfast Telegraph, requested Conor
to prepare a large painting titled Ulster Past and Present,[1] to
cover a long wall in the antiquities gallery in the Museum. This
was not the first commission of this kind to be given to a local
artist. In about 1903 J.W. Carey decorated the Ulster Hall with
scenes from Belfast history, and in the 1930s the local printer
Thomas McGowan commissioned a series of old Belfast views from Frank
McKelvey for presentation to the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery.
However both these sets of paintings were essentially hack recon-
structions, based on previous paintings and old photographs, and
made by men who had trained as illustrators (Carey had worked for
the printing firm of Marcus Ward, and McKelvey for the poster prin-
ters, David Allen) and had progressed little further than that role.

Indeed Conor's painting suffers from some of the same limita-
tions. He too had worked for David Allen's. He learnt more from the
experience than McKelvey, and put to good use the bold lines and waxy
crayons characteristic of lithographic poster designs. He also broa-
dened his horizons by study at the Belfast College of Art and by
visits to London, Paris and New York. Yet his work remained appa-
rently untouched by the exciting developments taking place in the art
of those cities. He preferred his own style which he characterised
as "Presbyterian".[2] And indeed the down-to-earth approach which he
implied by that had its own merits. But it did not include a feeling

1. Illustrated ibid, pp.52-3. The painting is now displayed above
     the museum's industrial hall.

2. Wilson, op cit, p.18.

for good composition or accurate anatomy, qualities which were to evade him throughout his career. Hence the somewhat flat, limp nature of this mural.

Nevertheless it is of interest for two reasons. In the first place it demonstrates the continuing willingness of some members of the small circle of artists and writers in the Protestant community at this time to see themselves as linked to Ireland's pre-Plantation cultural traditions. In the early years of the century Conor had been sufficiently influenced by the Celtic revival to sign his works with the Gaelic form of his name for a brief period. And the Irish warriors seen advancing over a hill past a great dolmen in the left-hand section of Ulster Past and Present are clad in costumes very similar to those designed by Conor, after consultation with an eminent Dublin archaeologist, for the Pageant of St Patrick, performed in the same year as this picture was painted.[1]

In the second place Conor depicted in the right-hand section of this painting the men and women employed in Northern Ireland's leading industries of shipbuilding and linen manufacture. Indeed throughout his life it was these employees whom he drew and painted, whether at their work or in the small Belfast streets where they lived. Some members of the province's middle-classes resented Conor's use of subject-matter they would have preferred to forget. A friend of his recorded that, when he advised a wealthy art-lover to buy one of Conor's mill-worker drawings, the man replied:

> "My wife doesn't like them things. She worked in a mill
> herself, and the neighbours might say yon was a por-
> trait of her, when she was young." 2

1. Wilson, op.cit., pp.7-8.
2. Ibid., p.12.

(A similar reaction to scenes of local industry can be seen in

the lack of enthusiasm displayed by Belfast Corporation for the

Shipbuilding and Flaxspinners triptychs completed for them in the

1920s and 1930s by that eccentric Anglo-Irish artist, R. Ponsonby-

Staples. Although originally encouraged by the then Lord Mayor, Sir

Daniel Dickson, and intended for the City Hall, where Ponsonby-Stap-

les thought they would be more worthy adornment than "vermilion-

coated Aldermen and Mayors", these massive works finally ended up in

the museum after the artist had received an exceedingly miserly

payment for them).[1]

But although Conor never made much money from his paintings he

was a widely admired artist in Northern Ireland by the 1930s, and

from the late 1950s was accorded his measure of public honour,

including a Civil List pension granted to him in 1959 by Captain

Terence O'Neill, then the province's Minister of Finance. He had

indeed become something of a local institution, whose depictions of

shipyard men and shawled linen workers provided Ulster Protestants

with a strong sense of cultural identity.

Some have seen in Conor's works and their eventual acceptance

an unwillingness on his part to challenge the political and social

status quo. There is indeed an element of truth in this assessment,

but as a recorder of Belfast back-street life Conor sometimes had a

perceptive eye for the impact on the city's inhabitants of the

political and social tensions inherent in Northern Ireland following

partition. In the Ulster Museum there is a picture painted by him

in approximately 1922 and titled The Latest News (ill 239). On the

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1. R. Ponsonby-Staples, Catalogue of Drawings and Paintings,
   Alpine Club, London, n.d. ca 1924, and John Hewitt, "Ulster
   artists of the recent past", Belfast Telegraph, 25 June
   1957, p.4.

239. William Conor/The Latest News/1922/oil on canvas/
19 x 14 ins (48.2 x 35.5 cms)/Ulster Museum/Photo:
UM.

back of it Conor wrote:

> "The news-vendor's shop is always a centre of interest
> in any little back-street. It is there that the inhabi-
> tants keep in touch with the movements of local interest
> or of the great world. You will always see a group
> scanning the windows or reading the contents bill of the
> daily press. This little group of elderly men and young
> women was actually seen on the Old Lodge Road during the
> troublous times in Belfast. They were reading, with
> some apprehension, the doings of the previous night: the
> number of killed, wounded and the houses burned. I made
> rapid notes on the spot and with the aid of further stu-
> dies, expressed in paint what I saw, when the impression
> was fresh and clear." 1

It is indeed a vivid, offhand depiction of the anxieties of

these years.

In the middle years of this century other artists from Northern

Ireland's Protestant community besides Conor used both pen and brush

to capture the teeming life of industrial Belfast. To his warmth

painters like George and Arthur Campbell or Colin Middleton added a

new appreciation of developments in the art-world outside Northern

Ireland, so that they could see in the distant silhouettes of the

shipyard gantries the dancing shapes found in a Paul Klee drawing,[2]

or in the singing colours of red-brick Belfast on a summer's evening

the joyful intensity of the Fauves.

However a very different image of Belfast and its industries is

celebrated in the two murals commissioned from the local artist John

Luke in 1951 and 1961. The first of these, in Belfast City Hall

(ill 240) was commissioned by the local Council for the Encourage-

ment of Music and the Arts[3] as part of Northern Ireland's celebration

of the Festival of Britain.

1. Notes made by William Conor in September 1922 on the back of the
   painting.
2. Arthur Campbell, "Belfast: A subject for painting?", Belfast
   Telegraph, 15 Sept. 1956, p.4.
3. Later the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

240. John Luke/Mural celebrating the history of Belfast/
1951/oil/180 x 372 ins (457.6 x 944.9 cms)/Belfast
City Hall/Photo: B. Loftus.

"The theme was something of an historical complicated emblem of the city's past. The Town Charter of 1613 is being read out by a figure in Jacobean costume, a kind of stereotype for Sir Arthur Chichester. The assembled figures vary their costume from that period, and shipbuilding, not at that time a local industry, is represented on the right of the picture. The left hand side presents the handloom and weaver of the linen trade, and extending almost to the centre of the bottom edge... is a portion of grass-covered land, upon which three strips of white linen are lying, thus representing the bleaching of linen..." 1

The second, in the entrance hall to the new extension to the

Belfast College of Technology,   is a celebration of modern

industry and technology in which scenes of ship-building, construc-

tion-work and engineering are woven together with views of the City

Hall and towering office blocks with Concorde flying overhead.[2]

Although commenced in 1961 it remained uncompleted at the time of

the artist's death in 1975.[3]

Luke's murals appear to have been the most generally accepted

of all public works of art in Northern Ireland. And indeed although

their painter was strongly aware of both the "Pat' and the "Scot" in

himself,[4] and was as willing to paint a Madonna and Child for a

Catholic priest[5] as a William III wallpainting[6] or a Masonic mural,

his style of painting was a most intense expression of those visual

and cultural attitudes which have been described above [7] as charac-

teristic of the Orange tradition. His figures move in a timeless,

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1. John Hewitt, John Luke, Arts Councils of Ireland, Belfast, 1978, p.80.
2. The mural is illustrated in Hewitt, op cit, p.105.
3. A third mural was painted by Luke for the Provincial Masonic Hall in Rosemary Street in 1956. It is illustrated in Hewitt, op cit, p.83 and shows Solomon surrounded by workmen building his temple.
4. Hewitt, op cit, p.58.
5. Ibid, pp.62-4.
6. See above, p. 56 note 1.
7. In Chapter 4.

pristine world which is strongly geometric and precise, every detail

clear by virtue of his flawless, almost carved[1] technique. Indeed

he came to art only by accident, quite literally. After a brief

spell working in a spinning mill he found employment in the ship-

yards, carrying hot rivets to the riveters working on the hulls, and

would have remained there had he not fallen while aboard a ship and

badly injured a leg. Study at the Belfast School of Art, and then

at the Slade under Tonks, with his fierce insistence on purity of

line; a visit to Paris and an obvious interest in the work of the

Cubists; and a growing absorption in Eastern mysticism, particularly

Zen Buddhism – these contacts with cultural movements external to

Northern Ireland only served to reinforce the passion for clean line,

pure technique, decorative patterning and contemplation of the every-

day object which derived from the cultural traditions of the Protes-

tant community in Ulster, and which he refined into his own extra-

ordinary and unique art.

The few history paintings celebrating the nationalist tradition

which were produced after the partition of Ireland are very different

from these northern works. In the early 1920s a highly dramatic illus-

tration of the last hours of the fighting in the Dublin GPO in the

1916 rising was produced by a man called Will Paget. Who he was and

where the picture first appeared it has proved impossible to estab-

lish. But the scene was to prove immensely popular. It has been

endlessly reproduced in republican newsheets during the present

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1. Luke was in fact an exceedingly skilled stone-carver who made
    two plaques showing the arms of two successive governors
    of Northern Ireland (illustrated in Hewitt, op cit, pp.91-2).

troubles,[1] and in 1979 a fresh version of it was produced by the

young republican who was later to design the first of the H-block

murals in the Rockmore Street area.[2] Troubled by the lack of the

equivalent in his own community to the William III images of the

loyalists this man made his own oil-painting based on the Paget

illustration, and had coloured prints produced from it (ill 241)

which he sold through Provisional Sinn Fein outlets and his own

personal contacts.[3]

Meanwhile pictures of the events of 1916 had by no means gone

out of fashion with professional artists from Ireland's Catholic

community. As part of the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of the

Easter Rising in the Republic, the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art

in Dublin was host to an art competition for paintings and sculpture

commemorating the rebellion. The works submitted covered virtually

the whole range of art-styles employed in the 1960s, from the

academicism of Thomas Ryan's The Last Day 1916 (ill 242), to Charles

Harper's highly abstracted, rough-surfaced painting of the execution

of James Connolly.[4] All however were romantic celebrations of

moments in an historical event which challenged the validity of Bri-

tish rule in Ireland, in strong contrast to the careful, precise,

timeless assertions of the status quo to be found in most Northern

Ireland history paintings following partition.

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1. See for example An Phoblacht, Dublin, June 1972, p.11 and
     Republican News, Belfast, Easter Sunday 1972, p.2; 16 April
     1974, p.1 and 29 March 1975, p.7.

2. See above, ill 19.

3. A large black and white poster reproducing Paget's GPO picture
     was also issued by a Dublin poster workshop some time during
     the present troubles.

4. Cuimhneachán 1916 (exhibition catalogue), Municipal Gallery of
     Modern Art.

A Terrible Beauty
Adapted by T. Clarke

241. Will Paget adapted by T. Clarke/A Terrible Beauty
Dublin's GPO, 1916/1979/coloured photo-gravure/
14³/8 x 21⁷/8 ins (36.5 x 55.5 cms)/Collection:
B. Loftus/Photo: Maire Concannon.

242. Thomas Ryan/The Last Day, Easter 1916/1966/oil on canvas/51½ x 63 ins (130.7 x 160 cms)/present location unknown.

When the present troubles broke out in Northern Ireland in 1968-9, the Irish history-paintings to which artists north and south of the Irish border could turn as exemplars were few in number and markedly divided in their political and cultural approach to the very concept of Irish history. The distinctiveness of this situation and its significance can best be appreciated if these works are considered in the wider context of the development of history paintings in Western Europe.

The problems faced by the painters of Irish history at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth were by no means unique. The whole business of painting scenes from national history, and particularly from contemporary national history was relatively new and chancy, in England, France and Spain, as well as in Ireland. New and chancy too were the forms of marketing associated with these pictures, the exhibition and the raffle. Indeed throughout western Europe the hey-day of academy or salon exhibitions in which large-scale history paintings were displayed was not until well into the nineteenth century.

What is striking is the relative paucity of Irish history paintings in the nineteenth century, particularly when compared to the immense number of them painted in England and France during this period. There seem to have been three main reasons for this. In the first place, following the Act of Union the shift of political power to London resulted in a double loss of patronage for history paintings in Ireland. Not only did many of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy move to England, but there was no incentive to establish in Ireland any equivalent to schemes like the decoration of the new houses of Parliament, for which Maclise's <u>Marriage of Strongbow and Eva</u> (ill 49)

was a proposed design, or the many public commissions available to French history painters like Gros and Delacroix.

In the second place Irish artists could not feel secure about their history in the way the English clearly did in this period. While to a certain extent the country's Celtic traditions were so distant as to be easily appropriated by both English and Irish, Protestant and Catholic during this period (with a few exceptions), subsequent events were in general too touchy to be easily handled without giving offence to one community or the other, so that only the most ambiguous paintings, like the Marriage of Strongbow and Eva were successful.

In the third place there was the evident reluctance of Belfast industrialists to encourage anything more than stiff portraits and decorous landscapes. This is in strong contrast to the situation in a number of English industrial cities during this period. In Liverpool and Birmingham for example the Pre-Raphaelites were well-patronised by local businessmen, and in Sheffield and Newcastle-upon-Tyne there were some interesting commissions for paintings of local industries.[1] It seems that Belfast's particularly strong Protestant ethos and the planters' lack of a sense of their own local history helped to prevent this kind of patronage.

This was in strong contrast to the attitude towards history painting of nationalist and Catholic Irishmen during the nineteenth century. For it is important to emphasise that despite the actual dearth of pictures of Irish nationalist history during this period, the theoretical commitment to the association of art, holiness and nationalism of the highly influential Young Ireland movement helped to establish a cultural and political nexus which was to remain

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1. See below, p. 763.

crucial in the attitudes of the country's Catholic community.

In the early twentieth century these factors continued to affect the history paintings produced in relation to political events in Ireland. The relative deficiency of contemporary pictures referring to the 1916 rising appears less curious if one remembers that Irish artists as diverse as Jack Yeats and William Orpen were still strongly involved in English culture, and that the majority of Irish men and women at this time remained deeply confused about the Irish question. And it is clear that the continuing lack of paintings related to the past and contemporary history of Irish unionists remained largely attributable to the general antipathy towards art of its leaders, and their unchanged commitment to British rather than local history.

In the years that followed partition there was a small revival in history painting north and south of the Irish border, but the old division in attitudes towards the genre remained much as before. Ulster's Unionists were more willing to recognise their local, industrial roots, but in pictures which tended towards timeless, crafted images, endorsing the untroubled continuity of the Protestant ethos in Ulster, much as a number of contemporary English artists celebrated the Festival of Britain and the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II with images reiterating the stability of British traditions. And Catholic nationalists continued to see art as a means of endorsing their historical identity, and to support paintings which glorified specific incidents in a romantic rebellious past, in a fashion common to states created by recent revolutions, like the USSR or Yugoslavia, but alien to the culture of the longer

established countries in the remainder of Western Europe.[1]

Clearly the visions of Irish history available to artists from the Protestant and Catholic communities confronted by the recent conflict in Northern Ireland have not only been marked by strongly differing concepts of local art and history. They have also endorsed vastly divergent associations with traditions in the wider cultural and political field. And these differentiations are not peculiar to the one genre of history painting. They can also be seen in the portraits of the historical figures honoured by the two communities in Ireland.

Portraits of leaders and heroes

Portraits of leaders and heroes are the other main genre in which artists have traditionally explored their own political identity and that of the society in which they live. In Northern Ireland the types of such portraits appropriated to the political history of Protestants and Catholics are very different in both content and style. Whereas Northern Ireland Protestants turning in the past thirteen years to artistically-endorsed images of figures important in their history have generally focussed on a small number of monumental statues of crowd-venerated leaders, their Catholic counterparts have found their identity symbolised in a wide range of images of lonely, heroic victims, often depicted in a romantic manner. The differences between these images and styles have been fostered by a combination of political, religious and cultural factors.

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1. On a visit to Russia in 1972 I was taken round state-sponsored studios where artists devoted themselves to the production of vast history-paintings for the country's local museums. Yugoslav paintings commemorating their country's recent history were shown in an exhibition of Yugoslav War Art at the Imperial War Museum in London in 1973-4.

The tendency of artists from Ireland's Catholic community to paint portraits of heroic victims is observable from the seventeenth century onwards. They did so not so much because it was their inclination, but because there was a market for this kind of work. While supporters of the Williamite cause amongst the country's English and Scottish colonisers sought images of King William himself or of contemporary defeaters of the Jacobites,[1] those Jacobites who remained in Ireland favoured portraits reflecting the melancholy of their situation, and the heroic fate of those of their number who had endured persecution for their Catholic faith. Garrett Morphey, the painter responsible for the prototype of the portrait of <u>Oliver Plunkett</u> (ill 243) which belongs to the National Portrait Gallery in London, but which from 1897 to / 1982 was on loan to the National Gallery of Ireland in Dublin, was probably sympathetic to the idea of depicting a Catholic priest who had been executed for persisting in propagating the Catholic faith in Ireland, for he was himself an Irish Catholic. The Portland Papers state that in 1688:

> "one Morphew a Roman Catholic painter drinking confusion
> to those who did not read his Majesty's declaration was
> attacked and beaten by one of the King's officers
> quartering in those parts [York]". 2

Indeed Morphey's political and religious sympathies are evident in his handling of this subject. One of Plunkett's hands rests on his heart, indicating religious devotion, the other holds a crucifix symbolic of his identification with Christ through his own martyrdom. These were gestures foreign to Protestant painters of the day, and no

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1. See above, p. 71 ff.

2. Quoted in Crookshank and Glin, <u>The Painters of Ireland</u>, p.24.

243. Garrett Morphey/Oliver Plunkett/ca 1681/oil
on canvas/20½ x 17¼ ins (52 x 44 cms)/
National Portrait Gallery/Photo: NPG

doubt encouraged in Morphey's work, because, like so many subsequent artists from Ireland's Catholic community, he was well-acquainted with the great traditions of European art. But Morphey also had a wary eye to his market, and after the Williamite conquest he was as ready to paint its supporters as the defeated Jacobites.

That Morphey's Plunkett portrait was also painted to meet a recognisable demand, appears to be confirmed by the existence of at least three versions of it besides the engraving made by J Vander-vaart in 1681.[1] Subsequently Morphey's image appears to have gone out of fashion, or to have been regarded as too provocative, for none of these versions seem to have been publicly exhibited in Ireland until this century, and a cult of Plunkett does not seem to have been part of traditional Irish culture, even in the area round Armagh in which he chiefly laboured, possibly because he was too aristocratic to become a popular hero-figure.[2] It was only in this century that the fortunes of both Morphey's image and its subject changed. During the period that the National Portrait Gallery variant was on loan to the National Gallery of Ireland postcards of it were steady sellers, and when in 1975, Plunkett was canonised a saint by the Roman Catholic church, his portrait was re-endorsed once again as emblatic of his countrymen's political and religious sufferings.

James Petrie's portraits of the leaders of the United Irish rebellions in 1798 and 1803 soon acquired a hallowed niche in the historic memories of Irish Catholics. Engravings after them were published in the early nineteenth century, and soon afterwards they

1. Crookshank and Glin, op cit., p. 24 and p.29.

2. Candida, "An Irishwoman's Diary", The Irish Times, Dublin, 13 Aug. 1979, p.9, and Cardinal Tomas O Fiaich, Saint Oliver of Armagh, Veritas, Dublin, 1981, pp.35-36.

ROBERT EMMET ESQ[R]

244. J. Heath engraving, after James Petrie painting/
Robert Emmet/illustration in Sir Jonah
Barrington, Historic Memoirs of Ireland, Henry
Colburn, 1835, vol I, opp p. 65/actual size

were reproduced in two widely-read publications on recent Irish history, Sir Jonah Barrington's Historic Memoirs, first issued in 1835 (ill 244) and Madden's United Irishmen, published in 1846.[1] The continuing importance of these works to Irish political leaders is evident from their incorporation in the collection of historical pictures which was established in 1944 for display in the presidential residence by Dr Douglas Hyde, the then President of Ireland.

James Barry's images of the Irish rebel were very different from those produced by Petrie, although made in approximately the same period. Barry aspired to be a history painter, but apart from his early picture of The Conversion by St Patrick of the King of Cashel, he turned to scenes from biblical, classical and English history, rather than the story of his native land.[2] In his self-portraits however Barry used the romantic, heroic style just coming into fashion to create strikingly dramatic images of his self-perceived role as an Irish Catholic artist , battling against the world around him (ills 245 and 246).

Various interrelated elements seem to have been involved in these pictures. Barry's fluctuating championship of Irish political grievances, his self-conscious awareness of his own position as a member of much-mocked race, his personal identification with the heroic anguish of Christ, his reaction as an artist and a Roman Catholic against the diminution in noble subjects available to the artist as the result of the Church of England's opposition to a major scheme for religious paintings, his involvement in an embittered competitive profession, and

1. The engravings of Petrie's portraits in Barrington's work were also available as proof prints, at 2s 6d each.
2. See above, pp. 677-678.

24⁻. James Barry/Self-portrait/1780-1804/oil on canvas/
32 x 25 ins (76.2 x 63 cms)/National Gallery of
Ireland/Photo: NGI.

246. James Barry/Self Portrait/1802/reed pen and brown
ink on paper/11½ x 9½ ins (29.2 x 24.1 cms)/Royal
Society of Arts.

the influence on him of contemporary artistic trends towards roman-

tic portrayals of suffering, monumental figures - all these appear

to have shaped these pictures of the artist as a suffering hero.

Barry's political views were by no means straightforward. Cer-

tainly the background from which he sprang was calculated to enforce

a sense of English injustice towards the Irish. His father was a

Protestant, but his mother, who apparently had the greater influence

on him, is said to have come from an old Catholic family, which lost

most of its estates in County Cork during the Williamite wars. Barry

was brought up in the Catholic faith, and despite being assailed by

doubts during his stay in Rome, clung to it till the end of his life.[1]

Indeed some of Barry's identification with suffering heroes in

his paintings may have derived from his Catholicism. His recent

biographer William Pressly has suggested that the beads of sweat on

Barry's brow in the Edmund Burke and Barry as Ulysses and his com-

panions escaping from Polyphemus[2] were a means of identifying himself

with the suffering Christ, traditionally depicted in this fashion in

the paintings of the road to Calvary and Veronica's veil.[3]

But like many a subsequent artist from Ireland's Catholic commu-

nity, Barry's political attitudes towards his native land were con-

fused. While in letters, prints and paintings he made direct and

indirect appeals to the English to improve their treatment of Irish

Catholics, he also expressed embarassed contempt for his fellow

countrymen,[4] and he knew he had no artistic future in Ireland. In

1798 he wrote bitterly:

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1. Strickland, op cit, entry on James Barry, Cunningham, op cit, p.59
   and pp.62-3; The Works of James Barry, ed Dr Edward Fryer, 1809, vol 1,
   pp.332-2, W. Pressly , The Life and Art of James Barry, Yale Uni-
   versity Press, 1981, p.2.
2. Reproduced Crookshank and Glin, The Painters of Ireland, p.107.
3. Pressly, op cit, pp.199-200.
4. Pressly, ibid, p.84.

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"An Irish artist may think himself well of if his country-
men are not against him, in order to curry favour for
themselves." 1

He maintained no contact with his relatives in Ireland, and

never returned there, even when his father was dying. In his writ-

ings he rejected the theoretical republicanism of the United Irish-

men.[2] Indeed he greeted the Act of Union between England and Ireland

with designs for a print celebrating the event, (although like many

Irishmen at the time he may have expected more to have been achieved

as a result, particularly with regard to Catholic Emancipation).

Yet the indifference and contempt displayed by the English towards

Irishmen could sting him in conversation into emotional identifica-

tion with the rebellion which the United Irishmen led in 1798. His

Irish contemporary William Henry Curran recalls a revealing incident.

"Barry spoke much and warmly of politics, and took no
pains to conceal that he was a sturdy republican. When
he alluded to the Irish events of 1798, it was as 'the
late civil war which they call a rebellion.' The only
instance which I recollect the native impetuosity of his
tongue to have broken out, was connected with the poli-
tics of Ireland. It was at a little evening party,
given expressly in his honour. Several young ladies
were invited to see an Irish lion and the noble animal
roared for them'an 'twere any nightingale.' They were
charmed with his pleasantry and his brogue. While they
were ranged around him, the conversation was suddenly
broken up by the entrance of a noisy, busy old gentleman,
steaming with perfumes, and gorgeously attired – the late
Mr N– of Soho Square. The pink of aristocracy pirouetted
through the little circle, offered his scented snuff to
the ladies, and opened a running fire of frivolous compli-
ments in a loud squeaking voice, from the annoyance of
which his own ears were fortunately saved by his exces-
sive deafness. Barry eyed the antiquated beau with con-
tempt, and was silent. But in a little time Ireland and
her turbulent peasantry were mentioned. Mr N– announced
himself to have been once an Irishman, tripped through the
common-place doctrines of provincial policy, and summed up

1. Letter to the Dilettanti Society, 1798, quoted Pressly, op cit,
     p.59 and pp.62-3; The Works of James Barry   pp.332-3;
     and   Pressly, op cit, p. 2.

2. Introduction to the Works, pp.333-335.

by exclaiming that they should be 'all hanged, every man of them hanged.' This was too much for the Irish lion, and the ladies now had a roar in earnest. Barry started from his chair, strided across to the corner where Mr N- was standing, and arranging both hands into the form of speaking-trumpet, bellowed in his ear 'And what sir, should be done to those who force the Irish peasantry to these excesses?' Poor Mr N- was utterly confounded by a home-question, which even to this day is perplexing the greatest statesmen, and Barry in surly triumph returned to his chair." 1

Barry's emotional identification with Irish rebelliousness was expressed in these kinds of personal encounters, and in his aesthetic explorations of his own identity, rather than in political discourse, art or action. He quarrelled continuously with patrons and fellow-artists.[2] He was ridiculed as a wild Irishman and began to act the part. In Rome the pompous Nathaniel Dance, drew a malicious cartoon of him (ill 247) inscribed with the following lines:

"On his coming to Rome Barry swore with a frown
Every man who opposed him he'd kick or knock down,
Having found his mistake with the few that he tried
Now, rather than quarrel, he'd kiss your backside."[3]

Dance's conclusion was erroneous. Although caricatures were commonplace in artistic circles in Rome at the time,[4] the drawing seems to have done little to sweeten Barry's temper, and throughout his life he combined with rudeness and aggression doubts about his own ethnic acceptability expressed in an obsession with his physical appearance. One writer records him as saying seriously of

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1. W.H. Curran, Sketches of the Irish Bar: with Essays Literary and Political, Hurst and Blackett, 1855, vol 2, p.180.

2. Cunningham, op cit, p.92ff and The Age of Neo-Classicism (exhibition catalogue), Arts Council of Great Britain, 1972, paintings, no 15, p.11.

3. Quoted in Thomas Bodkin "James Barry", Apollo, vol 23, Dec 1940, p.145.

4. See above, p. 402.

24 . Nathaniel Dance/Caricature of James Barry/ca
1766/pencil/10 x 7½ ins (25.5 x 19 cms)/British
Museum, Department of Prints & Drawings/Photo:
BM.

himself, "I am a pock-pitted, hard-featured little fellow."[1] His

contemporaries also commented on his small stature and his typi-

cally Irish features. Some saw in those Irish features a matter

for contempt.

Gilchrist recorded:

"I have seen a characteristic pencil recollection from
Blake's hand of the strange Irishman's ill-favoured
face; that of an idealized bull-dog, with villainous
low forehead, turned-up nose and squalid tout ensemble."[2]

But most, while appalled by the slovenly negligence of his

later years, credited him with a certain eloquence and nobility

of expression.

"His person was below the middle size, sturdy and
ungraceful. You could see at once that he had never
practised bowing to the world. His face was strik-
ing. An Englishman would call it Irish, an Irishman
a Munster face; but Barry's had a character indepen-
dent of national expression. It was rugged, austere
and passion-beaten; but the passions traced were
those of aspiring thought, and unconquerable energy,
asserting itself to the last, and sullenly exulting
in its resources." [3]

This impression seems to be confirmed by the various portraits

of Barry by other artists, notably W. Evans' drawing from a cast

taken shortly before his death (ill 248).[4] His own self-image, as

recorded in the extraordinary number of self-portraits he made with

restless, probing intensity, appears to have taken two forms, one

public and one private. In the public image he could maintain to the

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1. Cunningham, op cit, p.136.

2. Thomas Bodkin, Paper on James Barry given on 20 Nov 1940, Jour-
     nal of the Royal Society of Arts, vol 89, 13 Dec 1940, p.50.
     Bodkin points out Gilchrist may have misdescribed the drawing
     as Blake had a great admiration for Barry.

3. Curran, op cit, p.174. See also Cunningham, op cit, p.123ff and
     p.136.

4. See also the portraits of Barry reproduced in Strickland, op cit.
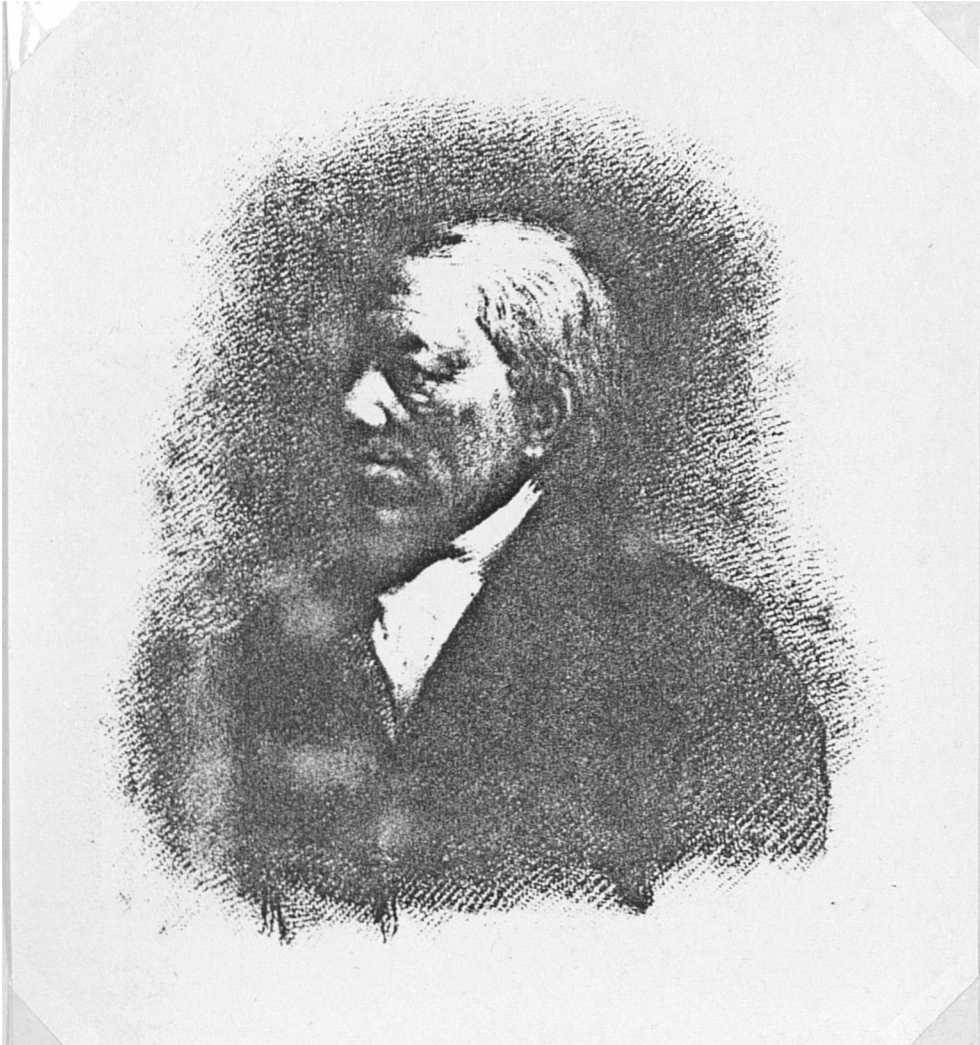
248. Engraving after W. Evans drawing from the
     death-mask of James Barry, frontispiece to
     Dr Edward Fryer (ed) The Works of James Barry,
     1809/actual size

end of his life (if current theories on the dating of his National

Gallery of Ireland <u>Self-Portrait</u> are correct), a vision of himself

as a romantic, heroically assertive young artist, grappling with

the world (ill 745), while in the private image he depicted an aged,

dispirited recluse, gazing sombrely at his mirrored reflection, by

the light of a flickering candle (ill 746). A note on the back of

this drawing vouches for its accuracy.

> "This portrait of Barry the painter I purchased shortly
> after his death. It was a favourite candlelight study
> of his, but never intended to be made public - as it
> was his intention that no portrait of him should be seen
> past the meridian of his life. He drew this a few years
> before his death with pen and ink and in his usual paint-
> ing dress. From my long acquaintance with him I can
> answer for its being a strong characteristic likeness of
> that artist and most singular man. Chas Warren." 1

What these two images have in common is a stress on suffering,

struggle and despair, and these are characteristics very common in

the whole range of Barry's output. There seems no doubt that they

were encouraged by Barry's real difficulties as a Catholic Irish

artist. But they were also related to his peculiarly difficult tem-

perament - and to the artistic fashions of the day.

Certainly, as we have seen, Barry encountered hostility and

ridicule on account of his Irishness. And certainly he encountered

problems as an artist because of his Catholic religion. His pro-

posal that St Paul's should be decorated by Academicians with paint-

ings of a scriptural nature, although accepted by the Academy

itself, was turned down by the Bishop of London, on the grounds that

"it would occasion a great noise and clamour against it, as an awful

intrusion of popery."[2] The incident had a lasting effect on Barry.

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1. Quoted in <u>Irish Art in the 19th Century</u>, p.18.

2. John Pye, <u>Patronage of British Art</u>, 1845, facsimile reprint by
   Cornmarket Press, 1970, pp.218-219. Pye, however, makes the
   point that the Bishop may have acted out of pique, not having
   been initially consulted about the scheme, and states his
   belief that the anti-popery outcry would have been minimal.

He had said in his letter of proposal that he saw the scheme:

> "as the only means of establishing a solid manly taste
> for real art, in the place of our trifling contemptible
> passion for the daubing of little inconsequent things -
> portraits of dogs, landscapes etc." 1

and subsequently he frequently voiced the conviction that the

Reformation was one of the chief causes for the lack of history

painting in England.[2]

But Barry's difficulties as an Irish Catholic need to be

set in the context of the more general problems of art during this

period, which William Pressly achieves very successfully in his

recent study of the painter.

> "Barry's personality was not atypical of a profession as
> fiercely competitive and chronically insecure as the
> one on which he had embarked. A man of great ambition
> and lofty intellectual aspirations, he needed to prove
> to himself as much as to others that he - a poor Irish
> Catholic - was a painter who could rise above his ori-
> gins to take his place in the first rank. In the pur-
> suit of this difficult goal he was obsessed with work,
> going out of his way to demonstrate that he had no time
> for the usual social niceties, expressing indifference
> toward areas normally taken for granted such as dress,
> food, habitation and family. The pressures created by
> his view of the world fed his violent temper; turned
> him into a solitary figure, secretive toward others lest
> they steal his ideas; and make him intensely jealous of
> those who were already prospering." 3

So great indeed was Barry's paranoia that he viewed himself

as a martyr awaiting violent assassination.

Moreover Barry's difficut status as an Irish Catholic, his

role as a member of a very difficult profession and his own obses-

sive personality were not the only factors contributing to his self-

depiction as a suffering rebel. Artistic theories and fashions of

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1. Letter to the Duke of Richmond, quoted ibid, p.218.

2. Notably in his An Enquiry into the real or imaginary Obstacles
   to the Arts in England, published in 1775, two years after the
   rejection of the St Paul's scheme (printed in the second
   volume of his Works). He also made comments in this vein in
   his lectures to Academy students, see Homan Potterton, Irish
   Church Monuments 1570-1880, Ulster Architectural Heritage
   Society, Belfast, 1975, pp.13-14.

3. Pressly, op cit, p.200.

the time also played a part in these images. He is known to have

had a predilection for monumental scale from his earliest work,[1]

but undoubtedly he was also strongly influenced by Edmund Burke's

description of the sublime style, and the increasingly romantic

taste for those classical sculptures which were on a monumental,

heroic scale. Burke's A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of

Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful made a considerable impact

on the youthful Barry, even before its author befriended him. It

suggests that the sublime is rooted in man's strongest passions

which are the feelings of terror aroused in him when danger or pain

threaten his life. Such theories were much in vogue, and many of

the artists and amateurs making the trip to Rome considered nearly

obligatory for cultivated men during this period, cited as most

worthy of admiration those monumental classical sculptures which

were capable of arousing such passions. Barry was familiar with

both these works and the books praising them,[2] and his own paint-

ings aspire to a very similar monumental grandeur. Indeed in the

1803 Self-Portrait (ill 245) there are very direct references to

such massive classical images of struggle and suffering. This

self-portrait is related to part of a mural, The Victors at Olym-

pia, which Barry painted for the Society of Arts building in the

Adelphi round about 1780. In both mural and portrait Barry depic-

ted himself as the Greek artist Timanthes, holding a conjectural

reconstruction of the painting in which he supposedly displayed his

ability in creating an aura of grandeur, by showing small figures of

satyrs attempting to measure the finger of a cyclops.[3] And in both

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1. Crookshank and Glin, The Painters of Ireland, p.105.

2. See Crookshank and Glin, op cit, p.106.

3. Robert Wark, "The Iconography and Date of James Barry's Self-
   Portrait in Dublin", Burlington Magazine, vol 96, 1954, p.
   153.

mural and portrait the statue of Hercules crushing the Snake of

Envy which stands behind the head of Barry Timanthes appears to

be a further reference by the artist to his involvement in the

grand art of history painting, from which he refuses to be deter-

red by the envy of more fashionable portraitists.[1]

Barry's self-depiction, in both his life and his portraits as

a suffering, struggling hero taking on the world were clearly fos-

tered by his own obsessive personality, and by artistic fashions

of the day, but the relevance for these images of his status as an

Irish Catholic artist should not be forgotten. How much influence

they have had on the Catholic community in Ireland is however

debatable. As we have seen Barry's career was spent in England and

Rome, and although he was acquainted with leading Irish figures of

the day, such as Burke and Curran, no major works by him were in

Irish ownership at the time of his death. However Irish interest

in Barry in the years following his death appears to have been

fairly strong. Not only were his Works noticed as soon as they

appeared, by the Belfast Monthly Magazine.[2] The Belfast Penny

Journal of 1846 also carried a "Memoir of Barry the Painter", and

his name was frequently included in the lists of eminent Irish

artists cited in the pages of The Nation. Works by him were also

sporadically included in the loan exhibitions in Ireland in the

second half of the century. Although curiously there were none in

the 1852 Industrial   Exhibition in his native city of Cork,

pieces by Barry were included in the 1853 Dublin Exhibition which

led to the founding of the National Gallery of Ireland in 1854,

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1. Robert Wark, "The Iconography and Date of James Barry's Self-
     Portrait in Dublin", Burlington Magazine, vol 96, 1954, p.
     154.

2. Vol 2 no 9, 30 April 1809, p.306, list of new publications.

the 1872 Dublin exhibition (a special display of his works), the

1873 Loan Museum of Art Treasures in Dublin (engraving), and the

Cork International exhibition of 1902 (the 1803 Self-Portrait and

one other work). In addition, a painting of Barry at work in his

studio was shown in the Dublin exhibition of 1865 by Edwin Hayes,

a London-based artist of Irish extraction best known for his marine

paintings. Meanwhile from 1875 onwards the National Gallery of

Ireland slowly acquired examples of Barry's output. The 1803 Self-

Portrait (ill 245) was purchased in 1934.

A very different kind of political and social identity is pro-

claimed in the portraits of Northern Protestants painted during the

late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some of the ear-

liest of these are by Joseph Willson, an artist about whom little is

known, except that he worked in both Belfast and Dublin. Willson,

like many painters at this time, attempted more ambitious works

than his portraits. In 1782 he advertised in the Belfast News

Letter his picture of Daniel interpreting to Belshazzar the writing

on the Wall, which he was attempting to raffle.[1] And in 1786 ano-

ther advertisement, this time for/ an engraving of Willson's

portrait / of Amyas Griffiths, to be had at booksellers in Belfast, Lisburn, Newry, Derry,

Armagh, Coleraine, Strabane and Downpatrick, was placed in The

Belfast Mercury or Freeman's Chronicle.[2]

This journal expressed the opinion of the recently formed volun-

teers, and it is for his volunteer portraits that Willson is best-

known. One of the finest of these is the portrait of Lieutenant

Hyndman now in the Ulster Museum (ill 249). The image that it

1. John Hewitt, Art in Ulster: 1, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1977, p.19.

2. 13 Jan 1786.

249. Joseph Willson/Lieutenant Hyndman/ca 1782-1785/
oil on canvas/30^1/4 x 25^1/4 ins (77 x 64 cms)/
Ulster Museum/Photo: UM.

conveys is one of quiet pride, in group membership, in trade, in
the development of a city, in military association, and in poli-
tical activity.

It seems fair to conclude that this image was one shared by
artist and sitter, for they were acquainted, and shared similar
commitments. Both were members of the convivial Masonic Lodge
no 257, which flourished in Belfast from September 1780 to about
1785 (Hyndman appears in the list of members for 20 March 1782,
Willson in that for October 1783).[1] Indeed Willson was employed
as a portrait-painter by many of his fellow-members, such as Amyas
Griffiths, John Brown and William Magee.[2] Hyndman proudly displays
in his buttonhole the emblem of this lodge, a medal embossed with a
skull and crossbones, suspended on a blue and orange ribbon.[3] He
also shows off the wares in which he traded. He was a snuff and
tobacco manufacturer and is shown here with a graceful pipe-full of
his own blend; on the table on which he leans the beautifully-pain-
ted still life includes the label from the packet he used to fill
it: "No 2 Made by R.H. and Andrew Hyndman Tobacconist. Belfast".
Another kind of pride appears to be conveyed by the simple neo-
classical architecture shown, in somewhat dubious perspective, behind

1. The lists, which are given in one of the two different issues of
     Ahiman Rezon, 5th edition, James Magee, Belfast, 1782, are
     reproduced in Millin, op cit, p.171.

2. The engraving of the Griffiths portrait is reproduced
     as the   frontispiece to Griffith's Miscellaneous Tracts,
     published in Dublin in 1788; the John Brown portrait is
     reproduced in Millin, op cit, p.91 and three Magee portraits
     are now in the Ulster Museum.

3. Eileen Black, "Volunteer Portraits in the Ulster Museum, Bel-
     fast," Irish Sword, Dublin, vol 13, no 52, 1977-79, pp.81-4.
     This article is available as an offprint from the Ulster
     Museum.

Hyndman. This was the style used in Belfast's first public build-

ings, such as the Poor House in Clifton Street, towards which the

Masonic Lodge 257 contributed on a number of occasions.[1] And there

is pride finally in military association and political activity.

Hyndman's dapper uniform is that of a Lieutenant (Staff Officer in

the Volunteer Ranks) of the Belfast 3rd Volunteer Union Company,

which was establshed on 12 June 1778.[2] Like so many of his fellow-

countrymen he rallied to the need for volunteer corps to protect

England from invasion via Ireland; we know too that he rallied to

the predominantly Northern movement to use the volunteers in support

of the establishment of an independent Irish parliament in Dublin,

for his name appears among a list on an address written by the Mer-

chants of Belfast, dated 1 March 1782, to Travers Hartley Esq,

offering congratulations on his election as the representative of

the City of Dublin in that Parliament;[3] but almost certainly he,

like his fellow masons, would have opposed the United Irish attempt

in 1798 to use their volunteer experience in rebellion against Eng-

land in order to gain greater liberties for Ireland.[4] A man of

reason, rather than passion, one might conclude, a self-reliant

representative of the age of enlightenment.

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1. On Lodge 257's support of the Poor House see Millin, op cit, pp. 167-168. On the development of Belfast at this time see Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, Problems of a Growing City, Belfast 1780-1870, H.M.S.O. Belfast, 1973, especially pp. vi-vii. T.W. Moody and J.C. Beckett (eds), Ulster since 1800, a political & economic survey, BBC, 1957, p.21; J.C. Beckett and R.E. Glasscock (eds) Belfast, Origins and Growth of an Industrial City, BBC, 1967, p.56ff and Brett, op cit.

2. Black, loc cit.

3. C.H. Wilson, Volunteer Resolutions, Joseph Hill, Dublin, 1782, vol 1, p.17.

4. On the involvement of Orange Lodge 257 in the Volunteer Movement and its loyalty in 1798 see Millin, op cit, pp.169-172.

To this conclusion Willson himself contributes. It seems that he may have been a volunteer himself, and that he attended the great Volunteer Convention in Dungannon in 1782.[1] He may well therefore have shared Hyndman's political views and that general feeling for democratic organisation so strongly embodied in the Volunteers.[2] Moreover the truly neo-classical balance, clarity, luminosity and tenderness of handling in his work helps to further this image of quiet pride in a civilised social and political self-reliance.

These characteristics can still be found in portraits of leading members of Northern Ireland's Protestant community in the early nineteenth century. In 1802 William Ritchie, one of the new hard-headed middle class replacing Northern Ireland's declining aristocracy[3] allowed himself to be portrayed by Thomas Robinson in a remarkably elegant pose, leaning against a classical statue of Neptune, the god of the sea, while his ships are building behind him in an idyllic rural setting (ill 250). It was not a mere pose, Ritchie was a good friend to Robinson and his precocious son, and an ardent supporter of such civic improvements as the Royal Academical Institution, the General Hospital and the Poor House and Infirmary.[4] And ship-building at this time was still closer to rural craft than modern industry, as can been seen in D. Stewart's watercolour view of Ritchie's dock, painted in 1805.[5]

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1. Black, loc cit, and Crookshank and Glin, The Painters of Ireland, p.158.

2. Black, loc cit.

3. On the decline of the Donegalls in the nineteenth century see Problems of a Growing City, p.v and pp.vii-viii.

4. See Millin, op cit, p.101.

5. Two versions of this exist, one in the Ulster Museum, the other in the Belfast Harbour Commissioners collection.

250. Thomas Robinson/William Ritchie/1802/oil on canvas/
37 x 29½ ins (94 x 75 cms)/Ulster Museum/Postcard:
UM.

By the middle of the century however the image projected in portraits of Belfast Protestant middle-classes was very different. The change can be best conveyed by contrasting with the Ritchie portrait Richard Hooke's picture of William Herdman painted in about 1840 (ill 251). Herdman, like Ritchie, played an important part in the shipping trade; Hooke, like Robinson, was by Belfast terms a successful artist, patronized by the Marquess of Downshire, building up a considerable local practice and exhibiting at the Royal Hibernian Academy. Yet his image of Herdman, stark, unadorned, the hands clenched on nothing more significant than a handkerchief, embodies the ultimate reductionism of the embattled Protestant tradition. It is not without a solemn staring presence, and there are passages in it painted with a delicate fluency, but it is a repeatable formula rather than a unique image - indeed it was repeated, for there is another version in the collection of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners. Hooke and his patrons both relied on the safe reproduction of similar objects. Born in County Down in about 1823, he was originally a carpenter. Showing a gift for painting, he was induced by Andrew Ferguson, manager of the Sion Flax-Spinning Mills, to take to portrait-painting. It was Ferguson who taught him photography, which he used in his portrait painting. The practice was common enough. From the mid-1850s photographers are mingled with artists in the Belfast Directories and by the early 1870s the following kind of advertisements are commonplace:

> E.T. Church (late partner of R. Mayer) Artist and
> Photographer, 55 Donegall Place, Belfast.
> Cartes-de-visite on enamel. Cameo vignettees. Incaustic
> Portraits from £5.5s and upwards. A few choice Oil
> Paintings always on sale.

251. Richard Hooke/William Herdman/ca 1840/oil on
canvas/36 x 27³/₄ ins (91.5 x 70.5 cms)/
Ulster Museum/Photo: UM

Rudolph Mayer & Co. Artist Photographer, 13 Castle Place,
Belfast. Every branch of photography. Mayerotypes.
Oleophotographs, Composition Family Groups, the Imperial
Vignette Portrait, Portraits Finished in Carbon, water-
colour portraits, Portraits painted in Oil.
Carte-de Visite Portraits
Works of Art, Drawings, Engravings, Oil Paintings, Minia-
tures etc, reproduced with the greatest care. 1

Belfast's Protestant bourgeoisie were increasingly turning to trades-

men rather than artists for the few portraits they required. Herdman

retained a certain prestige as a portrait-painter in Belfast – he

painted three successive Lord Mayors between 1849 and 1880 – but he

prudently married a rich widow from Manchester, and seems to have

spent a fair proportion of his time there in his later years.[2]

The late nineteenth century Northern Protestant taste for the

minimum number of self-images, executed in style of hard solemnity,

is endorsed by the nature of the statues to be found in Belfast.

Throughout the whole of the century only three free-standing statues

appear to have been erected in the city. The first of these was a

bronze figure of Frederick Richard, the Earl of Belfast, by Patrick

McDowell. This was erected in November 1855 in front of the Aca-

demical Institution. The shared characteristic of the subject, the

sculptor and the occasion was that very Victorian attribute, senti-

ment. The Earl had literary interests, a strong sense of social

responsibility, and a sympathy with Irish nationalism. In 1852 he

delivered a series of lectures on the English poets of the nineteenth

century in the Music Hall in May Street, for the benefit of the Lib-

rary Fund of the local Working Classes Association; he composed seve-

ral songs and had them printed and sold for Famine Relief; and he

was inspired to Irish patrotism by the literary outpourings of Thomas

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1. Catalogue of the Belfast Working Men's Institute and Temperance
    Hall Exhibition, 1871.
2. Hewitt, Art in Ulster: 1, pp.28, 144 and 162.

Moore and the Young Irelanders.[1] On his early death a statue of

him was commissioned by popular demand from McDowell, and paid for

with a public subscription of £1,500.[2] This sculptor, who was of

Irish extraction, worked in London where he achieved considerable

and well-deserved repute. His funeral monument to the Earl of Bel-

fast, in the chapel at Belfast Castle, is an outstanding work,

exuding pathos. The public statue was less successful, somewhat

weak and simpering. It was however accorded a dignified welcome,

with an unveiling by the Lord Lieutenant, and no less than two

commemorative odes.[3]

Twenty-one years later this figure was ousted from its plinth

by a very different monument, whose subject, style and manner of

inauguration were all symptomatic of the change in self-image which

took place amongst the Protestants of Northern Ireland in the nine-

teenth century (ill 252).

The new figure was of the Reverend Dr Henry Cooke (1788-1867).

Cooke played a decisive part in the striking change in temper of

Presbyterian Belfast between about 1830 and 1860. Gone was the late

eighteenth century tradition of liberal Presbyterianism, favourable

to cultural development, and prepared to join forces with the Catho-

lics against the overweening power of England and its established

church. In its place was a beleaguered, violent religion, frightened

by the massive influx of Catholics into Belfast in the mid-century.

> "Catholics had been 6.5 per cent of its population in the
> middle of the eighteenth century; in 1834 they were 31
> per cent; by 1848 some 43 per cent." 4

1. Ibid, p.62 and p.23 note 1.

2. Ibid, p.63 and p.170.

3. Ibid.

4. Sybil Baker, "Orange and Green, Belfast 1832-1912", in H.J. Dyos
   and Michael Wolff, The Victorian City, Routledge & Kegan Paul,
   1973, vol 2, p.793.

252. S.F. Lynn/Dr Cooke/1876/bronze/overall height
approximately 180 ins (457.3 cms)/College
Square East, Belfast/Photo: Northern Ireland
Tourist Board

This new Protestantism was harshly intolerant of frivolous

entertainment, and increasingly aligned with the prelacy, the Con-

servatives and the Orange Order. Cooke played a major part in

these changes. It was he who in the 1830s

> "proclaimed the banns of political marriage between
> prelacy and Presbyterianism and hurled anathemas
> against Liberalism, Popery and the Repeal of the Act
> of Union." 1

It was he who opposed the institution of national education[2]

and who led the mid-nineteenth century wave of Ulster evangelicalism.

It was he who nursed the infant Conservative Party, and defied Daniel

O'Connell's campaign for Repeal.[3] It was he who in the late 1860s

finally detached the Presbyterians from the Young Ireland orienta-

tion.

Cooke contributed to the total redefinition of the Protestant

tradition not only by what he did, but by the style in which he did

it. To him in large part we owe the identification of Protestant

religion and politics, the phenomenon of the political clergyman,

the style of political oratory which is phrased in the language of

the Bible. To a lesser extent he was also responsible for the deve-

lopment of a specifically Ulster rather than Irish Protestant tra-

dition, when he voiced his opposition to O'Connell's visit to the

province in 1841, in terms of the repulsion of an invader.[4] And in

turning against O'Connell his own technique of mass demonstrations,

1. Beckett and Glasscock, op cit, p.32.

2. Mary McNeill, Vere Foster, David Charles, Newton Abbot, 1971,
   p.109.

3. The Repealer Repulsed: The repeal invasion of Ulster, William
   McComb, Belfast, 1841, and J. Porter, The Life and Times of
   Dr Cooke, Belfast, 1875.

4. This is an idea I owe to David Miller. For an excellent analysis
   of the development of an Ulster consciousness at this time see
   Gilbert A. Cahill, "Some Nineteenth Century roots of the
   Ulster Problem, 1829-1848", Irish University Review, Dublin,
   vol 1 no 2, Spring 1971, pp.215-237.

he first introduced to Northern Ireland that frightening phenomenon,
the massed crowd, which allows itself to be manipulated by a leader
and therein sees its release from fear and confusion. Fear of the
sheer weight of Catholic numbers, fear too perhaps of divine wrath
as expressed in the mid-century famine and pestilence, fear of the
multitudes of dead:[1] all these may have encouraged the Northern
Protestants to political and religious excess and to frenzied head-
counts, whether of the 60,000 supporters of the Protestant Conserva-
tive Society that Cooke addressed at Hillsborough on 30 October
1834[2] or the 40,000 attendants of the first monster meeting of
Ulster's religious Revival of 1859, in the Botanic Gardens of Bel-
fast.[3] The inauguration of this statue was in the same tradition.
Its erection in 1876 was celebrated by a vast Orange Order demonstra-
tion, "an army of the loyal sons of Ulster" estimated at some
150,000, who used that recently-established means of mass transport,
the railway, could reflect on their numbers by means of that mass
medium, the photograph,[4] and were addressed in highly Biblical ora-
tory by that new leader of the masses, William Johnston of Bally-
kilbeg.[5] The statue itself justifies far more than its predecessor
the nickname of "the Black Man" which it inherited from it.[6] Weathe-
red green it may be, but the grim-faced divine, with a stark nobility
akin to Herdman's, epitomises the black North far more effectively

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1. See Elias Canetti, Crowds and Power, Penguin, 1973.

2. Cahill, op cit, p.226.

3. Beckett & Glasscock, op cit, p.97.

4. An "instantaneous view" of the demonstration was advertised by
   the Belfast photographer Robert Seggons, in the Belfast News
   Letter, 12 May 1876, p.4.

5. Ibid, p.5.

6. According to Brett, op cit, p.47, the Earl of Belfast's statue
   was painted black, hence theorigin of the name. Brett says
   Lynn's statue is meant to be a striking likeness.

than McDowell's simpering figure of the Earl.[1]

Ironically Lynn had worked for a while in McDowell's studio.[2]
The manner in which this and other commissions came to him under-
line the predicament of Northern Ireland sculpture in the nineteenth
century. Lynn was the younger brother of W.H. Lynn, partner to
Charles Lanyon, then Northern Ireland's leading architect, and it
seems possible this had much to do with his relative success, par-
ticularly as compared with Thomas Fitzpatrick, a gifted carver who
was his contemporary. Fitzpatrick, ignored by Strickland, but
rightly praised by Charles Brett for the vigour of his work, atten-
ded the Belfast School of Art and won the carving prize instituted
by Lanyon, but never achieved any great fame and appears to have
worked all his life in Northern Ireland. Lynn on the other hand, hav-
ing attended the School of Art at the same time, went on like
McDowell to become a successful sculptor working in England, assist-
ing Foley on the Albert Memorial and occasionally returning to Bel-
fast to contribute such well-known monuments as Cooke, and the
figure of Prince Albert on the clock-tower memorial to the Prince
Consort erected in 1870.[3]

These few monuments certainly came to hold an important place
in the political culture of Ulster Protestants. When at the time of
the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the political struggle over
the question of Irish home rule was at its fiercest, two postcards
were issued in support of the Unionists, which symbolised the impact
of Home Rule on Belfast with the demolition of the Albert Clock, the

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1. The third statue erected in nineteenth-century Belfast, that of
   the Reverend Hugh Hanna, unveiled in 1894, shared the same
   ethos and style as the Cooke monument. It was blown up in
   March 1970.
2. Belfast Museum and Art Gallery, Quarterly Notes, no 40, Summer
   1919, p.13 and Strickland, op cit, entry on Lynn.
3. Strickland, loc cit.

collapse of the City Hall, and the erection of statues to such

nationalist leaders as Redmond and Dillon (ill 253). And during

the present troubles, similar images of destruction of the sta-

tues of Cooke and later leaders of Ulster Protestants have again

been frequently employed to symbolise the impact of the conflict

on Northern Ireland.[1]

Yet the lack of public statues in Ulster prior to this century

remains striking. Influence may have got Lynn the commissions and

prestige which Fitzpatrick never acquired, but influence cannot

completely explain away the yawning gulf between Belfast's splendid

local carving and mediocre imported sculpture throughout the nine-

teenth century and well into the twentieth. There seem to be two

possible explanations for this. In the first place there was the

Protestant horror of images. And in the second place there was

Belfast's political status as an Irish city. Dublin was the coun-

try's political capital, and therefore the main centre for public

monuments. It was there that the memorials went up to English

monarchs like William III (ill 11) and Queen Victoria,[2] English

heroes like Nelson (whose vast column, erected in 1808[3] was in

strong contrast to Robinson's fictitious Belfast statue), Irish

writers like Edmund Burke, Oliver Goldsmith and Thomas Moore, and

Irish political leaders like Daniel O'Connell.[4]

The numerous representations of O'Connell are a striking excep-

tion to the gallery of heroes and victims who have acted as the main

1. A number of such images can be found in cartoons in loyalist newsheets.

2. This memorial, by John Hughes, was unveiled in 1908. After its dismantling it was placed in the courtyard of Kilmainham Hospital in Dublin. An old photograph of it is reproduced in Peter Harbison, Homan Potterton and Jeanne Sheehy, Irish Art and Architecture, Thames & Hudson, 1978, p.256.

3. See William Bolger and Bernard Share, And Nelson on his Pillar, Nonpareil, Dublin, 1976.

4. See Eilish MacCurtain, "Dublin Statues", Introspect, no 2, Dec 1976, Dublin, pp16-17.

BELFAST UNDER HOME RULE.   Making a Site for the Statue of King John the First of Ireland.
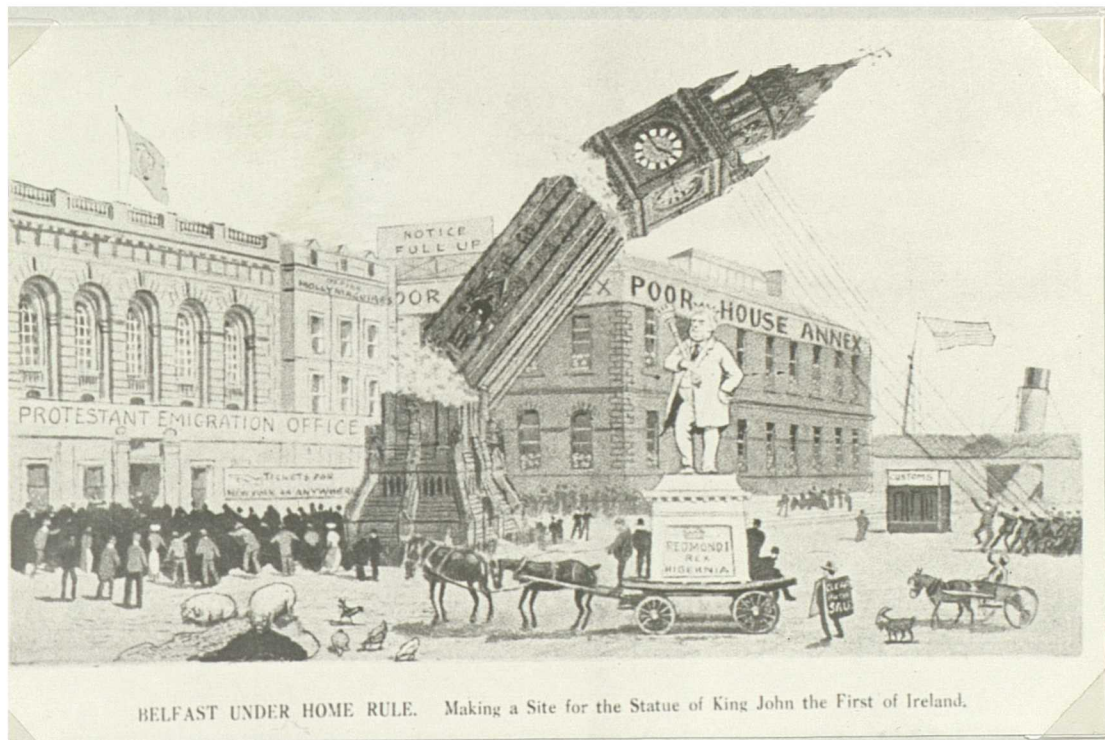
253.   Unionist postcard/ca 1906-12/black and white
        /photo gravure/3½ x 5 ins (9 x 13.8 cms)/
        printed by W.G. Baird, Belfast/Ulster Museum/
        Photo: UM

identity figures for Ireland's Catholic population. This nineteenth

century leader is almost invariable represented in his roles of

shrewd lawyer or member of the English parliament (ill 254). The

only exceptions to this somewhat monotonous rule appear to be the

painting of O'Connell as a Herculean figure rescuing Erin from her

bondage,[1] and the lithographs of O'Connell and the other "Repeal

Martyrs" produced during their imprisonment in 1843-4.

Undoubtedly O'Connell suffered as greatly from the attentions

of second-rate artists as he was later to suffer from the ineptness

of second-rate biographers. But the usually sober image they pre-

sented was also true to his own character. He was not a rebel,

being deeply opposed to militarism and the use of physical force.

In place of these, he turned to manipulation of the gradually deve-

loping English parliamentary system and exploitation of the tech-

niques of extra-parliamentary agitation, as the means of achieving

Catholic emancipation and repeal of the Act of Union. In Ireland

it was the latter strategy which was most noticeably to shape his

enduring public image. The mass meetings which he held up and down

the country, and the mass contributions to his Catholic and Repeal

Associations made him a giant figure, the focus of the hopes of

virtually the entire Catholic population. In 1843 the German Johann

Kohl observed:

> "Whoever travels in Germany or, in any other country, for
> geographical or ethnographical purposes, and wishes only
> to make himself acquainted with the character of the
> country and its inhabitants, need not trouble himself much
> about the personal characteristics of our distinguished
> men. To travel in Ireland for the same purposes, and to
> remain ignorant of O'Connell, the man who, as Atlas sup-
> ports the earth, has taken the entire emerald isle on his
> shoulders, is next to impossible; for he is himself an

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1. See above, p. 149.

254. John Foley, completed by Thomas Brock/Daniel
O'Connell monument/1867-1883/bronze statue on
limestone pedestal and base/overall height
480 ins (1219.2 cms)/O'Connell Street, Dublin/
Photo: Green Studios

ethnographical phenomenon, partly because for thirty
years he has exercised an extraordinary influence over
the formation of the character and the condition of
his nation, and partly because he himself and his
power is another phenomenon which can only be explained
by the character of the Irish nationality.

The Irish are a people after the old model, a
people almost without a counterpart in the world. In
Germany, we have everywhere become too enlightened
and too self-dependent for any authority. We laugh at
all who call themselves prophets; but among the Irish
the old faith in saints and miracles still exists.
Here alone the mighty, the immortal, and the great
still find a fertile soil, whence to obtain laurels
and a halo. The Irish are enthusiastic, credulous,
blind, innocent as children and patriotic so that they
are ready to abandon themselves to the most ardent
admiration of a talented individual, and to raise him
aloft on their shields and shoulders, as the Roman were
wont to elevate their generals. They are also unhappy,
and desirous to be relieved from their sufferings, and
their full, wounded hearts are consequently ever ready
to applaud and shower down praises on him who manifests
sympathy in their wrongs and devotion in their cause." 1

There is some evidence that this heroic outsized image of

O'Connell did replace his more sober persona in his later years,

partly as a result of his own efforts, partly as an outcome of

the activities of his supporters. Indeed as early as 1827 another

German, Prince Hermann Ludwig Heinrich von Puckler-Muskau, who was

sympathetic to O'Connell and contributed to his campaign funds, said

of him

"His desire for celebrity seemed to me boundless"[2]

and by 1842, according to Kohl, the metamorphosis into a public

figure was almost total.

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1. Reisen in Ireland, 1843, quoted in   Diarmuid
      O'Muirithe, A Seat behind the Coachman, Gill & Macmillan,
      Dublin, 1972, pp.87-8.

2. Ibid, p.85.

"O'Connell, in proportion as he has made himself public,
has retained less of himself for himself than any other
man in England. He everywhere gives himself up to the
gaze and judgment of the public, whether in parliament
or at public meetings, in the streets, at elections or
in travelling. He scarcely ever ceases to lead a public
life, and almost everything he does is done before the
eyes of hundred or thousands. Peel, Wellington, and
other great statesmen, hide themselves in the mysteries
of their bureaux and cabinets, from which they issue
forth in their public measures, and in person only in
parliament, or at public dinners, O'Connell, the tribune
of the people is almost public property, flesh and bone;
he even speaks of his domestic concerns at his popular
meetings, for he is enabled to support his house and his
family only through the indirect assistance of the
public." 1

The phrases Kohl uses are pregnant with meaning. O'Connell

did indeed "give himself up to the gaze and judgment of the public"

in the great open-air meetings which were orchestrated by his sup-

porters in the Young Ireland movement - in 1843 alone he appeared

at some 34 meetings at each of which more than 100,000 were esti-

mated to be present.[2] And when not present in flesh and blood his

image could be endlessly admired by his followers, whether in the

shape of the life-size statue completed for the Repeal Association

by John Hogan in 1846 (probably the first statue to an Irish

nationalist leader in his lifetime) or a plaster copy of Peter

Turnerelli's bust of him made in about 1828-30 (10,000 of these

are reputed to have been sold)[3] or one of the Staffordshire jugs

and busts produced from about 1830.[4] For he had indeed become pub-

lic property. In a sense his followers bought a share in him, whether

by their subscriptions to the Catholic Association in the 1820s or the

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1. _Ibid_, p.87.

2. R. Dudley Edward, _Daniel O'Connell and his World_, Thames & Hudson
   1975, p.66.

3. Strickland, _op cit_, entry on Turnerelli.

4. There are examples in the 1798 room in the National Museum in
   Dublin.

rent they paid to the Loyal National Repeal Association in the

1840s to replace the income O'Connell had lost by giving up his

lucrative legal practice.

>"Perhaps the present age will and must have its heroes
>well dressed and well fed. As the English debt is a
>burden which keeps all England together, so is the
>O'Connell tribute a burden which keeps together all
>repealers. Having once pledged themselves to pay so
>much, this promise obliges them to continue with
>O'Connell. They are probably astonished at the extra-
>ordinary amount of this tribute, which a man without
>any external power, and merely by his eloquence and
>zeal, has imposed upon them, and perhaps they value him
>more highly on that account." 1

And they could also make O'Connell their property by buying

images of him. If they could not afford a Staffordshire figure,

or a Turnerelli bust, they could, by the early 1840s, paste up on

their wall an engraving of their hero cut out from the Illustrated

London News[2] or one of the numerous Irish lithographs of him pro-

duced by Irish artists like J.P. Haverty.

The symbolic apotheosis of O'Connell as a monumental leader

of the Irish nation was finally achieved after his death, with the

erection of the statue of him in the Dublin street which now bears

his name (ill 254). The scheme for the monument was launched by the

Freeman's Journal in 1862, and the extent of public enthusiasm for

the projected monument was confirmed by the massive demonstrations

attending the laying of its foundation-stone in 1864.[3] However two

competitions failed to produce a design acceptable to the O'Connell

Monument Committee - "pretty peagreen quoins", "nice pink pillars

and blue lamps", a Chinese pagoda with Gothic windows or the

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1. Kohl, op cit, quoted in O'Muirithe, op cit, p.91.

2. The front page of The Nation, the weekly paper run by O'Connell's
supporters, the Young Irelanders, carried on 26 August 1843
an advertisement by the Illustrated London News of its illus-
trations including that of the monster meeting at Tara (ill
125).

3. Loftus, op cit, pp.20-21.

depiction of O'Connell either "under a Gothic canopy apparently in the act of making love to a young lady", or seated on a stove, although all charming ideas clearly lacked the requisite serious-ness.[1] It was decided therefore to commission John Foley to undertake the work.

Despite Foley's Dublin origins, and his provision for the city of a number of fine statues to such eminent Irishmen as Burke, Goldsmith and Grattan[2] there was an outcry at the employment of "a London artist." However when his design was put on public display it met with unanimous approval. An attack of pleurisy contracted while working on the Albert Memorial slowed down Foley's work and he died before completing the monument. His assistant Thomas Brock carried out the remainder of the work, chiefly the four Victory figures round the base, and the whole monument was finally finished in 1883. It is a suitably imposing construction and admirably sited, but despite the figure of Erin trampling her fetters underfoot, holding the Act of Emancipation in one hand while with the other she points upwards to the Liberator, as figures emblematic of different walks of Irish life gather round, the style employed is resolutely British. And although it occasioned a somewhat premature commemo-rative medal, the supposed admiration of fictional Irish patriots, and two massive demonstrations in which contingents from Northern Ireland participated,[3] this statue appears to have retained little significance for later generations of nationalists and republicans,

1. Homan Potterton, The O'Connell Monument, Gifford and Craven, Ballycotton, 1973, p.3.

2. Potterton, Irish Church Monuments, p.46.

3. William Woodhouse represented the projected monument on a medal issued to mark O'Connell's birth centenary in 1875 (National Museum, RIA 129). In Patrick Colum's historical novel The Flying Swans, the characters Ulick and Duineen admire the monument on a visit to Dublin (Allen Figgis, Dublin, 1969, p.373 ff).On the demonstrations in 1864 and 1882 see Potterton, op cit, p.2 and p.10, Tony Gray, The Orange Order, Bodley Head, 1972, pp.153-4, and Loftus loc cit.

particularly in Ulster.

Far more influential for their sense of identity have been the images of suffering heroes produced during this period by the painter and print-maker J.P. Haverty, and the sculptor John Hogan. As we have already seen, Haverty was an artist strongly sympathetic to the ideals of the Young Ireland movement, and a painter of scenes which helped to crystallize in Irish nationalist thinking the association of Celtic remains, wild, untamed landscape and the courageous practice of a persecuted Catholic religion.[1] But perhaps the most influential of all his works has been The Limerick Piper (ill 255).

This picture was immensely popular with Irish nationalists from its earliest appearance. When it was first shown at the Royal Hibernian Academy in 1845 it was described by The Nation as "one of the sweetest and simplest, and by far the most Irish picture in the exhibition."[2] It constantly reappeared at exhibitions of Irish art, such as those in Dublin in 1853 and 1861 and at the Guildhall in London in 1904. The Art Union print of it was disseminated the length and breadth of Ireland. And in its two versions the painting was at various times in the possession of leaders of Irish political culture, whether the Gore-Booths at Lissadell, or the Young Irelander William Smith O'Brien, who eventually gave his version to the National Gallery of Ireland in 1864.

The runaway success of this work appears to derive from its very availability, and the combined appeal of its theme and artistic treatment. The painting's subject was a real figure, the blind piper Padraig O'Briain, who played at the Crescent near Hartstronge Street

1. See above, pp. 475-476 and pp. 691-692.
2. 31 May 1845, p.138.

255. J.P. Haverty/The Blind Piper/1864/oil on
canvas/30 x 23$\frac{1}{4}$ ins (76 x 59 cms)/National
Gallery of Ireland/Photo: NGI

in Limerick every day.[1] Haverty, who spent much of his career in

the city, must have observed him there, but chose instead to

depict him in a melancholy, autumnal country setting, accompanied

by his daughter, a masterly appeal to sentiment. Nationalist

viewers of the picture would also have been aware of the traditional

role of Irish musicians as celebrators of native heroism. The use

of Irish harps in this way and their subsequent appeal as nostalgic

images of Ireland's lost freedom, have already been discussed.[2] The

Irish or uillean pipes being played in this picture are also a dis-

tinctive national instrument, with political meaning attached to

them. First developed at the beginning of the eighteenth century,

they, like the Irish harp, became a subject of interest for anti-

quarians from the 1790s onwards. This was also the period of their

popular hey-day. Nearly all the pipers of this period were, like

the figure in this painting, blind. While the trade of itinerant

musician provided employment for numerous blind men throughout

Europe during this period,[3] the almost total association between

Irish music and blindness in pre-Famine days imbued a figure like

this with a combination of national solemnity and melancholy and,

possibly, the kind of irrational depths of emotion we associate

with the phrase "love is blind". Indeed many nationally-minded

artists, such as Thomas Bridgford,[4] Sir Frederick Burton[5] and Henry

O'Neill[6] chose to depict Irish pipers at this time, but it was

Haverty's work which became the national icon of this kind, probably

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1. See Pipes and Piping (exhibition catalogue), Arts Council of
     Northern Ireland, Belfast, 1976, p.3, no 4.
2. Above, p. 445 ff.
3. Burke, op cit, p.26 and pp.99-100.
4. Irish Piper, ca 1843, in the National Gallery of Ireland.
5. Paddy Coneely, ca 1840, also in the National Gallery of Ire-
     land, shown in Irish Art of the 19th Century, p.22, no 18.
6. Lithograph of Gandsey, the Kerry minstrel, which won a
     Royal Irish Art Union prize in 1842 (Strickland, op cit,
     entry on O'Neill).

due largely to its sentimental nature and its widespread distri-
bution as an Art Union print.

A somewhat different image of the heroic victim was provided
for Irish nationalists during the mid-nineteenth century by John
Hogan, a sculptor much favoured by the Young Ireland movement. Not
only did Hogan make some extremely influential images of Erin.[1]
He was also responsible for numerous figures of the dead Christ,
which were frequently shown in nineteenth century Irish exhibi-
tions,[2] and eventually made their way into a number of Dublin and Cork
churches. They, together with less exalted images of the same
kind, such as the entombed Christ in St Malachy's church in Bel-
fast, and the Sacred Heart prints which became so popular in Irish
Catholic homes from the mid-nineteenth century onwards (ill 82),
may well have encouraged the ideas of blood-sacrifice which came
so much to the fore in the thinking of republican leaders prior to
the 1916 rising. And Hogan's Transfiguration (ill 58), which was,
until at least the 1920s, in Patrick Pearse's local church in West-
land Row in Dublin,[3] looks like a very probable model for one of
the posters commemorating that rising (ill 56). Memories of reli-
gious imagery seem also to lie behind the pose of the Cuchulain
figure by Oliver Sheppard (ill 256) which stands in the Dublin GPO,
and for many remains the most memorable monument to the rebels who
fought and died there in 1916. In reality however, this statue was
made at least four years before the rising, apparently in an atmos-
phere of artistic high jinks rather than nationalist fervour. Seamus

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1. See above, p. 157.

2. Such as those at Cork in 1852 and Dublin in 1853.

3. Benmore, (alias John Clarke), Memorials of John Hogan, the great
     Irish sculptor, 1800-1857, Glenarm, 1927, p.9 and pp.15-7 and
     Irish Art in the Nineteenth Century, p.85.

256. Oliver Sheppard/The Death of Cuchulain/ca
1911-12/bronze/approximately 72 ins (183 cms)
high/The GPO, Dublin/Photo: Bord Failte

O'Brien, Sheppard's assistant, recalls that an Italian model from

the School of Art posed for the figure, the artist James Sleator

sat for the head, and that he himself provided the drapery, "the

hide of a Russian goat that I coaxed from my sister Nellie, who

wanted to make a floor rug out of it."[1]

Yet this seeming frivolity conceals darker realities. It seems

likely that Sheppard and his Cuchulain statue played a part in deve-

lopment of the cult of the blood sacrifice by Patrick Pearse, one of

the leaders in 1916. Pearse's brother William was a sculptor who

studied under Sheppard at the Metropolitan School of Art in the

early years of the century. Given Sheppard's continuing influence

on his pupil, William's closeness to his brother (he taught art in

his school at St Enda's) and Pearse's interest in Celtic culture,

the possibility that the political leader knew and was influenced by

the sculptor's work appears fairly strong.[2] The influence may

indeed have been reciprocal. Sheppard's Cuchulain is a very exact

expression in visual terms of the role assigned to the Celtic hero

in Pearse's private mythology.

Pearse's worship of and identification with Cuchulain is not

merely a matter of posthumous speculation, as by AE in The Living

Torch and Michael,[3] but of documented reality. The story that he

was so impressed by the Celtic hero's deeds that at the age of ten

"he went down upon his knees and vowed to devote the rest of his life

to the freeing of Ireland"[4] sounds suspiciously like pious myth, but

1. Irish Art 1900-50, p.84.

2. See ibid, pp.82-3.

3. See William Irwin Thompson, The imagination of an insurrection,
   Harper Colophon, New York, 1967, p.183. The name of Cuchulain
   was first proclaimed on the public stage in AE's Deirdre in
   1902. See ibid, pp.168-9.

the mural at the entrance of his school, showing the boy Cuchulain

taking arms from the Druid, is well documented, along with its

Irish motto "I care not if my life have only the span of a night

and day if my deeds be spoken of by the men of Ireland."[1] As

Pearse's friend Stephen McKenna said,

> "He hoped no less than to see Ireland teeming with
> Cuchulains". 2

And these Cuchulains were to be Christ-like rebels, for Pearse

read the Ulster Cycle as an image of the Calvary story, in which the

Celtic hero's blood-sacrifice redeemed from its primal sin the king-

dom of Emain Macha. A month before the Rising he made his farewell

speech to his own proto-Cuchulains, the students of St Enda's, and

said:

> "As it took the blood of the Son of God to redeem the world,
> so it would take the blood of Irishmen to redeem Ireland." 3

Had he seen Sheppard's figure, in which the dead Cuchulain

droops as the dead Christ droops in Michelangelo's Deposition figu-

res redemption achieved? Had he already envisaged it as his own

memorial? His father as well as his brother was a monumental sculp-

tor, and they must have been aware of the religious significance of

Cuchulain's pose, so soon to be used in the memorials to the Irishmen

who fought in another cause during the Second World War.[4]

Clearly the genesis of the Cuchulain figure is a subject deserv-

ing more detailed research than has been possible or appropriate in

this context. But whatever the true nature of its origins were, it

1. Desmond Ryan, "A Man called Pearse", in Collected Works of Pad-
    raic Pearse, Dublin, 1924, p.157, quoted Thompson, op cit,
    p.25.

2. Martin Daly (Stephen MacKenna) Memories of the Dead, Dublin, n.d.
    p.17.

3. Pamphlet in National Library of Ireland, quoted Thompson, op cit
    p.77.

4. The memorial to the First World War victims from Queen's Uni-
    versity Belfast uses the Deposition theme. For evidence of
    interest in Cuchulain in Ulster previous to 1916 see above,
    pp. 499-500.

rapidly became a symbol of extreme importance, both for Irish repub-

licans, and for others. It was used on the service medal for those

who fought in 1916, reappeared on a commemorative coin issued by the

Irish Republic in 1966,[1] and during the period of the present troub-

les in Northern Ireland has been re-used for the Derry memorial to

members of the Provisional IRA. Even Northern loyalists have laid

a claim to this figure in recent years, on account of Cuchulain's

significance as an Ulster warrior. A photograph of the GPO sculpture

hangs over the desk of Andy Tyrie, leader of the Ulster Defence

Association.[2]

Cuchulain however was not the only Christ-like hero-victim who

inspired the leaders of the 1916 Rising, and the artists linked with

them. Robert Emmet, the memory of whose abortive rebellion was

celebrated in the period between 1898 and 1903, was also an impor-

tant identity-figure for them. Patrick Pearse turned increasingly

to thinking of Emmet's heroic, apparently futile gesture, after he

moved St Enda's School to the Hermitage at Rathfarnham, a house with

Emmet associations. By 1914 he was talking of him as a Christ-figure

who had redeemed Ireland from acquiescence in the Union by his sac-

rifice. And at the time of the 1916 rising:

> "Emmet was clearly Pearse's inspiration. Emmet
> influenced the Proclamation; Emmet's picture stood
> at the head of Connolly's bed; and Pearse commented
> with satisfaction that 'Emmet's two hour insurrection
> is nothing to this'." 3

It seems also to have been the figure of Emmet which first

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1. For a reproduction of the medal see Dr A.E.J. Went, Irish Coins
   and Medals, Eason, Dublin, 1978, ills 77 and 78 and for the
   coin, ibid, illustration inside front cover.

2. Barrie Fitzpatrick, "Interview with Andy Tyrie", The Crane Bag,
   Dublin, vol 4, no 2, 1980-1, p.15.

3. Maureen Murphy, "'What stood in the Post Office/With Pearse and
   Connolly': The Case for Robert Emmet," Éire-Ireland, Irish-
   American Cultural Institute, Minnesota, vol 14, no 3, Fall
   1979, pp.142-3. Emmet also inspired Constance Markievicz's
   commitment to the cause fo Irish independence. See Jacqueline
   Van Voris, Constance de Markievicz: In the Cause of Ireland,
   University of Massachusetts, 1967, p.58.

attracted the painter Jack Yeats to an interest in the republican

cause, for two watercolours referring to the commemoration of

Emmet in the centenary celebrations of the 1798 rebellion are the

earliest references to Irish politics in the painter's work.[1]

Yeats was to leave no further images of Irish historical

heroes whether past or present, but a number of works by him did

endorse the heroic, sacrificial theme, in an indirect yet influen-

tial fashion. His early drawings and prints of peasants of the

West of Ireland, with their emphasis on a fierce, feckless, indepen-

dent existence, provided an enormously powerful summary of Irish

rebelliousness and nonconformity, widely disseminated through fre-

quently republished book illustrations and prints (ill 257). His

late paintings took up the same theme in a slightly different

fashion. Totally unable to accept the political compromise of 1921,

he retreated into a highly personal individual world, his own "real

Ireland", in which private heroes moved through idyllic dream-like

landscapes, painted with flying impasto and soaring colour.[2] And in

one particular series of pictures on the theme of the rose, he seems

to have merged private and public meanings in a celebration of

heroic failure.

The rose was a symbol of blood-sacrifice and of life rising

from death much favoured by the leaders of 1916,[3] and indeed by

the painter's brother, the poet W.B. Yeats.[4] It appears to have been

used by the artist with this meaning in his early painting

1. A watercolour of a figure dressed as Emmet taking part in the
   Sligo celebrations of the 1798 rebellion is reproduced in
   the Jack B. Yeats centenary exhibition catalogue, p.29 and
   another dating from approximately 1900 and showing an old
   cottage interior with a print of Emmet over the hearth is
   illustrated in Crookshank and Glin, The Painters of Ireland,
   p.284.
2. See Hilary Pyle, "Fine Days", Hibernia, Dublin, 7 Aug 1971, p.
   13.
3. See above, pp. 170-171.
4. See de Breffny et al, op cit, pp.200-201.

AN ISLAND HORSEMAN
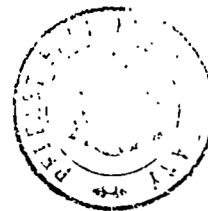
257. Jack B. Yeats/Illustration in J.M. Synge, The
     Aran Islands, Maunsel, Dublin, 1907, opposite
     p. 164/actual size

commemorating the tragic deaths at Bachelor's Walk in 1913.[1] Now

he employed it with a more personal significance, in works like

This Grand Conversation was under the Rose, (ill 258).

> "According to James White, he painted this picture after
> an Arts Club dinner where his colleagues had presented
> his wife with a paper rose, and had indicated by their
> eulogies of his work that they did not understand it at
> all. He returned home determined to paint from then on
> for himself and himself alone. Thus the painting shows
> the clown (the artist) and the haute ecole rider (his
> inspiration) meeting outside the ring after the act.
> Their private life is outside the audience's experience,
> and they only meet secretly, sub rosa, under the rose
> fastened to the haute ecole rider's whip. In this way,
> Yeats shows that the true meaning of the painting is the
> artist's secret." [2]

Yeats' reputation as a major artist was not achieved until the

post-war years however, when visitors flocked to the loan exhibition

of his work in Dublin in 1945,[3] and collectors paid increasing sums

for his paintings.[4] And meanwhile more mundane records of those who

fought in 1916, and laboured to institute Ireland as a free and

independent state, were distinctly lacking, as the compilers of the

1966 exhibition celebrating the Easter Rising repeatedly lamented.[5]

William Orpen was one of the leading portrait-painters of his age,

and his obsession with self-portraits and the ugliness of his own

appearance seems to have involved an element of that ethnic self-

questioning to be found in James Barry's works. But Orpen saw his

career lying in England. This, not Irish rejection of his politi-

cal suitability, must have lain behind the lack of portraits by him

of Irish leaders of the post-1916 period. For John Lavery, who like

Orpen had made his career in England, and worked as an official

artist for the British during the First World War, painted numerous

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1. See above, p. 170.
2. Jack B. Yeats centenary exhibition catalogue, p.153.
3. 1,500 daily (Irish Art 1900-50, p.16).
4. "Jack Yeats began to achieve great importance as a painter, and
   his pictures were sold for large sums of money, sometimes
   running into thousands of pounds" (Beatrice Glenavy, 'Today
   we will only gossip, Constable, 1964, p.182).
5. Cuimhneachán 1916/Golden Jubilee of the Easter Rising (exhibition
   catalogue), National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, 1966.

258. Jack B. Yeats/This Grand Conversation was under
the Rose/ 1943/oil on canvas/14 x 21 ins (35.5 x
53.3 cms)/Private collection

portraits of this kind in the early 1920s. Roused from his usual

political lethargy by the actions of the Black and Tans, and urged

on by his politically ambitious wife, Lavery painted nearly all

those involved in the Irish Treaty negotiations, in the hopes that

his studio might provide a neutral meeting-ground for them. Most

of these works, which he later presented to the then Belfast Museum

and Art Gallery and the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin,

are pedestrian but one, the picture of the republican leader Michael

Collins in his coffin, titled Love of Ireland, was painted with

strong emotion, for Collins had become a close friend of the Laverys,

and the picture has become another icon of heroic self-sacrifice for

Ireland.[1]

Meanwhile in Ulster a very different image of leadership had

been created, the image of Edward Carson as an over life-size ora-

tor, rousing crowds to a fever-pitch of political fervour (ill

259). It was not without parallel in the South, where Joe Cash-

man's memorable photograph of the trade union leader James Larkin

has something of the same scale and crowd-holding drama of gesture,

but the political role played by Carson, the style of the sculptor

commissioned to make his statue, and its status as an open-air, pub-

lic monument in an exceedingly grandiose setting, has given it a

particular role in the ideology of loyalist Ulstermen.

Carson, as we have seen, deliberately fostered his image as an

over life-size leader, addressing jingoistic, flag-waving crowds.[2]

The sculptor chosen to commemorate him was well accustomed to convey-

ing this kind of message. A London man called L.S. Merrifield, he

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1. On this series of paintings by Lavery, see John Lavery, The Life
   of a Painter, Cassell, 1940, pp.207-217. The Collins painting
   is reproduced in de Breffny, et al, op cit, p.259.

2. See above, pp. 298-9.

Lord Carson Memorial and Northern Ireland Buildings, Stormont, Belfast.   RT.260

259. L.S. Merrifield/Sir Edward Carson/1933/Bronze/
      overall height approximately 300 ins (762.1 cms)/
      Stormont, Belfast

was chosen for the task chiefly on the strength of his war-memorials

at Lurgan and Comber, of which the one at Lurgan is exceedingly

aggressive. And the setting in which the statue was placed helped

to endorse its basic theme. Commissioned in 1926, it was erected

in 1933 and unveiled by its subject,[1] in front of the monumental

parliament buildings constructed for the new Northern Ireland state-

let established in 1921. Paid for by the British government and

costing over a million and a quarter pounds,[2] these are a vast

edifice in what can only be described as totalitarian neo-classi-

cism. The style was commonplace throughout Western Europe at the

time, being equally favoured in fascist Germany, communist Russia

and inter-war England.[3] But it fused here with the same kind of

leadership image as that previously conveyed by the Cooke statue,

identifying a public monument with a political status quo in a par-

ticularly potent fashion.[4]

Carson's statue was however the last major identity-figure

produced by artists for Ulster's Protestant community prior to the

present troubles. In contrast a number of artists continued to make

variations on the theme of heroic rebellion and failure favoured by

the Catholic community. Sean Keating, a pupil and then an assistant

of Orpen, used the bravura oil-painting technique learnt from his

mentor to make a number of paintings early in his career which showed

republican guerilla fighters in heroic groups, clutching their wea-

pons, eager for battle, sometimes with the tricolour draped beside

them.[5] These works seem to have had a measure of political influence.

Rev M. Dewar   1966

1. /Junior Orangeman's Catechism,/Question 54.

2. Anthony Cronin, "Belfast Notebook. II", The Irish Times, 10 Sept 1976, p.8.

3. Walthamstow Town Hall on the outskirts of London is a striking example.

4. Information on the Carson /statue /supplied by David Hogg of the Central Secretariat at Stormont.

5. Irish Art 1900-50, pp.41-2.

Men of the South was in the collection formed for the presidential

residence in 1942 by Douglas Hyde. And Keating himself achieved

prestige and status as an Irish artist. He taught at the Metropoli-

tan School in Dublin, represented Ireland in exhibitions abroad, and
                                          Academy
was President of the Royal Hibernian /from 1948 to 1962.

The Northern painter Gerard Dillon achieved little fame or

success during his lifetime. He was indeed an immensely prolific

and experimental artist whose work was very uneven. But amongst

all the variety three kinds of imagery stand out as of major impor-

tance to Irish Catholic traditions: these were the adaptations from

Irish High Crosses, the working class interiors, and the late scenes

of clowns and death (ill 260). In the High Cross pictures he showed

how the apparently simple gestures of their carvings could be used to

thread together widely different aspects of human behaviour with a

witty sense of ambiguity;[1] in the working-class interiors he cele-

brated the crowded richness of everyday life; and in the images of

clowns and death, he reworked the theme of heroic failure with allu-

sions to Yeats and Picasso and Chagall, but also to the bleakness

of his own life, dying of the illness which had already caused the

death of his three brothers. These same ways of handling social and

political realities were to be used by many younger artists from

Northern Ireland's Catholic community when they tried to picture the

impact of conflict on the small world in which they lived.

For it is evident that the artists working in Ulster since 1968

have received from local fine art traditions modes of political ima-

gery which differ very little from those offered by the traditions of

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1. See Christopher FitzSimon's comment on Dillon in The Irish
      Imagination, 1959-1971, (catalogue of Rosc '71 exhibition),
      Dublin 1971, p.54.
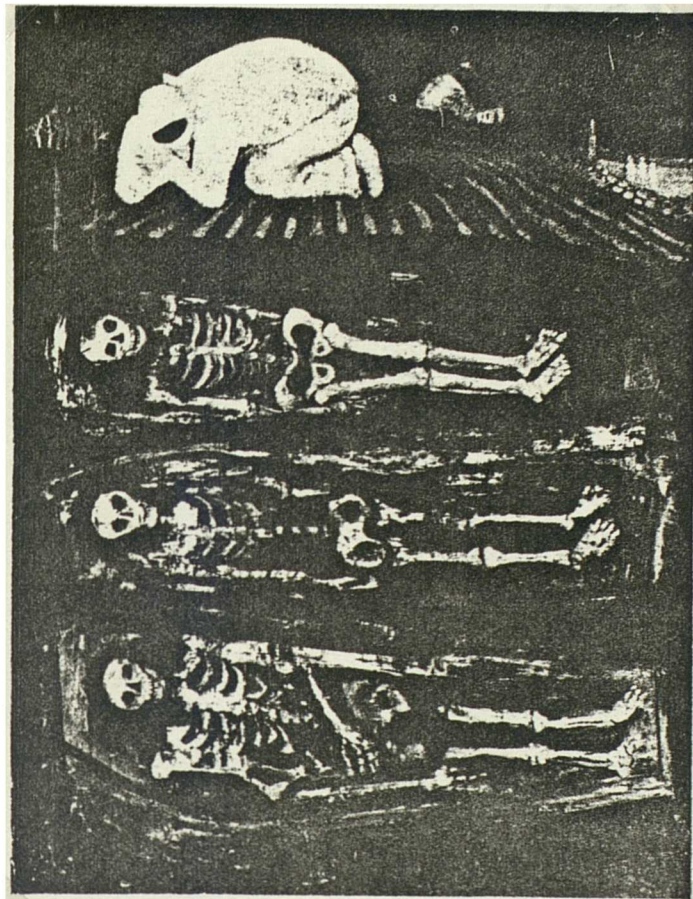
260. Gerard Dillon/The Brothers/1966/oil on panel/
48 x 36 ins (122 x 91.5 cms)/ present
location unknown

popular symbolism examined in Chapters 2-5. In the Protestant
community history paintings and portraits of prominent figures
have tended to offer, like the images associated with William
III and the Orange Order, a mode of vision which is stiff, craf-
ted, unarty, minimal, focussed on timelessness rather than his-
torical events, and on British rather than local history, little
concerned with private human relationships, involved with a
religion of public witness, and celebrating such legitimate lea-
ders of society as royalty, representatives of royalty, soldiers
businessmen and ministers of religion. In contrast in the
Catholic community, these genres of political art have tended to
emphasise, like the images associated with Mother Ireland and
the traditions of Irish nationalism and republicanism, a view of
history which is painterly, romantic, arty, complex, figurative,
focussed on events in Irish rather than British history, much
concerned with private relationships, involved with a religion
of personal devotion and celebrating suffering, heroic failures,
such as artists, musicians, peasants and clowns.

The closeness of "popular" and "fine art" traditions of poli-
tical imagery in Ulster is therefore abundantly evident. But in
order to have some idea of their functional weight in the more
general cultural history of the province it is necessary to attempt
now to set them in a wider context and to see how they have been
reinforced or eroded by art institutions in the province.

Art institutions

The traditions of history-painting and hero-figures available to
artists confronted with the present conflict in Northern Ireland
must not be over-emphasised. They existed, but, as Cyril Barrett

has rightly emphasised,[1] they have only formed only an exceedingly

small part of the output of Irish artists which, from the late

eighteenth century onwards, has consisted overwhelmingly of depic-

tions of the Irish landscape.

Moreover the artistic context within which Irish artists have

made their decisions in the handling of the Northern Ireland con-

flict does not consist solely of a heritage of local artwork. Also

crucial are the institutions in which these artists find endorse-

ment of their participation in a culturally-manifest political iden-

tity. Patronage, art education, art exhibitions, permanent collec-

tions of artworks, jobs in the artworld - all these at the time of

the outbreak of the Northern Ireland conflict were, both through

their current functioning and their past history, structures sug-

gesting to Irish artists where they belonged.

It is necessary therefore to give a brief overview of the dis-

tinctive development of such structures in Northern Ireland, with

some consideration of their location within a wider British and Irish

context. This will be seen to confirm the existence of two distinc-

tive trends in the art history of Northern Ireland already suggested

in this and earlier chapters. These are the general tendency of Irish

Catholics and nationalists to lay claim to artists in a way not paral-

leled by either Ulster Protestants or the British, and the more

specific opposition to the development of the fine arts by Belfast's

predominantly Protestant manufacturers and businessmen from the mid-

nineteenth century onwards. An exceedingly important aspect of these

linked trends was that while Irish Catholics and nationalists con-

stantly assimilated local art to wider traditions in Europe and

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1. In his "Irish Nationalism and Art 1800-1921".

America, their counterparts in Ulster's Protestant community frequently ignored or rejected such traditions.

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century the development of art-institutions in the north of Ireland was in no way greatly different from what happened in other provincial areas of Ireland, mainland Britain or indeed America. The lack of commissions for anything but portraits, the intervention of foreigners or itinerant artists, the need to fall back on other work such as acting or sign-painting, the rarity of aristocratic collectors owning works of merit from the main European traditions, the almost total absence of teachers of art - such handicaps to the development of local artistic traditions were as commonplace at this time in Cornwall or Pennsylvania or Cork or Scotland or Wales, as they were in Ulster.[1]

It was in the nineteenth century that art institutions in Ulster began to differ in important respects from those in similar provincial areas. In part this was clearly due to the province's location within the political structure of Ireland. Dublin was the capital of the country, and despite the act of Union in 1800 it continued to receive from the British government, as well as local nationalists, the artistic endowments appropriate to such status. It was inthe streets of Dublin that public monuments to English and Irish figures were erected;[2] it was in Dublin that the Royal Dublin Society, the Royal Irish Academy and the Royal Hibernian Academy provided the Irish artworld respectively with art-education, learned

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1. On provincial art elsewhere during this period see: American Art 1750-1800,Towards Independence, (exhibition catalogue) Yale University Art Gallery, 1976; Trevor Fawcett, The Rise of English Provincial Art, Oxford, 1974; Donald Read, The English Provinces ca 1760-1960, Edward Arnold, 1974; Scottish Masters (exhibition catalogue) Ulster Museum, 1957-8; and Pride of Possession (exhibition catalogue) Welsh Arts Council, 1975.

2. See above, pp. 65-67 and pp. 742-748.

research on the country's history and monuments and a major

exhibiting society. And it was in Dublin that local moves to

establish the National Museum, the National College of Art and

the National Gallery were approved and given financial support

by the British government in 1864.[1] Not all of these developments

had a great impact on the development of cultural identities in

Ireland. As we have seen the National Museum has served as little

more than a dusty repository for a sometimes strange selection of

objects from Ireland's past, and the deplorable state of the

National College of Art until recent years rendered it singularly

unattractive to would-be Irish artists. The establishment of the

National Gallery of Ireland was crucial however. Generously

endowed by both government and private funds and gifts from its

earliest days, controlled by an admirably-constituted board of

governors, including practising artists, and served by a number of

fine directors, this institution rapidly acquired superb collec-

tions, displayed in an elegant and spacious building in such a way

that some of the best Irish art could be seen in the context of

rich European traditions.

The situation in Belfast was very different. Not only was the

city limited by its provincial statue to municipal rather than

national commissions and art organisations; the individual and cor-

porate meanness of its city fathers also ensured that the local

development of those commissions and organisations lagged far behind

1. On the establishment of the National College of Art see Strickland op cit
vol 2, p.590 ff. On the history of the National Gallery of Ireland,
see 1864-1964, Centenary Exhibition (catalogue), National
Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, 1964. On the history of the National
Museum see Science & Art 1877-1977 (exhibition catalogue), National
Museum, Dublin, 1977.

what was happening in other provincial cities in the rest of Ireland and mainland Britain. Whereas local politicians and industrialists were honoured with statues in Bradford from the 1850s onwards,[1] painters of industrial scenes were patronised by local aristocracy and manufacturers in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Sheffield in the mid-nineteenth century[2] and notable collections of Pre-Raphaelite works were formed by businessmen in Britain's industrial midlands, Belfast had its three solitary statues of local figures in the nineteenth century, and only one collector of any note, Francis McCracken, an early patron of the Pre-Raphaelites.[3]

The divergence between the support given to art institutions by industrialists and businessmen in Belfast, and by their contemporaries in other provincial cities in England and Ireland was even more striking. In Liverpool the 1870s witnessed the donation of an art gallery to the city by Walker's the brewers, and the establishment by the Corporation of a Fine Arts Committee which sponsored a large annual Autumn exhibition, and bought works for a permanent collection.[4] In Cork the Municipal School of Art was established in 1850, supported by the city's ratepayers from the mid-1850s, and provided in 1884 by Mr W.H. Crawford with a fine extension including

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1. A.H. Robinson, Bradford's Public Statues, Bradford Art Galleries & Museums n.d.

2. At Newcastle William Bell Scott painted his mural of Iron and Coal for the Trevelyan family in 1861 (See Francis D. Klingender, Art and the Industrial Revolution, Paladin, 1968, p. 189 and ill 112), and at Sheffield there is a very interesting collection of artwork for and about the local steel industry produced between 1850 and 1875. (See 1850-1875, Art & Industry in Sheffield, Sheffield City Art Galleries, n.d.).

3. Hewitt, op cit, p.39 and S. Shannon Millin, Art in Belfast, lecture at the Ulster Arts Club on 11 Feb 1903, reprinted Northern Whig, Belfast, 12, Feb 1903, pp.8-9.

4. John Willett, Art in a City, Methuen, 1967, p.9 and p.41.

an art gallery.[1] In Belfast however the city's school of art

established in 1850, although in many ways successful, failed to

persuade the Town Council to grant it rate support, and received

little backing from local industrialists. It closed its doors in

1858, and although it was revived again in 1870, the first nig-

gardly rate support was only forthcoming in 1891,[2] and as late as

the 1930s it remained the only College of Art in the British Isles

which was treated as no more than a subordinate department of the

College of Technology.[3] Similarly it was only in 1890 that a muni-

cipal art gallery of any description was opened in Belfast. Ori-

ginally installed, along with the Belfast Museum, in rooms in the

public library, of which it was   a sub-department, it was only

given independent status in 1909, and a proper home in 1929. More-

over the new government of the Northern Ireland statelet instituted

in 1921 appears to have removed from the museum massive funds to

which it was entitled as the result of the financial settlement made

at the time of partitition.[4] The details of this misappropriation

are too complex to go into here, but it seems that the Ministry of

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1. *1724-1969, Scoil Ealaine Chathardha Craford*, historical booklet
   produced by the Crawford Municipal School of Art, Cork.

2. The Corporation grants between 1891 and 1901 ranged from £100
   to £250 pa.

3. On the general establishment of government art schools in Bri-
   tain see Quentin Bell, *Schools of Design*, Routledge & Kegan
   Paul, 1963. On the history of the Belfast School of Art see
   typescript in the library of the Belfast College of Techno-
   logy; K. Jamison, *Retrospective Exhibition of the Belfast Art
   College Association, 1849-1960* (commemorative booklet);
   Annual Reports of the Belfast School of Design, 1850-1854
   and 1873; William Gray, *Notes on the Educational Agencies for
   promoting Science and Art in Belfast during the past fifty
   years*, Northern Whig, Belfast, 1904; Belfastiensis, "The Old
   Belfast Governmental School of Design", *Belfast News Letter*,
   22 Jan 1907; Souvenir booklet issued at the opening of the
   Ulster College of Art and Design in 1970; Government of Nor-
   thern Ireland / Ministries of Education & Commerce, *Report of the Committee on Industrial Art*, Cmd
   169, HMSO, Belfast, 1936; and Strickland, op cit, pp.652-4.

4. The controversy was widely reported in Belfast newspapers in the
   1930s. See for example, "An Artless Confession", *Irish News*,
   7 Feb 1930, p.4. ; "Mr Kyle corrects Mr Pollock"; *Irish News*, 8 Feb 1930, p. 5; "Colwyn Award Fund", *Northern
   Whig*, 26 March 1935, p. 7 ; and "Colwyn Committee Award", *Bel-
   fast News Letter*, 29 March 1935, p.9.

Finance concealed knowledge of the funds from the Museum, that as
much as £100,000 may have been involved, and that the Ministry's
refusal to allow the Museum access to a reasonable proportion of
this sum helped to delay the building of the much-needed extension
to the Museum for a further twenty years.[1]

Not only were Belfast's city fathers slow to back local art-
commissions and institutions, they also severely limited the kind
of art made available through commissions and institutions. Godli-
ness, loyalty, political belligerence and industrial achievement
have remained the main messages of the city's public works of art;[2]
until well into this century the chief function of the school of art
was to service the local linen and printing industries; and the art
gallery was to endure a long history of rejection of proposed pur-
chases because they were supposedly too modern,[3] or too indecent,[4]
or not sufficiently loyal to traditional Williamite iconography.[5]

Only very occasionally did a temporary exhibition bring to the
Northern Ireland public the kind of foreign or modern works so lack-
ing in the Art Gallery's permanent collections. In 1906 local art
societies, with the assistance of the notable Anglo-Irish art col-
lector Hugh Lane succeeded in bringing to Belfast a superb exhibi-
tion of works by English, American and French artists, ranging from

1. Noel Nesbit, A Museum in Belfast, Ulster Museum, Belfast, 1979,
     pp.23-30.
2. See above, pp. 738-741 and pp. 756-757, and Brett, op cit, passim.
3. It appears to have been for this reason that the purchase for
     the gallery by the Haverty Trustees of a fine Jack Yeats
     painting of a Dublin street, titled Morning in the City was
     rejected by the city councillors. The picture was given
     instead to the National Gallery of Ireland in 1941. See
     Hewitt, op cit, p.79.
4. In the 1930s Wilson Steer's Mother and Child, bought for the
     Museum by the Contemporary Art Society, offended various
     elderly ladies, including the wife of the Town Clerk, on
     account of its nudity, and the then curator somewhat cravenly
     persuaded a London dealer to exchange it for an inoffensive
     landscape (Hewitt, loc cit).
5. See above, p. 99.

Burne-Jones and Millet to Degas, Renoir and Vuillard.[1] This was

followed by Japanese prints in 1908, a further Lane Loan in 1913,

and an interesting Contemporary Art Society show of English pain-

ters in the same year. But, apart from a Rodin exhibition in

1932-3,[2] and a show in 1935 by the English Unit One group, which

included John Armstrong, Paul Nash, Edward Wadsworth, Ben Nichol-

son, Edward Burra, Barbara Hepworth and Henry Moore, no further

opportunities for seeing foreign or modern works of quality were

provided until the 1960s, when the newly-titled Ulster Museum

began to acquire major pieces by modern European, English and Ameri-

can artists, and to import temporary exhibitions of their work.[3]

(The local Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts,

established in 1943, and transformed in 1961 into the present Arts

Council of Northern Ireland, concentrated on mounting shows by local

artists). Ulster artists who have wished to see old master paint-

ings, or foreign and modern works of any quality other than through

reproductions, have had to travel outside the province.

The dearth of good temporary exhibitions in Northern Ireland

in this century is not unusual for a provincial area - but its lack

until very recently of a permanent collection showing anything more

than a poor selection of local works is virtually unparalleled. So

too is the extent to which its exhibiting societies and commerical

galleries were dominated by local industrial interests. As Martyn

1. For a fuller description of this exhibition see John Hewitt,
   Colin Middleton, Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast,
   1976, p.8.

2. Nesbit, op cit, p.37.

3. Such as the Paul Klee show in 1963, and the Pop Art exhibition
   in 1964.

Anglesea has recently made clear,[1] between the 1870s and the 1890s

Ulster art societies were almost entirely composed of members of the

local printing industries, and it was the printing firm of Marcus

Ward which launched the best-known commercial gallery of this period,

Rodman's, which flourished from the 1870s to the 1930s.[2] Some feel-

ing for the style of works it displayed can be gained from the

following report on an exhibition there, in Nomad's Weekly, in 1912.

> "There are two Edgar Bundy pictures of the Restoration
> period, 'The Warrant' and 'The Arrest', full of colour
> that immediately impresses the visitor. Then never,
> perhaps, has the Dutch School of painting of so great
> merit and of such high standard been available in types
> of life and still life of wonderful cleverness. Mr J.W.
> Carey has an excellent work in 'In 1850', and Hans Iten,
> another Belfast artist, has no less than three pictu-
> res, all showing big advances. Still another Belfast-
> man is Arthur D. M'Cormick, R.I, whose 'In the Captain's
> Room' is a delight. Mildred Buller, A.R.W.S. is at her
> best in 'In the Lap of Luxury', and Briton Riviere's
> 'There are none so deaf as those who won't hear' - a
> snappy terrier barking at two indifferent collies - is
> quite equal to anything he has attempted so far.
>
> There are several choice works by Yeend King, V.P.
> R.I., and W.P. Frith, R.A.; while 'Afternoon Tea' by
> Georges Croegaert, must have admirers from its dainti-
> ness and exactitude. Pictures of Venice and Cairo are
> particularly fine. In fact the entire exhibition of 211
> works is a very notable advance even on the exceedingly
> high standard Mr Rodman has accustomed us to." 3

From the early years of this century Northern Ireland artists

did begin to break away from the dominance of illustrative work

naturally associated with the printing firms, and to group together

to show paintings and sculptures aspiring to participation in inter-

national art trends.[4] But most of the best of them from this period

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1. In his The Royal Ulster Academy of Arts.

2. See Sam Leighton, "Reminiscences of Local Art", Northern Whig,
   Belfast, 12 Nov 1931, p. 11.

3. Nomad's Weekly, 26 Oct 1912, p.7.

4. Anglesea op cit, passim and Hewitt, Art in Ulster: 1, passim.

until the 1950s left the province, generally to study in Paris or London, and then to return to a base in Dublin, from where they would make frequent excursions to the West of Ireland, to France, and in the post-war years, Spain.

There were various reasons why they left. There was the lack of a good local art collection already alluded to, the stifling puritanism of Northern Ireland, most eloquently described in the autobiography of Paul Henry,[1] the awareness of exciting new developments in Paris, the appeal to artists from both the Protestant and the Catholic community of the West of Ireland scenery and peasants celebrated by members of the Celtic Revival, and above all the failure of Ulster to <u>claim</u> its artists after partition in the way that the new Southern state increasingly began to do.

The establishment of the Northern Ireland statelet did occasion a small measure of feeling that the province should assert the existence of a distinctive group of Ulster artists. From about 1919 there were moves to have the Belfast Art Society renamed the Ulster Academy, in line with already existing Royal Hibernian, Scottish, and Cambrian Academies.[2] Indeed a very forcible statement on this issue was made in 1928 when the painter T. Eyre Macklin claimed that

> "Ulster people had a character peculiar to themselves, and their art was different in expression to that of other people. Now that Ulster was an independent province, with its own Government, it was essential that it should have its own academy by which it would build up its own tradition ... such as had been so commendably done by the Royal Academies in England, Scotland, Wales and the Irish Free State. It would give art a recognised status in Ulster, and would make it an integral part of its national life." 3

1. Paul Henry, An Irish Portrait, Batsford, 1951, pp.6-8.
2. Anglesea, op cit, p.4 and p.56.
3. Quoted ibid, p.72.

The Belfast Art Society duly changed its name in 1930 to the

Ulster Academy, and in 1950 it received permission to add the pre-

fix "Royal" to its title.[1] This latter move was linked to the mood

of celebration and cultural reassertion surrounding the Festival of

Britain in 1951. Other actions at this time, notably the commis-

sioning of the John Luke mural for the City Hall[2] and the publica-

tion by CEMA of The Arts in Ulster[3] with a chapter on local paint-

ing by John Hewitt, were evidence of some measure of institutional

recognition of Ulster artists. But who exactly those artists were,

and in what precisely their definition as "Ulster" lay, remained a

matter for debate.[4] And although certain Ulster artists, notably

William Conor,[5] found it possible to live and practise art in the

province, and obtained widespread public recognition there within

their lifetime, for many others recognition and a sense of belonging

lay south of the Irish border. It has not been impossible for the

Ulster artist to succeed in English art circles. William Scott and

F.E. Mcwilliam, two emigrés from the province's Protestant community,

have both done so. But, particularly in the post-war years, it has

been easier for Northern Ireland painters and sculptors to exhibit

and sell their works in the smaller, less hotly competitive artworld

centred on Dublin.

It is important to stress that this was not the case immediately

after partition. The meanness towards the arts of the newly-estab-

lished Irish state in the 1920s and the 1930s was legendary, and is

1. Ibid, p.76 and p.111.
2. Above, pp. 712-713.
3. Edited by Sam Hanna Bell, Nesca A. Robb & John Hewitt, and pub-
lished by George Harrap.
4. Anglesea, op cit, pp.82-4.
5. See above, pp. 708-712.

chronicled for today's reader in the various reports by Thomas Bod-
kin, director of the National Gallery of Ireland from 1932-1935.[1]
Moreover this period was also characterised by a narrow-minded
nationalism which led to the removal from Dublin streets of various
public monuments associated with former British rule, notably the
statues of George I and Queen Victoria. And in terms of education
and jobs Ulster artists from both communities have generally turned
from the 1920s to the present day to the improving facilities in
their own province, and in the English art-colleges, rather than to
the ill-organised and under-financed system of art-education avail-
able south of the border.

Nevertheless from the 1940s onwards it was the southern state
which offered the Ulster artists recognition. The newly-organised
Irish Exhibition of Living Art and the revived Oireachtas show were
open-entry exhibitions which from 1943 onwards challenged the cause
of Irish modern art in a way no northern exhibition did until the
Arts Council of Northern Ireland's Open Painting exhibitions in the
mid-1960s. Commercial galleries selling modern works like Victor
Waddington, the Dawson and the Hendriks were opening in Dublin in
the 1940s and 1950s and stayed open. They did not appear in Belfast
until Nelson Bell launched his gallery in 1964, to be followed in
1969 by Tom Caldwell and then by others. Indeed selling modern Irish
works remained very difficult in the north until the late 1960s.
According to a present employee of the Arts Council of Northern Ire-
land, very few works sold from their long series of shows by local
artists in the 1950s, and a number of artists have commented on the
fact that when the Irish Exhibitions of Living Art were shown in

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1. See his The Importance of Art to Ireland, public lecture deli-
    vered at Trinity College, Dublin on 24 June 1935, and printed
    At the Sign of Three Candles, Dublin 1935, and his Report on
    the Arts in Ireland, Stationery Office, Dublin, 1949.

Belfast as well as Dublin in the 1960s, £2,000-£3,000 of paintings might be sold in the Southern capital, while in the North purchases rarely totalled more than £20-£30. Not surprisingly therefore Northern artists from both communities chose to exhibit frequently in the Republic from the 1940s onwards.[1]

Not only could Northern Ireland artists show and sell their work more easily in Dublin during this period. They could also see their work further endorsed by acquisition for the sizeable collections built up since the 1950s by such state and industrial organisations as the Bank of Ireland, the P.J. Carroll tobacco company, Coras Iompair Eireann (the state transport body), Great Southern Hotels, Guinness Breweries, and the Irish Hospitals Trust. There was virtually no equivalent to this kind of patronage in Northern Ireland.

And finally Northern artists could see themselves claimed by art institutions and politicians in the Republic as representatives of Irish culture, and thereby accorded considerably higher status than was possible within the Ulster and British context, for all the endeavours of bodies like the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. As we have seen, Irish nationalist politicians from Edmund Burke to the leaders of 1916 were frequently involved with the arts, and aware of their potential in endorsing Ireland's claim to independent status. And despite the meanness of the Irish state towards the arts in its early years, its politicians were quick to deploy young and avant-garde Irish artists as its cultural champions in the international arena. From the 1930s such artists were employed to decorate pavilions in international fairs and to represent their country in

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1. See the summary biographies contributed by Theo Snoddy to Mike Catto, Art in Ulster: 2.

international exhibitions. Such opportunities were also available during this period to Ulster artists in the British context; W.R. Gordon painted the decorative friezes for the Ulster Pavilion in the British Empire Exhibition of 1924, and Morris Harding (ironically of English extraction), assisted by Poppy Mollen and John Luke, was responsible for a 150ft frieze for the Ulster Government's pavilion at the Glasgow Empire Exhibition in 1938.[1] But in the postwar period there was no equivalent to the spate of exhibitions of Irish artists sent abroad from the Republic,[2] to which Northern Ireland artists were invited to contribute. Early in 1974 an established artist from Northern Ireland's Protestant community, who had lived and worked in the province all her life, and shown her work with equal success in England and the Republic, commented to me:

> "My husband and I were included in a touring exhibition
> run by the Southern Arts Council some years ago, toured
> all over America and Canada and so on, and they were
> quite happy to claim us as Irish artists. Up here they
> made no protest at all. There was no protest when
> people like George Campbell and Dan O'Neill went off to
> Dublin. And if we were to say tonight we're going down
> to the boat, go off, never come back, they'd probably
> give us our fare and say cheerio you know. No claiming
> of artists here, none." 3

This claiming of artists by the Irish Republic reached its peak in the late 1960s, with the heightening of nationalist consciousness at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 rising. Artists from Northern Ireland's Catholic community contributed paintings to the exhibition of modern works commemorating the Rising;[4] in 1967 they and their Protestant counterparts saw the first of the periodic

1. Hewitt, Art in Ulster;1, p.113 and p.160.
2. Such as the Exhibition of Contemporary Irish Painting, toured in the United States and Canada in 1950, and Contemporary Irish Art, shown at the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth in 1953.
3. Conversation, 13 January 1974.
4. Cuimhneachán, Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin, 1966.

Rosc festivals bring together exhibitions of Celtic artifacts,

modern international art and modern Irish art in a fashion which

emphasised the status of Irish cultural traditions and their loca-

tion within a wider context; and in 1969 they were to witness Charles

Haughey, then Minister of Finance, introducing a scheme whereby

painters, sculptors, writers and composers working in Ireland were

to be free of tax on all earnings from work of cultural merit.

Meanwhile developments in Northern Ireland were further erod-

ing local artists' sense of being claimed by their native province.

The numerous jobs created by a rapid expansion of art-education in

the province were principally filled by Englishmen, together with

a small number of artists from the Protestant community.[1] And

simultaneously the receipt of vastly increased grants by the Arts

Council of Northern Ireland and the Ulster Museum seem to have

induced a feeling of vertigo, countered by a recourse to a process

of professionalisation which involved calling in outside experts,

whether to judge the Arts Council's painting competitions or to

assess the financial needs of the Ulster Museum.[2] Longstanding

feelings of inferiority were reinforced in the artists of Protestant

extraction while their Catholic counterparts, some of them already

antagonised by what they believed to have been blatant discrimina-

tion against them during their studies at the then Belfast College

1. See the summary biographies provided by Theo Snoddy for Catto,
   op cit.
2. There is a very notable change in tone in the Arts Council of
   Northern Ireland annual reports in the mid-1960s. In the
   1964-5 report the introduction conveys an exuberant sense of
   expanding possibilities, but by 1966-7 it was making a some-
   what panicky insistence on the need to raise standards in
   order to make proper use of the increased grant. For the out-
   side assessment of the Museum, see Government of Northern Ire-
   land, Ministry of Finance, Museums in Northern Ireland, Report
   of the Standing Commission on Museums and Galleries, Cmd. 488,
   HMSO, Belfast, Dec 1965.

of Art[1] felt their hopes of local employment and recognition ser-

iously undermined.

It is impossible to typify the range of feelings about the

political status of their work experienced by Northern Ireland

artists in the period immediately preceding the outbreak of the

present troubles in the province. However some sense of their

nature and complexity can be given by describing the relevant

experiences and attitudes of two painters native to the province

who in 1968 had reached the age of thirty. One, from the Catholic

community, believed that he had been the object of discrimination

both during his studies at the Belfast College of Art and subsequently.

A major commission had been given to him by a Catholic church in

Ulster - yet he rejected his Catholic upbringing. He had contribu-

ted a painting to the Dublin show in 1966 commemorating the 1916

rising - but he had been appalled by the subservience displayed at

its opening to politicians and public figures who had nothing to do

with the ideals of that rebellion. His counterpart from the Pro-

testant community trained as an art-teacher and was bitterly resent-

ful of the English dominance of the best art-teaching jobs in the

province. He was deeply opposed to Catholicism and its influence in

Ireland, yet he felt that the strongest roots of his own art were in

the ambiguous, "natural", world of the country's Catholic pre-planter

population, not the neat, mechanized geometry of his own forefathers,

and he was strongly aware that 90% of his works were bought by members

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1. Two artists from the Catholic community trained at the college in
   the early 1960s have given me long and detailed accounts of
   such incidents as examination submissions mislaid, or marked
   against the tutor's recommendation. Their contemporaries from
   the Protestant community assert however that such incidents
   were commonplace for many students and not the result of sec-
   tarian discrimination.

of the Catholic community. The tensions felt by these two artists in relation to their political and cultural identity were not untypical in Northern Ireland during this period, and they seem to have been heightened rather than lessened by the generally good relations between artists from the two communities in Ulster, and the growing cross-border co-operation between institutions like the Arts Councils of Northern Ireland and the Republic.

For it must be remembered that virtually all the cultural institutions outside the professional artworld in Ireland have reinforced rather than eroded the sense of separate Protestant and Catholic cultural identities. Artists in the province may train, exhibit, work and socialise in a manner which takes no account of political or religious divisions. But during their formative years at the very least, the vast majority of them will have attended different schools, learnt different kinds of art,[1] studied different histories with different images of their cultural heritage,[2] attended different churches and chapels with different forms of religious imagery, lived in homes with different pictures on the walls, seen different newspapers, and been involved in sporting and cultural groups employing different badges and emphasising different traditions. The extent to which local artworks relating to Northern Ireland's present conflict have been conditioned by this cultural dichotomy will become apparent in the two sections which follow.

1. See below, pp. 849-850.

2. It remains true that most Catholic schoolchildren in the province learn Irish history, often with well-illustrated textbooks produced in the Republic, while their Protestant counterparts learn British history. Recently I was visited by an intelligent and inquiring sixth-former from a prestigious Protestant school which educates Northern Ireland's leading businessmen and civil servants. This young man had no idea who Wolfe Tone was, and was unaware that the United Irishmen were largely composed of Ulster Presbyterians.

Catholic views?

In the two sections which follow, I shall be looking at images of
the Northern Ireland conflict produced by artists from the province's
two communities. I shall do so by focussing on four main turning-
points in their production. These are the decision to depict the
Northern Ireland conflict; the selection of actual subject-matter;
the choice of imagery employed; and the option for a particular
style of presentation. My aim will be to establish the effect on
those decisions of the political and social situation of the
artist, of local visual traditions, and of the international art
conventions prevailing during the past thirteen years. In doing
this I will not be seeking to present images of the troubles by Nor-
thern Ireland artists as schematic products of these forces, but
rather as evolved works by individual creators, making conscious and
unconscious choices, affected by these factors, among others. I shall
be trying in fact to set these images within some of their most
important, though by no means their only contexts, rather than leav-
ing them as disembodied encounters between art and politics or art
and violence.

To enumerate here the possible social and political positions
open to artists from Northern Ireland's Catholic community between
1968 and 1981, or the international aesthetic conventions available
to them during these years would be over-cumbersome. These possibi-
lities, and the choices made from them during the past thirteen years
by artists from Northern Ireland's Catholic community, will therefore
be allowed to emerge from the discussion which follows.

The way in which images and styles have been made available by
local visual traditions during this period is however a major theme

of this thesis. It is as well therefore to summarise here the symbols and stylistic characteristics which have been established as dominant in the traditional imagery of Northern Ireland's two communities. In Chapters 3 and 5, Mother Ireland figures, green symbolism of various kinds, harps and Celtic imagery were established as some of the main themes traditional in the visual imagery of the province's Catholics. The extent to which they have been employed by Northern Ireland artists making works relating to the present troubles was also discussed, and it became apparent that Mother Ireland figures and Celtic imagery have both had a strong impact on the troubles works of artists from the Catholic community. In the opening sections of this chapter the significant involvement of local artistic traditions with the political aspirations of Irish Catholics has been examined, and the theme of single, heroic, suffering figures, pitted against social and political conventions, has been seen to be closely linked with that involvement.

In addition it has become clear in the course of these various analyses that the traditional imagery of Northern Ireland Catholics has exhibited certain marked stylistic characteristics. It is ambiguous; shape-shifting; all-embracing; much concerned with art; strongly figurative; often related to the devotional imagery of the Roman Catholic Church; and private.

In Chapters 2 and 4 it has been established that images of William III and the symbolism of the Orange Order have played a major role in the popular imagery of the Province's Protestant community, although they have been themes usually avoided by that community's fine artists. In the opening sections of this chapter the general lack of fine art celebrations of the history and heroes of the

Protestant tradition has also been established. Where such cele-

brations have been made, they have tended to focus on British

rather than Ulster history, and on such legitimate leaders of

society as royalty, representatives of royalty, soldiers and minis-

ters of religion.

Stylistic characteristics peculiar to the visual imagery of the

Protestant community have also emerged from these discussions. Such

imagery is usually stiff, crafted, unarty, minimal, focussed on

timelessness rather than historical events, little concerned with

private human relationships, and involved with a religion of pub-

lic witness. It will be a major concern of the following two sec-

tions to establish whether these two sets of symbolic themes and

stylistic characteristics have influenced the troubles works of Nor-

thern Ireland artists.

One of the first one-man exhibitions in Northern Ireland of

works about the troubles by a professional artist was George Camp-

bell's show at Tom Caldwell's gallery in Belfast in the summer of

1973. Campbell came from a mixed background, but he settled in the

Irish Republic quite early in his career and his paintings were

strongly rooted in the visual traditions of the nationalist, Catho-

lic community. He was born in Arklow in Co Wicklow, and schooled

in Dublin, but spent all his school holidays and early working years

in Belfast. His family uneasily spanned Ireland's political and

religious divisions. His mother was from the South, and his father

from Armagh. In later life he talked of the tensions of this time

of:

> "holidays spent in trying again and again to re-enter the
> family circle, each of us with sets of speech symbols
> developed along fairly dissimlar lines, different histo-
> ries even...

> Somewhere along the line I was trying to come to terms
> with two sets of ideas and a period of confusion set
> in." 1

These family tensions, and experience of Ireland's earlier

troubles in the 1920s and 1930s, drove him away from the complexi-

ties of politics and religion into private emotions and the world

of art.

> "I still like frequent escapes into myself and away
> from the brou-ha-ha. And there was plenty of brou-
> ha-ha, to put it mildly, in those days - what with
> the recurrent troubles and unemployment, groups
> running, shouting, throwing, soldiers and guns - all
> bewildering to a small boy, or adult for that matter.
> I still fail to understand the political maze or
> religious bigotry.
>
> As an artist I'll settle for the tiniest of little
> Willie's drawings or little Mary's first piano
> exercises, rather than all the political or religious
> strife in the world." 2

It was in fact violence which drove Campbell to take up paint-

ing, but not the violence associated with the Irish question.

> "When war came, the blitz in Belfast and the resulting
> desolation, both in human and material terms, had a
> traumatic effect on me, and I found myself wanting to
> recall or perhaps exorcise scenes and emotions that
> had made such an impact one me. And so I began to
> make drawings - discovered that they were not too bad
> - and just went on from there. It was not a conscious
> decision, just a point when my life changed direction." 3

The same desire to exorcise the impact of violence drove Camp-

bell to make paintings relating to the present troubles in Northern

Ireland, but only after a lengthy pause. He held back because of

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1. George Campbell, "Self Portrait", Aquarius, Benburb, Co Tyrone, no 6, 1973, p.27.

2. Ibid, p.27.

3. "Profile : George Campbell," Art about Ireland, Dublin, vol 1 no 1 Feb-March 1979, p.9.

his old wariness of the unhappy complexities of Irish conflict, and because, like Edward Delaney,[1] he believed that Irish history was cyclical and therefore his responses to the events of the late 1960s was simply a weary "here we go again."[2] Eventually however the cumulative impact of the Northern violence drove him to make paintings of it. He had by this time been living in Dublin for many years but he had firsthand experience of what was going on in Ulster, as the result of visits to friends and relations there. Moreover the media imagery of the conflict made a very strong impression on him. He was deeply impressed by Clive Limpkin's photographic record of the early riots in Derry, in The Battle of Bogside,[3] but it was to television pictures that he reacted with the greatest fury. He felt like going out into the backyard and shouting, and saw art as a means of coping with both the external violence and the violence within himself. As before he found himself strongly opposed to politicians. "An artist is not a thinking animal", he said to me, and the closest he came to a political observation was a declaration of support for the UWC strike.[4] His response was almost entirely emotional.

When rendering these emotional responses to the Northern conflict into paint, Campbell intended to create something separate from his other work. He wanted to stop the aesthetic getting in between himself and what he was doing, and to look at the very visible violence of this period with a cold journalistic eye. He could not however escape his own artistic nature. For most of his career he had concentrated on two themes beloved of Irish artists of the

1. See above, p. 529.
2. Conversation with George Campbell, 26 August 1974.
3. Penguin, 1972.
4. Conversation with George Campbell, 26 August 1974.

Catholic tradition, landscape and music, dividing his time between

Southern Ireland and Spain. In all his work there was the sense of

drama, so characteristic of both those countries.

> "It was immediately striking that he never painted
> ordinary people or dull places. They did not catch
> his eye. He had the reporter's sense for the vivid,
> the unexpected and the intense." 1

This sense of excitement was often conveyed in paintings of

sombre intensity, "dark with flashing lights, little climaxes that

emerge like fireworks in the night."[2]

This Spanish-Irish drama of theme and style came out very

strongly in Campbell's paintings of the Northern conflict. They

fall into three groups. The first group consisted of a number of

still lives. (Campbell later said "It was the pervading, horrific

still-life atmosphere, the almost night-marish quality of it all

that I had to comment on").[3] He painted the disturbing things he

had seen for himself in Belfast, burnt-out cars and buses, boarded-

up windows, and the black mark left on the pavement by an incendiary

bomb, which became for him a symbol of the negation of the situation.

In his next group of works, Campbell went on to depict figures

of soldiers and policemen. His aim was a certain coldness, a non-

dramatic non-aesthetic view, akin to journalism. Like many Irish-

men he felt that the English were a cold race, and he wanted these

men to look like robots or clockwork figures. It was an aim he

could not achieve. The soldiers are duly anonymous with their plas-

tic masks and shields, but they loom out of black and red murk with

all the portentous intensity of Campbell's habitual dark romanticism

(ill 261). And it is this same romanticism which is the keynote of

his last group of troubles paintings, a series of portraits of the

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1. James White, foreword to a booklet on George Campbell by Eric
   Newton, n.d., p.5.
2. Newton, op cit, p.28.
3. "Profile : George Campbell", p.9.

261. George Campbell/Belfast riot scene/ca 1973/oil
on board/30 x 37 ins (76.2 x 94 cms)/Students
Union, Queen's University, Belfast/Photo Sean
Watters

people involved in the troubles, bewildered old women, a tarred and feathered man depicted as a suffering Christ-figure, a small child with an old man's face.

Forty of these paintings were shown in Tom Caldwell's Belfast gallery in May 1973. Twenty-five of them sold, the last group of portraits proving particularly popular. But the purchasers were, according to Caldwell, mostly Campbell collectors or people who thought they should be buying this kind of work, and the general response, particularly amongst artists in the North, was one of suspicion. One young artist from the Catholic community for example, saw the works as "intensely contrived." Others described them as slick, and felt that Campbell was reaping healthy profits from the sufferings of others. (In fairness it should be pointed out that some of the proceeds from the exhibition went to the Irish Red Cross). To a certain extent this critical response was clearly rooted in resentment of the successful emigré artist, a resentment no doubt increased by Campbell's refusal to attend the opening of his show. In part too it may have derived from suspicion of picture-manufacture, given Campbell's well-known belief that painting was a job to be carried out every day on a nine-to-five basis. But in part it derived from an antipathy to Campbell's romanticism. And the net result of this general Northern antagonism to Campbell's paintings was to make it more difficult for subsequent artists to make and exhibit works on this theme.[1]

Campbell's social and political position clearly had a crucial influence on his initial decision to deal with the Northern Ireland conflict in his work. He was both attracted to the theme and frightened, because although he lived at some distance from the violence, it touched on tensions and conflict in his family background which

1. See below, p.840.

still affected him. The decision once taken, his choice of sub-ject-matter, imagery and style all appear to have been strongly affected by his links with the visual traditions of Ireland's Catholic community, and particularly with the paintings of Jack Yeats. The overtness of his pictures, their concentration on single figures or small groups of them looming out of the street violence, his use of religious themes, his dark expressionist roman-ticism, despite his desire for coldness, all show his involvement with these traditions, an involvement which appears to have been strengthened rather than moderated by his contact with the paint-ing and music of Spain.

For Anne Davey-Orr[1], like George Campbell, making artworks about the Northern troubles was a means of exorcising her own feelings about violence. She was brought up in Northern Ireland and studied at the Belfast College of Art, but then in 1962 obtained a scholarship to Edinburgh Art College. There she was already starting to handle violent themes before the conflict broke out in her native province. In a one-woman show in Edinburgh in 1965 four sculptures were con-cerned with the negro woman's situation in American society, the inspiration for the works being some very explicit photographs of the riots which were taking place at that time. During these years away from Northern Ireland she also worked as a designer for Cullo-den and The War Game, films made by Peter Watkins to emphasise the horrific realities of war. Her work for him included making limbs for battlefields.

Anne Davey-Orr's own contact with the Northern Ireland conflict came in 1969. For the three previous years she had moved between London and Belfast, writing art reviews for the Guardian and working

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1. The following discussion of Anne Davey-Orr's work is largely based on a conversation with her on 15 April 1981.

on arts programmes for the BBC. Now she found herself for a brief period editing BBC news in Belfast. Like many people in Northern Ireland at that time, she was totally unprepared to the scale and bitterness of the violence erupting round her, and the shock of what was happening was heightened for her by the apparent coldness of the people handling the news as it came into the BBC.

It was only later however, when she was living in tranquil surroundings in Co Kilkenny in the early 1970s, that Anne Davey-Orr began to deal with the Northern conflict in her own work. In 1975 she put together an exhibition of sculptures and drawings on this theme, which she showed first in Kilkenny, as part of its summer Arts Week, and then at the Glencree Reconciliation Centre in the Wicklow Mountains. What she wanted to do with this show was to exorcise her own sense of futility when confronted by the Northern situation, and to recreate for the complacent southerners the shock of the outbreak of violence in 1969. In order to do this she felt that it was necessary to jettison aestheticism. Whereas in her Edinburgh show in 1965 each work was a complete statement, a precious object, in 1975 she intended that the sculptures be viewed together as a group statement, not as individual pieces in their own aesthetic right. She wanted their impact to be as unrelenting and undiluted as possible, and to this end deliberately executed artistic principles. One reviewer described the sculptures as:

> "dark gleaming brown torsos squatting on their low plinths
> and making no concessions to any preconceived ideas of
> smooth or seal-like perfection. Textures are rough, to
> say the least; there are bloody paint streaks on the sur-
> faces; limbs have been chopped off, often arbitrarily it
> seems. The overwhelming impression is one of bursting
> force as if the sculptor has worked at great speed to
> retain at all costs - at times even aesthetic ones - her
> original inspiration.

The figures frozen in mute agonies at floor level make
one turn with relief to the drawings on the walls, but
many of these are studies for the sculptures; the rest
are of Belfast fires and funerals, mobs, and the aim-
less old people and children on their out-skirts,
caught up and wandering from one street encounter to
another." 1

Like George Campbell, Anne Davey-Orr also felt the need to

deliberately confuse reality and unreality.

"I wanted to reiterate the unreal feeling which surrounds
the Northern violence (happening in the midst of urbane
normality) by painting the very realistic figures a hard
gloss black (my own image of each incident portrayed) and
to create a surreal feeling by using very realistic blood
on the shiny unreal figures (suggesting the intractability
of the situation)." 2

Furthermore she wished to convey the sense of oppression she

felt existed in Northern Ireland, both for her personally, (she

was one of the students at the College of Art who felt she had been

the victim of sectarian discrimination in the early 1960s), and for

the Catholic community as a whole. This was a theme she continued

to explore in later paintings about suffocation.

The exhibition did shock many of those who saw it

"A few middle-aged women had to be carried weeping to
the street. A group of men attacked me verbally for
bringing such horrors to their city.
Two men came in and emptied their pockets onto the
reception table and told me to take what money there
was if it would help.
Others gave me the clenched fist salute.
Some just walked in, gasped and walked out again.
Several friends fell into long depressions on first
seeing the exhibition." 3

But an element of aesthetic appreciation was also involved.

Although the sculptures were deliberately left to disintegrate,

the drawings sold well. She did not, as critics claimed, make any

profit from them, but she felt her purposes might have been better

1. Maurice Leitch, "Images of Conflict", Connoisseur, Dec 1975, p.
   98.
2. Letter to the writer, 21 May 1976.
3. Ibid.

achieved with a television film. More saw the 5-10 seconds coverage of the exhibition on RTE television than visited its two showings, though they were well attended.

As with George Campbell, Ann Davey-Orr's decision to produce works relating to the Northern Ireland conflict was precipitated by the strong dislocation in her life and work between extreme closeness and extreme distance from the outbreak of violence. Like him she chose to deal very overtly with what was going on in the streets of Belfast and Derry. And like him she wanted to murder aesthetics in order to do so. But with her stronger awareness of political and cultural movements elsewhere, the imagery and style of her work were less tied to the visual traditions of the community from which she derived.

To understand T.P. Flanagan's paintings of the troubles knowledge of his social and cultural background is essential. His upbringing was that of an isolated country child reared by aunts in Co Fermanagh and spending the summers with them in Co Sligo. His loyalty is to the Irish countryside, in which he sees no border. His community is the world of artists and writers, particularly those like Basil Blackshaw and Seamus Heaney who share his concern with landscape and a sense of place.

As a child art was presented to Flanagan as a natural pursuit. One of his aunts had studied embroidery and design at the old Dublin School of Art, and later ran a school which Lady Gore-Booth had set up in Sligo to teach the local girls how to knit and crochet and make lace. She encouraged her nephew to paint, giving him a box of watercolours when he was only five or six. Lacking other distractions he readily followed her encouragement.

"There wasn't much in the way of amusement laid on when
I was small and I had to make my own fun. Naturally I
turned to drawing and painting for entertainment, and I
was not made to feel that I was wasting my time. In
fact I was encouraged and what I did was admired, so
that by the time I got to school I had a bit of an edge
on the other children and any child, particularly if
he is not very aggressive or forward, will tend to make
use of a skill that separates him from the rest. Soon I
became known as the drawer in the class and would make
sketches of cowboys and Indians for the others." 1

Later on he learnt the art of watercolour painting from Kath-

leen Bridle, who taught him how to handle still-lives and land-

scapes, and introduced him to the ideas of significant form cur-

rently being proposed by Bloomsbury critics such as Clive Bell and

Roger Fry. Torn between his love of literature and painting, a

visit to the Ulster Museum tipped him in favour of the latter, and

he went to the Belfast College of Art. In those years immediately

following the war financial and intellectual constraints meant that

study elsewhere was never even considered. He was happy enough

with the teaching, enjoying the constant life-studies, and himself

went on to a successful career in art-education in Northern Ireland.

Since 1955 he has been at St Mary's College of Education in Belfast,

the main teacher-training centre for Catholic girls, and he has

been head of their art department since 1965.

Like many of his Protestant counterparts Flanagan was placed

on the defensive by the troubles. He was endlessly annoyed by people

asking him how the violence affected his work. He felt very strongly

that anything of value he might paint concerning the subject would

be after a lapse of years.

"My best work is always retrospective. If this wasn't so,
there would be nothing to stop me going out and painting
barbed wire, the helmeted soldiers, the tear gas and the
armoured cars. The only image that did appeal to me right
from the start of the troubles is that made when a petrol

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1. Interview with Caroline Walsh, The Irish Times, Dublin 14
   August 1976, p. 10.

bomb has been thrown at a wall. It explodes into smoke
and fire, and then the next day there is a sort of
after-image left on the wall, which is rather like a
blown rose. I remember going down the Falls with its
walls decorated in this way and having the sensation
that I was going through a peculiar, macabre flower
garden. Though I never used this image, it appealed to
me." 1

He also felt that the massive media coverage of the troubles

made figurative painting of the violence redundant. Characteris-

tically his own reactions came to be expressed in an oblique,

almost negative fashion, using the filter of landscape painting.

Flanagan has always been concerned with the patterns of the seasons.

From 1969 the theme of ice and freezing began to dominate his work.

"In the summer of 1971, when I started to assemble paint-
ings for an exhibition I found that the major theme
emerging was preoccupied with ice. Since 1969 my drawings
and paintings have been concerned with the elements of
water, and with reeds trapped and embalmed in winter
frosts. In retrospect it seems to me that these pictures
were natural in a community which historically, has its
recurring season of hate and prejudice. I realised why,
at the time I had turned to the severity of ice for sym-
bolism." 2

The theme was fully developed in a diptych titled Ulster Elegy,[3]

Ostensibly this was about the two Rooney brothers, two postmen known

to Flanagan, who went to the assistance of a boat in trouble on Lough

Erne, but were trapped when the ice broke under them. Though they

were inches from the shore, where the wife of one of them stood,

no one was able to save them. When their bodies were recovered the

next morning they were stiffened into almost hieratic poses. They

were simple people and Flanagan imagined the numbness of their freez-

ing as a symbol of the numbness of their lives, with this perhaps the

1. Interview with Caroline Walsh.
2. T.P. Flanagan, "The Artists in Northern Ireland", The Arts in
     Ireland, Dublin, vol 1, no 1, Autumn 1972, p.44.
3. Illustrated in T.P. Flanagan, Paintings 1967-1977 (exhibition
     catalogue) Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast, 1977.

most significant event in them. He could feel the despair of the

wife so near yet so helpless during that long evening and night.

Later on he reflected on the general numbness of Ulster lives, their

frozen nature, the way in which the troubles have given them signi-

ficance and adrenalin, and the helplessness of onlookers like him-

self. Comment on public events spiralled out from personal feel-

ings. It may be significant that Flanagan's earliest extant paint-

ing is of skaters out on a frozen lake in Fermanagh. Did the boy

he was then unconsciously select that theme as an expression of the

numbness and drama of an isolated childhood? Or was his return to

this theme simply because it came readily to observers of the con-

flict in Ulster's water-threaded cities and countryside?

Certainly the themes of ice and water have been used by a sig-

nificant number of Ulster artists as a means of making oblique

references to the conflict in the province. Thus many of the pos-

ter-poems commissioned by the Arts Council during the early 1970s

are redolent of ice, flood, death and decay, despite a deliberate

attempt to select totally divergent artists and poets. Padraic

Fiacc's poem, accompanied by a photo of a brooding fibreglass sculp-

ture by Deborah Brown, talks of his upbringing in Belfast with the

sea to east and west:

> "... threatening with danger
> and it
> would always darken suddenly."

Frank Ormsby also uses water as a symbol of resurgent unrest.

> "at high tide the sea is under the city,
> a natural subversive. the farset,
> forced underground, observes no curfew,
> and, sleepless in their beds, the sullen drains
> move under manholes.
>
> blame fall on the builders, foolish men.
> the strained civility of city, sea, breaks

yearly, snapped by native rains,
leaving in low streets the sandbagged doors,
the furnished pavements."

Over his poem broods John Middleton's photo-montage of Belfast build-
ings, a heavy black line running below them, a dour blank grey sky
above, a truly bleak image of urban despair.

But it is Flanagan who has made most persistent use of such
imagery in handling the Ulster conflict. The combination of numb-
ness and drama was again the theme of his next major series of works
concerned with the troubles, which he commenced in 1975. For some
time he had been absorbed in making variations on Poussin's Echo and
Narcissus.[1] Although a long-time student of European art-history,
ever since early encouragement by his aunts and youthful journeys to
Paris, he had only come to admire Poussin in middle age, at the same
time as he came to sense his own increasing maturity. At first his
interest in the painting was purely formal. In a series of drawings
he explored Poussin's ordering of composition and colour, which to
him seemed a crucial problem. Through these studies he was grappl-
ing with questions such as what do you select, how do you arrange it
and how do you impose your viewpoint. Then came the death of Judge
McBirney, with whom he had a slight acquaintance. He was gripped by
the television image of the body being carried out under a sheet,
the foot sticking out.

"He was fond of the food and drink and there were all
these odd lumps and bumps under the sheet." 2

He came to see the Poussin figure as identified with McBirney,
and McBirney as identified with other victims of the troubles. He
painted a large version of the Poussin figure, in full detail, then

1. The painting is in the Louvre Gallery in Paris.

2. Conversation 21 December 1979.

laid semi-transparent white over the figure, gradually obliterat-

ing it (ill 262). (Somewhere in the back of his mind was childhood

memory of being told that Turner would paint buildings in full

detail, then blot them out with his atmospheric effects). Over the

whole he placed a heavy sheet of glass like a glass lid to a coffin.

Life and death had been wrapped up and sealed away, just as with

the Rooney brothers below the ice. Numbness reigned again. Paint-

ing of live and dead roses wrapped in cellophane took up the same

theme. With their associations of weddings, funerals and mystery

- shades of Jack Yeats' Beneath the Rose[1] - they suggested "a ten-

tative tenderness - an object refocussed in its own hermetic

environment."[2]

More direct imagery has emerged in his work. In 1976 he did

a series of stark landscapes crossed by strands of barbed wire,

related to memories of seeing the wire in Belfast in the mornings

> "when it would be lined with bits of burnt paper, and
> debris blown up in the light, and it looked like some
> strange, venomous laundry line." 3

But it is the tentative Victim and Rose paintings which to

Flanagan seem to voice most truly his reactions to the troubles.

> "what people have got to realise is that what an artist
> does is not obvious. He doesn't have to set out to be
> an illustrator of an event. When he appears to have
> no reaction to his environment or to what is going on
> around him, that, if you like, may be his form of
> reaction." 4

This oblique approach by Flanagan to the Northern Ireland vio-

lence does seem to be related to his social and political position

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1. See above, pp. 754-755.
2. Artist's notes in T.P. Flanagan. Paintings 1967-1977.
3. Interview with Caroline Walsh.
4. Ibid.

262. T.P. Flanagan/Victim/ca 1975/oil on canvas/
     31 x 54 ins (78.8 x 137.1 cms)

within the province. He feels himself to be simply Irish and can
recognise no border; but he lives within Northern Ireland and he
is a mature man with an established position in the province's
artworld. For these reasons the direct, relatively simple approach
to the violence of the more distant George Campbell or the younger,
more mobile Anne Davey-Orr, would have been very difficult for him.

The subject-matter through which Flanagan approached the
troubles can indeed be seen to derive from private rather than pub-
lic concerns, from his personal sorrow about the deaths of people
known to him from his isolated country childhood and from his
aesthetic interest interest in the works of Poussin. Yet the ima-
gery and styles he has employed in handling these themes and subjects,
have very strong links with the visual traditions of the Catholic
community in Ireland. His Victim figure is a contemporary variation
on an image long popular in that tradition as a symbol of Irish suf-
fering, and bears indeed a striking resemblance to the Celtic slave
of Provisional Sinn Fein posters (ill 27), the dying Cuchulain in
the Dublin GPO (ill 256) the dead Christs entombed in many Irish
Catholic churches and the recent depictions of Republican prisoners
in Provisional Sinn Fein posters, murals (ill 19) banners
and newspaper advertisements. (Moreover in evolving this figure from
a painting by Poussin Flanagan was turning to mainstream European
culture in a way very familiar amongst artists of his community).
His roses are another kind of national victim image used alike by
Jack Yeats and the leaders of 1916. And his filmy layers of paint in
all these pictures are closely related to the evanescent evocations
of the water-laden Irish landscape so much favoured by its native
painters during this century.

A similar involvement with the traditions of visual imagery inherited by artists from Ireland's Catholic community can be seen in Brian Ferran's paintings relating to the Northern Ireland conflict, which have been discussed elsewhere, in the sections on Mother Ireland figures, Celtic imagery and depictions of Orange processions. To a large extent Ferran's career has led him away from localised traditions. His work with the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, where he was rapidly appointed to be director of art and film, his interest in international art movements which has led to various study-trips in Italy and the United States, his residence in a relatively peaceful, middle-class area of Belfast - all these factors might well have been expected to draw him away from involvement with local visual traditions. Yet his approach in his paintings to the problems and conflict of Northern Ireland, has chiefly been through the theme of the hero so strongly embedded in Irish Catholic culture. Indeed even his Orangemen are handled through this distinctly non-Protestant perspective. And his works relating to the troubles have also made play with the Mother Ireland theme, with the Celtic imagery so important to him from his schooldays onwards, and with Thomas Robinson's painting of the Battle of Ballynahinch (ills 32 & 231). Many other forms of imagery have fed his conflict paintings as well. Children's paintings, the grafitti on Belfast walls, the impact of the news of a little girl's death - these have all been important. And the style in which his pictures have been painted draws heavily on the brightly - coloured, flat, satirical handling of pop art. But at the same time his combination of humour with violence is rooted in a very prevalent Northern attitude to the troubles, and his work often has a strong romanticism

and a feeling for the mainstream European traditions of figure-painting, which are very much part of the visual culture of Irish Catholics.

Those artists from Northern Ireland's Catholic Ireland's Catholic community who have lived in closer contact with the conflict have reacted in a number of different ways. Some, like Liam Andrews and John Vallely have swung between immediate, political comment and traditional themes. Andrews is a middle-aged artist living in Bally-murphy, where he is strongly involved in community education, particularly the teaching of Irish. In the early 1970s he painted a couple of crib backgrounds for Fr Desmond Wilson, a local Catholic priest also deeply involved in community action. These made an ironic contrast between the nativity scene and what was going on in the area. The first, painted in 1972, showed soldiers in action; the second, dating from the following year, depicted a number of local people, most of them with their backs to the crib, the adults drinking and the children fighting. Only an old couple and a young girl with a babe in her arms appeared to be taking any interest in the birth of Christ. In more recent years Andrews has turned to nostalgic memories, painting scenes of old Belfast, some of which were reproduced on a calendar sold in aid of Ballymurphy's Irish-language school in 1976.

John Vallely's[1] work demonstrates the still-powerful appeal of traditional nationalist imagery. The son of an Armagh teacher, he was taught to paint by his father, and after attending local night classes, studied at the Belfast and Edinburgh colleges of art. He received a number of grants from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, and travelled widely in France, Italy, Spain and North Africa

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[1] The following discussion of John Vallely's work is largely based on a conversation with him in the summer of 1976.

between 1964 and 1969. However artistic recognition did little to increase his fondness for the Northern Ireland establishment and travel reinforced rather than modified his loyalty to traditional nationalist subject-matter. In the mid-1960s he carried out a mural for the baptistery of Loughmacrory Roman Catholic Chapel in Co Tyrone, and in other paintings at this time he dealt with themes from Celtic mythology, and dock-scenes of Irish political prisoners like the Manchester Martyrs, painted with exaggerated spikes surrounding them. These were later followed by studies of Irish traditional musicians.

During the early years of the troubles Vallely was involved in street politics through his membership of People's Democracy.[1] Following a scuffle between People's Democracy members and the police in Ardglass where PD was attempting to prevent the breaking of a cement-strike by Dutch suppliers,[2] he was imprisoned briefly in 1970. The Arts Council ensured him a supply of materials, and he painted a number of prison interiors such as View from the Circle (ill 263). Despite its slightly nightmare atmosphere, reminiscent of the works of Piranesi with its enmeshing web of black and white paint, he insists that this and other works done in jail were nothing more than formal exercises. He similarly dismisses his few paintings of rioters as being little more than sketches. Apart from his heavily emotive illustrations to Fathers Faul & Murray's booklet on internment titled The Hooded Men (ill 264) he has indeed rejected political art, continuing instead his series of musician paintings (ill 265).

1. On People's Democracy see above, p. 559 ff.

2. Paul Arthur, The People's Democracy 1968-73, Blackstaff Press, Belfast, 1974, p.83 and p.92.
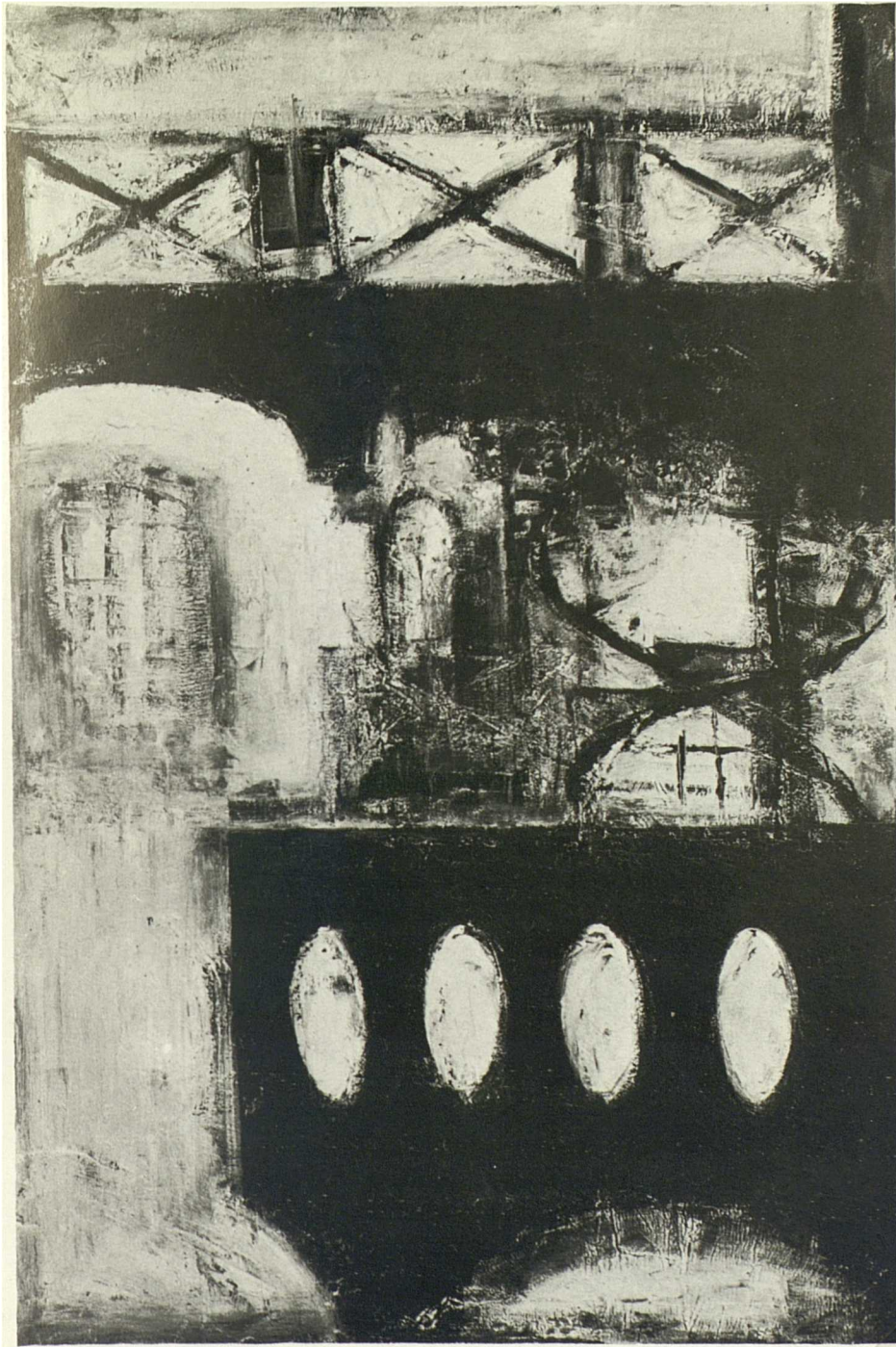
263. John Vallely/View from the Circle/1971-2/oil
     on canvas/ $54\frac{1}{4}$ x $35\frac{3}{4}$ ins (138 x 91 cms)/
     Arts Council of Northern Ireland
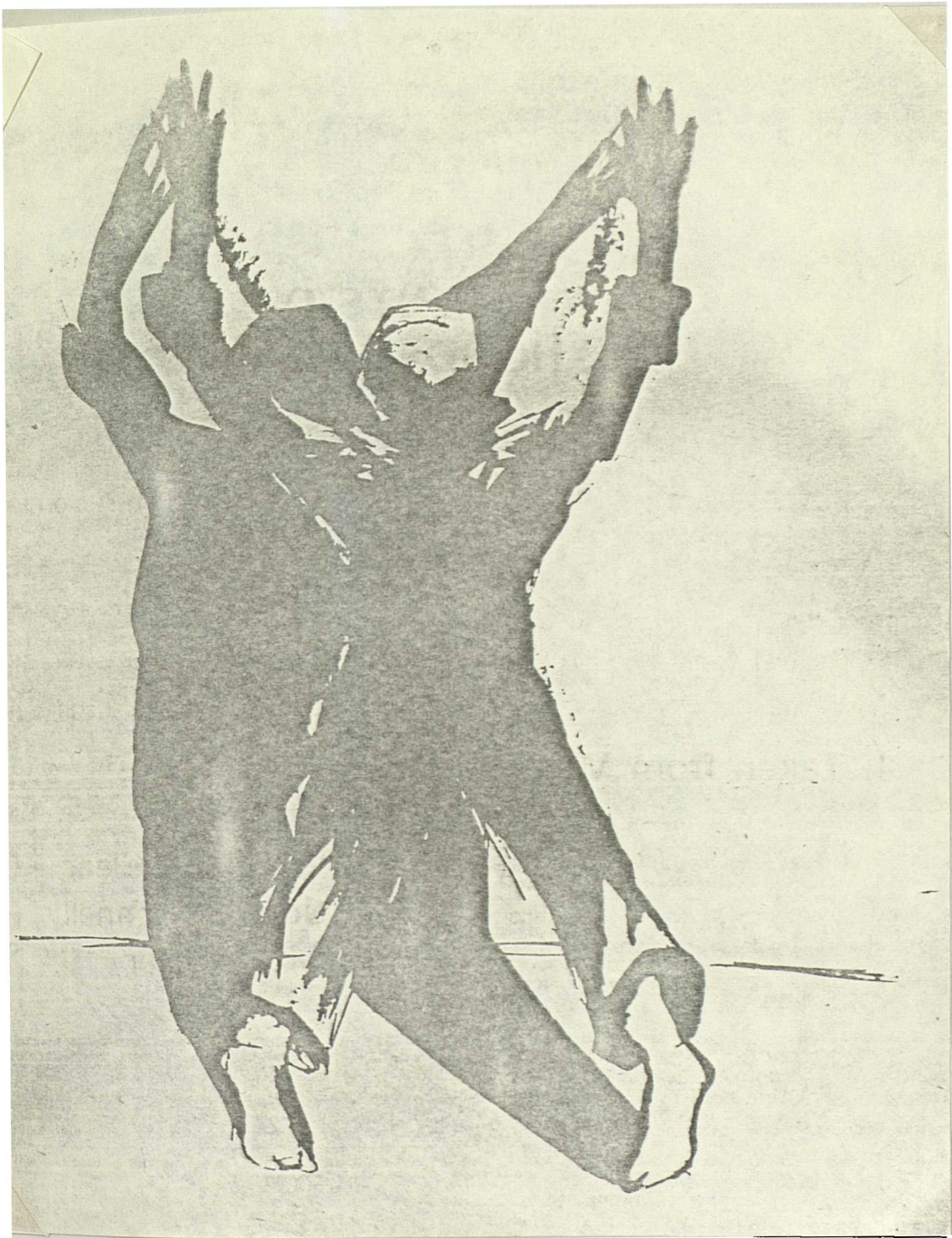
264. John Vallely/Illustration in Frs Denis Faul
and Raymond Murray, The Hooded Men, Dungannon,
Co Tyrone, July 1974/black and white/actual
size

265. John Vallely/Trio/1973/oil on board/48 x
53¼ ins (122 x 135 cms)/Ulster Museum/
Photo: UM

In some respects these are universal figures, part of international folk traditions of which Vallely became aware during his travels abroad, and painted in monumental compositions with heavy impasto. Yet equally they are very much embodiments of an important thread in Irish nationalist tradition. Vallely is steeped in the world of Irish music. A fine musician himself, he and his wife participate in competitions at fleadh cheoils, the three-day events of traditional Irish music, dancing and literature, and by their teaching and publications have helped to encourage a remarkable growth in interest in the country's traditional music amongst young people. He is clearly aware of the historical significance of such music. On the walls of his home, alongside a copy of the 1916 proclamation framed in Celtic interlace, are two versions of Haverty's Blind Piper (ill 255), a good oil copy, and the Royal Irish Art Union print.[1]

The other Northern Ireland artists from a Catholic background who have been in direct contact with the violence of the past thirteen years have produced a body of work whose themes, styles and under-lying attitudes are remarkably coherent, and strongly rooted in the visual traditions of their community.

Joe McWilliams[2] grew up with a strong sense that he was politically, socially and artistically an underprivileged outsider as a result of his Catholic background. He comes from the New Lodge area of Belfast which he looks back on as a "desperate, deprived, depressing area."[3] His school he remembers as a dumping-ground for

1. See above, pp. 748-750.
2. The following discussion of Joe McWilliams' work is based on a number of conversations with him, most particularly one which took place in January 1974, and on the transcript of Liam Thompson's interview with him in August 1977.
3. Interview with Liam Thompson.

children whose parents couldn't afford to send them to grammar
school. He claims he was the first pupil in about fifteen years
to take art O-level, and the first in about twenty to apply to
the Art College. But it was at the Belfast Art College that he
felt himself most strongly to be the victim of discrimination.
Certainly the treatment of his work by the art college that he
has described to me and others appears to have been blatantly
unfair. It would however be virtually impossible to establish
the veracity of his claims at this distance in time, and it must
be remembered those artists from the Protestant community who stu-
died at the Art College during this period believe that virtually
all the students were treated unfairly, and that if there was an
element of discrimination involved, it was probably based on class
rather than sectarian divisions. However these reversals and the
suspicion that they were to do with his Catholic background meant
that McWilliams left the college feeling he was an outsider to
the art-establishment in Northern Ireland, and during the mid-1960s
he publicly attacked the constant awarding of the major prizes in
the Open Painting competitions of the 1960s to London gallery
artists, questioned the Ulster Museum's choice of modern paintings,
and continually opposed what he saw as the over-cerebral, craft-
rejecting pretensions of international modern art.

McWilliams' own work during this period followed strongly
traditional lines. Like so many Northern Ireland artists his chief
obsession was with landscape, and specifically with landscape as a
kind of lost paradise. Although he was/city child, from the time he
was given his first box of paints by his father at the age of six he
would paint the country, drawing on his mother's memories, and on

holidays in her home territory of Rostrevor and the Mourne Mountains.

> "I remember one time, painting, now this was when I was
> about eight, a woman milking a cow. Now I'd never seen
> a woman milking a cow in life before, in fact I'd barely
> seen a cow at close quarters. But it was this feeling
> for the country and my mother talking about living on
> the farm." 1

Although he himself rejected Catholicism he also carried out

a commission for a large-scale mural of the Stations of the Cross

in the Catholic church of St Mary at Aghagallon, Co Antrim.

With the onset of the troubles all this kind of work came to

seem meaningless to McWilliams.

> "My work which up to this time derived its existence
> from an emotive feeling for the countryside, the
> changing lights of Irish landscape, the effect of sun-
> light on Irish lakes, now seemed at best irrelevant, at
> worst part of the frightful mythology that every now
> and again imprisons the Irish." 2

Political involvement was for him no solution. He had joined

first the National Democratic Party and then the Northern Ireland

Labour Party in the 1960s, but had left the one because it was too

nationalist and the other because it was too unionist. In 1966 he

had a piece in the Dublin exhibition of modern art commemorating

the 1916 rising, but found himself very depressed by the opening,

where the Anglo-Irish gentry received far more attention than the

founders of the Irish republic. The spirit of socialism asserted

in 1916 seemed to have gone altogether. He went out on the early

Civil Rights and Peoples Democracy marches, but ceased his support

when he felt they were becoming too violent and republican.

So, after a confused period of about two years, McWilliams

began painting immediate reactions to the violence going on around

him. Often he worked on the spot, fascinated by the drama of the

1. Interview with Liam Thompson.

2. Letter written 27 February 1973.

streets. Orangemen and soldiers processed through his works.[1] The

ugliest subjects were transformed by the awareness of colour and

light native to his tradition. An army post seen at dusk was

recorded as a vivid pattern of blue and green shadows and lights,

before he was arrested for his suspicious activity. Barricade

rubble was built into his pictures, in one case being formed into

an ominous bird shape, threatening the small figures of his parents

seen in a small glow of light as though on a distant summer's day.

Sometimes he used media imagery. Newspaper headlines were incor-

porated by him into a composition titled Internment Week, contrast-

ing their false reporting with jarring imagery of parades and con-

flict. The media image of the paramilitaries was merged with Sidney

Nolan's Ned Kelly image to give the metal-box-headed, dark glassed,

masked behind a mask figure of God protect us from our protectors.

However McWilliams' strongest painting from this period was

based on photographs shown to him by a solicitor friend (ill 266).

> "He slapped down a series of colour photographs. They
> were of the back view of a man and it was just a mass
> of bruises, and he said 'look at his backside', and
> his backside was raw, it was like raw meat. And he
> said 'That's the man, that you read about today in the
> paper when the RUC said 'He gave a voluntary state-
> ment.'" 2

McWilliams transposed the photograph into a painting, delibe-

rately placing it on a green background with an orange frame and

adding the bald title in letraset. It is an angry statement on the

traditional and immediate problem of the Irish victim, in which the

lush, colourful paintwork often found in the visual imagery of the

Catholic community provides an ironic contrast to the subject-matter.

McWilliams' dealer refused to include this picture in his first

1. See above, pp. 376-377.
2. Interview with Liam Thompson.

He gave a voluntary statement

266. Joe McWilliams/He gave a voluntary statement/
1972/gouache/5 x 9 ins (12.7 x 22.8 cms)/
Private collection/Photo: the artist

exhibition of troubles works in 1974, but otherwise the show was

successful and sold well. However the artist himself was discon-

tented. Lapsing into apathy about the troubles, and feeling that

matters were improving, he reverted for a while to painting lyrical

landscapes. Troubles themes soon re-emerged however. In 1977 and

1978 he was largely absorbed in making works employing the symbol

of the rainbow, which seems to have become a personal emblem of

hope for him during this period, influenced partly by the activi-

ties of the Peace People, partly by an acquaintance with Picasso's

peace murals during a summer visit to the south of France,[1] and

partly by the real-life frequency of rainbows in Ulster's watery,

changeable climate. McWilliams' rainbow is often shown in the

very gutters of Belfast's streets, in mixed media pieces which

question the multiple layers of pictorial reality.[2] In the sum-

mer of 1977 this theme was applied specifically to the troubles,

in a work made by McWilliams for display in the Free International

University presentation at the documenta exhibition in Kassel (ill

267). This piece centred round the charred door of an Ardoyne

community centre in which the artist had been working. Because

the door had been repeatedly fire-bombed he saw it as a kind of

phoenix image and placed it above a flight of rainbow steps. It

was surrounded by a series of reflections on the ambiguous role of

doors in the Northern Ireland conflict, ranging from places of

refuge to security gates, bricked up doorways and the sites of

sectarian assassinations.

   In his rainbow pieces McWilliams was again bringing together

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1. These murals were painted by Picasso in 1952 when, outraged
      by the Korean War, he decided to convert the deconsecrated
      chapel at Vallauris into a temple of peace.
2. See the picture illustrated in Catto, Art in Ulster : 1, p.86.

267. Joe McWilliams and the Community Door/ca
1977/Photo: Belfast Telegraph

beauty and violence. He was also linking up the country and the city. These concerns remained very prominent in his Lovers Lane series of paintings made from 1978 to 1980. In these, shadowy masked figures lurk in beautiful country lanes, painted with all the detailed attention to the dappling of light and shade on wet ferns and grasses which McWilliams had been developing in a long series of landscapes painted in the Glens of Antrim. Inset in the foliage are newspaper cuttings referring to the murders during this period of well-known and little-known victims, whose bodies were often dumped in settings such as these.

Joe McWilliams started to paint pictures relating to the Northern Ireland troubles because he felt he could not do otherwise, because the violence was all around him, and because, partly as the result of his artistic and political background, he felt the need to protest against the system, but rejected violence and indeed politics, as a means of doing so. The subjects he chose to paint, with their emphasis on figures engaged in street conflict, or in isolation as mock heroes or very real victims clearly have strong roots in the visual traditions of his community. And by painting with an emphasis on colour and beauty and violence, an awareness of leading figurative painters outside Ulster, and a concern with bringing things together, McWilliams also showed how closely his way of seeing was related to that tradition.

Like Joe McWilliams Sister Theresa O'Neill,[1] a Roman Catholic nun from Derry who attended the Belfast College of Art in the mid-1970s, delighted in found images relating to the Northern Ireland conflict. Pieces of street debris, the layers of wallpaper revealed in bombed and burnt-out buildings, media images dealing with

1. The following discussion of Sister Theresa O'Neill's work is largely based on a conversation with her on 30 June 1975.

violence, all appeared in her works.

"It is strange, even magazines have taken on a new role.
They are no longer glossy rubbish, but tangible material
from which I can draw images for my ends. There is a
wealth about these images that I love. I'm using other
people's very best and this makes me treat them with
respect." 1

Such photos she felt were inevitably of people involved in

dramatic situations and this drew her imagination towards them.

However Sister Theresa did not wish to simply reproduce this

collage which she felt was already in existence all around her,

but to develop it in her paintings. Her initial approach was to

focus on small details with fascinated intensity, drawing out all

their implications.

"You know I had never thought that I was really con-
scious of what was going on at all, and I remember
this morning I was going down ... to College when I
picked up the bus ticket, and I usually collect lots
of little bits which come to hand anyway. And on
the back of the bus ticket they put the Confidential
Telephone 2 number. And I just found this really
absurd, really extraordinary ... that a piece of bus
ticket which will go through the hands of practically
every person in Belfast at some stage or another had
this incredible thing on it which was linking up an
everyday event with a nasty situation and making you
conscious of it. You know, on a bus ride you don't
think of the trouble except when you see a bit of it
outside and I wasn't at all conscious of it and it
was the bus ticket which made me so. So I felt I
had to use it in some way ... I suppose I was always
hitting at something that I felt was so blatantly
obvious to me and I wanted to make it as obvious to
someone else." 3

However one viewer of her early works said to her that as a

religious she should not be dealing with such bitty, fragmented

imagery, but with wholeness instead, and she herself felt a need

to bring such fragments together and make something coherent of

them. In many of her paintings and drawings at this time, small

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1. Artist's statement, ca 1975.
2. On the Confidential Telephone see above, p. 623.
3. Ibid.

intimate depictions of people were lost and isolated in vast

areas of white space, reflecting much of what she felt about

society. Gradually however she attempted to bring them together.

In the Drawing Board piece she made during her first and second

years at Art College she placed these little drawings in a series

of little compartments. With a piece of plastic placed over the

work they looked like figures in doll's house. They were still

isolated but at leat they had somewhere to be.

Then she began to make a whole series of paintings in which

repeated figures, often clowns, appeared behind collaged wooden

fences, sometimes in association with the bus ticket motif (ill

268). Every section of these works had for her a range of mean-

ings. The fence referred simultaneously to funfair shooting ran-

ges, innocent garden fences and the security barriers erected in

Northern Ireland towns and cities during the present troubles. Its

repetition emphasised the relentless procession of events in

Ulster, the endless sequence of pressures on every member of its

society. The clown behind it symbolised for her man with his lack

of experience, constantly trying out new things, and making a fool

of himself in his attempt to reach what he wants.

Gradually this figure came to take on religious connotations.

First of all he appeared in a further picture in this series with

a halo, which Sister Theresa felt everyone should have. But

simultaneously she emphasised his pathos by painting the halo like

a target. And finally she made a highly complex painting of a

Crucifixion in a garden. In this a jack-in-the-box crucified

figure spirals up from layers of green and brown. These symbolised

to her a cross-section of human growth in which no layer-individual
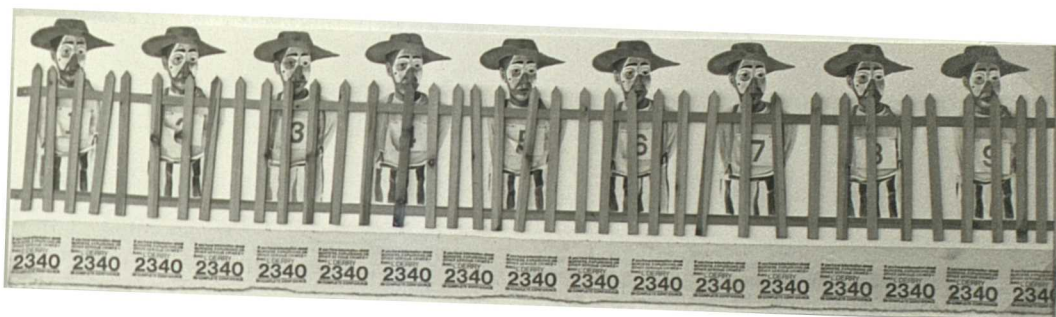
268. Sister Theresa O'Neill/Clowns/ca 1975/
mixed media/30 x 113 ins (76.2 x 287 cms)/
Belfast College of Art/Photo: B. Loftus

was complete in itself, but each was related to its neighbours. This figure is set in a beautiful fenced-in garden. Violence, beauty, failure, meet together in a work greatly influenced by study of Persian miniatures, with their love of gardens, feeling for natural surroundings, overall beauty and communication of meaning with every part.

Like Joe McWilliams, Sister Theresa felt she could not avoid painting the Northern Ireland conflict because it was all around her, and like him she made works which were strongly rooted in the visual traditions of her community. Her focussing on people isolated yet linked in the world of urban violence, her use of the clown-victim-Christ theme, her turning to traditions of figurative art, her feeling for the interrelation of beauty and violence, and her concern with bringing things together, were not simply what one might expect from somebody in a Roman Catholic religious order – they were choices conditioned by her involvement in a specific Irish Catholic tradition.

Involvement in these traditions has also been a feature of Martin Forker's works relating to the troubles.[1] Forker, like Sister Theresa, had joined a Catholic religious order, and worked with them in the Republic for six years, caring for mentally-handicapped children. He left them however in August 1969 and returned to his home in the Ardoyne area of Belfast just before the outbreak of the present violence. From then onwards he found himself in the thick of conflict. During the riots of August 1969 he had to move his grandmother from her home, as Catholics and Protestants alike were burnt out of their houses in the Ardoyne and Falls, Shankill and Crumlin areas. His brother, who had joined the RUC, was injured

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1. The following discussion of Martin Forker's work is largely based on a conversation with him on 11 April 1981.

in a shooting, in which one of his colleagues was killed. Forker

himself was trapped in the Belfast College of Art when a bomb

exploded beside it, and was thrown across the room in which he

was working. And during the early part of his married life he

lived in the strongly republican, bitterly troubled and badly

delapidated Turf Lodge housing estate.

Yet for many years Martin Forker avoided making works

relating to the troubles. This was partly because he found little

to admire in existing attempts to deal with this theme, and partly

a result of his slow development as an artist. It was only in

1975, during his last year at the Belfast College of Art that he

finally began to develop what he felt to be his own artistic voice,

and to handle troubles imagery in his work. His studio at this

time was a room in a building in the Falls Road run as a hostel

for homeless men by the Catholic charity of St Vincent de Paul. He

began to paint strongly expressionist portraits of residents in the

home and then of members of his own family, trying to show the

impact on them of both the conflict in their city and the social

deprivation of the areas in which they lived. These works were fol-

lowed by a number of more ambitious paintings and drawings in which

he combined real and symbolic detail to convey the nature of exis-

tence in troubled Ardoyne and Turf Lodge. In one painting his

policeman-brother is seen in the midst of burning Ardoyne, being

offered an umbrella for protection by/boy-clown reminiscent
a

of Charlie Chaplin, observed by his grandmother wearing the shawl

traditional to old women in Belfast, and three figures of death.

In other paintings a boy holding a dove as a symbol of peace is seen

in the concrete fortresses of the Turf Lodge flats, or walking by

starlight down the Ardoyne street in which Forker spent his child-
hood. And in a whole series of drawings he depicted, with expres-
sionist bitterness, the plight of the women living in Turf Lodge.[1]

Martin Forker came to make works like these relating to the
troubles because, like so many young artists in his community, he
found himself and his family in the midst of the conflict. And in
choosing to use in them images of the heroic victim, referring to
figures like Vincent Van Gogh or Rouault's clowns or Charlie Chap-
lin, and a vivid, highly coloured, expressionist mode of handling,
he showed how strongly he was rooted in the visual traditions of
Northern Ireland's Catholic community.

Very similar imagery and stylistic characteristics can be
found in the work of Brendan Ellis. When the troubles began Ellis
was still a young art student, absorbed in technical problems. But
already his paintings were an exploration of the relationship between
people and their environment. When undertaking a series of portraits
of fellow-students he asked his sitters how they wanted to be painted
and what objects or setting they would like associated with themsel-
ves. The same principle is to be found in his paintings of children
from the same period which have pieces of car glass or dead leaves
built into them.

His first painting related directly to the conflict was based
on an incident he himself had witnessed in the area where he lived,
adjacent to the Falls Road, round about August 1972.

> "There was a shooting one day, four soldiers got shot at
> and there was a couple hit. They pulled round, there's
> an alleyway at the back and they pulled into it. They
> dressed the two men that were hurt and I saw them out of
> the window... They left all this sort of debris around
> afterwards and I went out and collected it. Still have

1. See above, p. 113 and ill. 30.

it... souvenirs... cotton-wool, pain-killing tablet,
bandages, blood-stained and that sort of thing. And
I just kind of brought it in and make a sort of
still-life out of it. That was the first time I'd
tackled anything like that ... I think it was the
experience sort of brought it ... home for some rea-
son or another." 1

This absorption in local events, local environments, also comes

across very strongly in the painting of an alleyway that he did soon

afterwards.

"That one was about the entry behind there, the alley-
way. It's round about where I live and there's been a
couple of shootings and things like that; there was a
body found in it once. And I wanted to say something
about it in the painting. And at the same time it's
a place where ... local couples and all hang about as
well. I thought there was a curious sort of compari-
son, not so much a comparison but a very close ...
there was violence of several different types going on
... The drunks hang about there and they're inclined
to get really rough in it and a lot of bottles break-
ing and things like that there and people get slashed
you know." 2

Gradually these direct representations of local violence became

pervaded by an awareness of their universal significance, and by

that element of make-believe which Ellis felt was shared by child-

ren and artists, with their ability to transform the odds and ends

of urban life, making old pencils stand for cigarettes, clothes-

pegs for bullets. Thus a painting of dead plumbers was based on

a real incident in which two plumbers were shot dead by soldiers

who mistook the pipes in their hands for guns, but the pose which

Brendan Ellis chose to use for them was based on a photograph of

two dead men in the desert after the Six Days' War. This was both

to avoid what he saw as the over-dramatisation and romanticism of

most photographs of the Northern Ireland troubles, and to stress the

universality of death. The position of the bodies was also

1. Conversation on 16 January 1974.

2. Ibid.

deliberately chosen for its ambiguity. The men might be working or sleeping or dead. The only sign of tragedy was the bullet-hole in the window.

Religious imagery also began to pervade Ellis's paintings of the troubles at this time. Thus a tarring-and-feathering which he had witnessed rapidly acquired the poses and symbolism of a Crucifixion scene.

> "It was very like a crucifixion ... a modern type of
> crucifixion ... I used myself as the ... figure
> crucified. I make a very literal representation of
> tarring and feathering by putting a ... noticeboard
> round his head with the word 'tout' on it, which is
> usually what they did tarring and feathering for,
> being unfaithful to their companions. The lamp-post
> I like because you don't see many of them about now,
> very rare ... but it's never a tree, always a lamp-
> post. The guy with a ladder and the bucket at the
> back, he made up a cross-like effect for me ... but
> at the same time I thought him particularly valid for
> a tarring and feathering ... in the crucifixion sense
> in that you have to ... tie the guy onto the lamp-post,
> and you have to get up above him to pour the tar over
> him, so you really need a ladder and the guy who does
> it. I think I was thinking more about the crucifixion
> when I put him in. The pillow-case attached to the top
> of the spar ... is just the feathers ... I didn't want
> to destroy the figure by pouring a lot of black paint
> over him and painting feathers on him ... I wanted the
> suggestion. The children round the bottom were the
> last thing to go in and they were very literal ...
> that's exactly what I saw, the tarring and feathering
> that I saw, the kids danced around it ... like a maypole
> or anything like that, they ... danced around and jeered
> at the guy, that sort of thing ... Again it's the com-
> plete unreality of the thing ... I was thinking about the
> crucifixion, I stuck him on the top of a hill ... The
> hill lets everybody see. It's above you and you can see
> it and you can't get away from it. The same way as I
> suppose that the crucifixion symbolises that. You know
> on the top of the hill, it's about as high as you can go
> apart from flying." 1

Eventually Brendan Ellis destroyed this painting, using it as the basis for a large polyptych of the Deposition, influenced by Roger van der Weyden, in the possession of the College of Art in

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1. Conversation on 16 January 1974.

Belfast (ill 269).

By the end of 1972 the element of unreality was becoming very dominant in Ellis's paintings, notably in a series of pictures of injured men and women falling backwards into the sky. In part the floating, dreamy, upside-down nature of these works was due to the strong influence on the artist of the paintings of Chagall, in part to the growing unreality for him of the Northern Ireland violence. He found himself during this period exclaiming at the beauty of a burning building, or advancing down a street raked by bullets, until he was pulled to safety by a friend.

In reaction to this unreality Brendan Ellis painted in December 1972 a series of half a dozen harshly direct pictures of victims of the violence, sprawled in the squalor of Belfast's rubbish-filled alley-ways. Having brought himself down to earth in this fashion, he began to turn away from the incidents of violence to more complex consideration of the nature of the individuals who caused them, and of the society in which they took place. Again the new style paintings were strongly influenced by Ellis's considerable interest in European art traditions. He looked widely at earlier works dealing with conflict and violence. Goya he rejected as a reporter; Uccello's Rout of San Romano appealed to him because of its ambiguity; the popular paintings of the First World War he enjoyed for their heroics and their detail. But it was Max Beckmann's harsh, expressionist, complex pictures exploring the strangeness of life in inter-war Germany which had the strongest and most long-lasting influence on his work. From them he learnt how to construct more elaborate groups of apparently disparate figures and to show their interrelationships in a claustrophobic world of violence,

269. Brendan Ellis/Deposition/ca 1974/acrylic on
canvas/71$\frac{1}{4}$ x 48 ins (181 x 122 cms)/Belfast
College of Art/Photo: B. Loftus

without losing his grip on everyday reality.

Thus in The Bus Queue (ill 270) the playing with reflections and the uncertainty whether the queue is in the shop-window or outside it, recalls Ellis's former fascination with unreality, but is grounded in direct observation. Objects are still highly ambiguous, but this is now strictly in accordance with the facts of the situation. The umbrella looks menacing, but then the furled umbrella, for long carried in Orange processions, had recently been sharpened and used as a weapon by the loyalist Tartan gangs. The parcel too looks dangerous, but with good reason, for are there not two tell-tale wires sneaking away from it? And the cross-section of society which includes a strange Mr Fate figure, summing up "the faceless men, the figure in the crowd that plants the bomb and does the shooting", is deliberately jammed into the framework of the shop window, "to show how crammed and close-knit ... folk are."[1] Violence is no longer seen as external, it is part of each and every member of society. Equally the artist is no longer cast in a falsely dramatic role in the play of violence. In this painting he appears in the guise of a blind saw-player sitting outside the window. The man is a real Belfast character, William Campbell, known as "Wee Willy Winkie", who played outside one of Belfast's big stores for forty years or so until his death in the late 1960s.[2] Ellis knew him well. He loved the sound of his playing and thought him "the happiest figure I've seen about this town for a long, long time." Campbell is also a symbolic representation of Ellis's own role as an observer of street level life. And he is one of the latest figures in the Irish Catholic tradition of images of the blind musician, who

1. Ibid.
2. See the photograph in the Belfast Telegraph, 12 January 1969,
      p.8.

270. Brendan Ellis/Bus Queue/1973/oil on canvas/
60 x 70 ins (152.5 x 177.8 cms)/Belfast College
of Art/Photo: Sean Watters

sings the true story of his native land.

In 1975 Ellis went to the Royal College of Art in London for two years. The work that he produced during this period and subsequently continued to explore the wider ramifications of violence in Northern Ireland society but with new means. He began, like Beckmann, to use the traditional religious format of the triptych, in order to convey the progression of historical events, or the interrelationship between different individuals and groups, and increasingly he made line as well as colour the carrier of emotion. Thus the figures in the Good Samaritan triptych (ill 29), verge on caricature, but every line and hatching which goes to make them carries a charge of meaning. Clothing is twisted into tension, corrugated iron drums down its barrier, a battered carrier bag is angry evidence of a hand-to-mouth existence.

Brendan Ellis, like most of his fellow-artists in Northern Ireland's Catholic community, has been driven to paint the present conflict because it is all around him. Like most of them he has chosen to deal with the realities of street violence and to handle them in paintings drawing heavily on themes traditional to his community, notably the heroic victim set apart from society, whether the crucified Christ, or the blind musician. Like most of them too he has chosen to handle such imagery in an overt, emotive, figurative fashion, which is heavily influenced by the mainstream traditions of European art, and much concerned with drawing together the disparate elements of Northern Ireland's violent little world.

Ellis has had a distinct influence on succeeding generations of students in the Belfast College of Art. Many of his pictures have been retained in the College's collection, and he

taught there in 1977-8. Amongst those he taught, two in parti-
cular, Brian Sproule and his own brother Fergal, have shared his
interests and stylistic approach.[1] Both paint Belfast street
scenes with the same kind of directness. In Brian Sproule's case
the subjects are remarkably similar - assembled groups of street
types, lovers in alleys, dead bodies, rubbish. In Fergal Ellis's
case the similarity is more generalised, rooted in a strong interest
in German expressionism acquired from his brother.

These two artists are close friends, and saw themselves shar-
ing the role of belligerent outsiders during their time at the Col-
lege of Art, a role possibly encouraged by Brendan Ellis's own
obvious antipathy to some of the college teaching staff. Both felt
they were being dictated to too much by the teachers and argued con-
stantly about their project work. Sproule in particular felt he was
being deliberately discouraged from figure work. Both felt that
other students were shutting themselves off from local concerns,
turning instead to internationalism and action painting, largely
under the influence of what Sproule called secondhand teachers from
England. In their own work both rejected artistic perfectionism,
working very speedily from the imagination. Sproule attempted a
few more complex pictures but found himself swamped by them; Ellis
rejected canvas in favour of board, as much from dislike of the
labour of stretching it, as from distaste for its springiness.

As with Joe McWilliams, this outsider stance was as much poli-
tical as artistic. Ellis felt that he and Sproule were in a Catholic
minority. He himself painted political subjects from time to time,
such as a hanged man in a prison cell, referring to the death of

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1. The following discussion of the works relating to the troubles
   by these two artists is largely based on conversations with
   Fergal Ellis on 11 December 1979 and with Brian Sproule on
   20 December 1979.

Brian Maguire (ill 271),[1] but he found that fellow-students were

reluctant to discuss such works because of their fear of the reli-

gious divide. Sproule felt that the political paintings made while

they were at the Art College were a way of getting back at the

institution. Even the fact that he had to hide a painting of an

IRA funeral from the cleaners clearly gave him a kind of satisfac-

tion.

Despite their joint front these two artists produced works

which differed in important respects. Brian Sproule's paintings

are firmly based in his own experience of Belfast's street life.

Aged thirteen in 1969, he was involved in some of the early Bel-

fast riots, and he was present at the blowing-up of Sheridan's

Bar in the New Lodge Road, shown in a picture now owned by the Col-

lege of Art. The republican involvement of his friends motivated

him to produce paintings of subjects like the H blocks. He also

knew about half a dozen of the victims of the Shankill Butchers.[2]

The majority of them were from his school; two died just by the

street where he lives. To make a painting on the subject seemed

only natural.

Sproule also has a very direct relationship with his audience.

His paintings hang on the walls of the clubs in which he organises

disco sessions, or are given to friends. (Somewhat incongruously

his Shankill Butchers painting was chosen as a wedding present by a

friend.) The direct communication of personal experience is of more

importance to this artist than any painterly niceties. He has a

strong interest in artists who have dealt with political conflict

elsewhere, and has studied the works of Goya, Ben Shahn and Diego

1. Who committed suicide in Castlereagh RUC Centre on 14 May 1978.
2. The name generally given to the Shankill Road-based perpetra-
   tors of a particularly gruesome series of murders of Catholic
   victims in the mid-1970s.
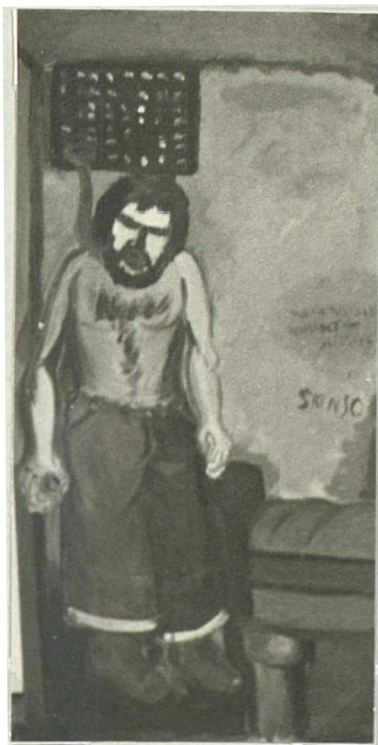
271. Fergal Ellis/Brian Maguire/ca 1978/oil on
     board/38½ x 18 ins (97.8 x 45.8 cms)/
     Collection: the artist/Photo: B. Loftus

Rivera, but he rejects the paintings of the troubles by outsiders like Micheal Farrell and Rita Donagh as too arty, and his own favourite works are deliberately simple scenes of the bodies of the victims of sectarian violence sprawled in street rubbish, backed by Belfast's Cave Hill, or of such domestic details of Ulster's violence as the father cleaning his rifle beside his small son's cot (ill 272). Northern Ireland's conflict lives at home for much of the time, and Sproule, moving around a constant circuit of clubs and friends' houses in Catholic areas of Belfast, has often been a witness of it.

Fergal Ellis has also painted from direct experience. One of his foundation year works was about a Protestant youth converted to Catholicism, who played football with his brother. He was murdered and his body was dumped in the entry at the bottom of the street in which the Ellises live. Most of Fergal's paintings however are either portraits of friends and individual types painted with the intensity of icons, or scenes derived from literary inspiration. He is deeply interested in writers as diverse as Dostoievsky and Liam Flaherty, Camus and Alan Sillitoe, and has himself written a large number of short stories which he often uses as a basis for his paintings. Children are a constant theme in both the stories and the pictures. Like his brother Brendan he identifies very strongly with them. He finds them easier to co-operate with than adults, and sees them as the same kind of victims and outsiders as himself. A particular obsession is the idea of the child born dead. This emerges very strongly in two of his paintings. One shows a woman with a child in a graveyard. The gun she carries is a symbol of the marital conflict which Ellis sees as widespread in Northern Ireland. The other is of a man beside a child's coffin in a church,
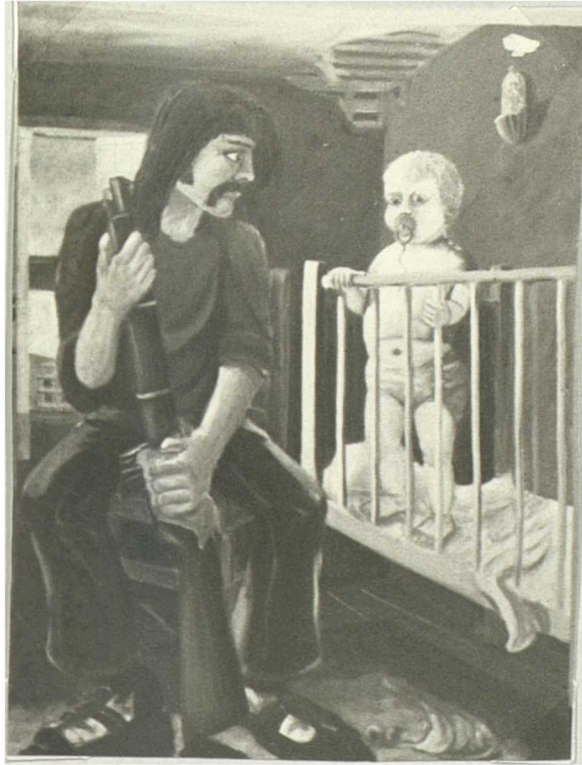
272. Brian Sproule/Untitled/1978/oil on canvas/
42 x 42 ins (106.7 x 106.7 cms)/Photo: B.
Loftus

a scene made all too familiar by media photographs during the present troubles. In both an almost childlike distortion and simplicity ram home the horror.

Brian Sproule and Fergal Ellis have chosen to make paintings about the Northern Ireland conflict both because its impact has pervaded the Catholic areas of north and west Belfast in which they have lived, and because producing such pictures is a kind of gesture against both the political and the aesthetic status quo. The type of imagery they have used, with its direct representations of republicanism, its strong concern with death, religion, women, heroes and victims, and its simple, emotive, figurative style shows how strongly they are rooted in the visual traditions of Northern Ireland's Catholic community.

In the late 1970s another small group of young arists from the Catholic community began to make works dealing with the Northern Ireland troubles. Like Fergal Ellis and Brian Sproule they trained at the Belfast College of Art; and like them they felt strongly involved with their community. But in addition their images relating tothe troubles were conditioned by the growing interest in various forms of photographic imagery which was evident at the College of Art in this period.

Dave Scott[1] is the son of Protestant parents holding very strong socialist beliefs. He was one of the large number of young artists who emerged from his community in the late 1950s and early 1960s as the result of the encouragement they received from the art-masters then teaching in Annadale school, in south-east Belfast. However, instead of proceeding straight to art college Scott spent

1. The following discussion of Dave Scott's work is largely based on a conversation with him on 11 July 1979.

ten years after leaving school working as an aircraft draughts-
man, a graphic designer and a commercial artist. During part of
this time he was employed in England, and enormously enjoyed the
irreverent upsurge of creativity that was taking place there,
breaking traditional moulds.

In the late 1960s Scott became involved in political deve-
lopments in Northern Ireland. He was for a time a member of
People's Democracy, and he has continued since this period to
support political and cultural activities in Northern Ireland's
Catholic community, by supplying cartoons for political newsheets,
making sleeve-designs for records of traditional Irish music and
republican songs, and producing his own prints as comments on poli-
tical events in the province.

It was in the early 1970s that Scott began to paint pictures
relating to the troubles. Painting had always seemed to him a
highly glamorous activity, partly because of the cost involved,
and he set about these works with characteristic speed and extra-
vagance, producing approximately 200 pieces, some of them as large
as 5' x 4', in 1971 and 1972. (They were exhibited in Dublin in
1974; most were sold, and the rest were given away). The majority
of these works placed a single figure or a small group of figures
in a surreal setting which emphasised the bizarre nature of the
violence in Ulster. Many of them were based on incidents in which
Scott had been involved. His obsession with all kinds of warfare
also surfaced in the numerous pieces involving faceless and gas-
masked soldiers. The fluctuating relationship between sex and
violence was likewise a major theme. An element of harsh, surreal
humour, partly influenced by Scott's interest in the German expres-
sionists and the works of Magritte, was often evident. A friend who

asked for a landscape for Christmas got a pleasant seaside picture, but on the rocky shore stood three soldiers in gas masks and riot gear dragging a battered victim (ill 273). A polite request for a more suitable picture was met with another seaside scene, this time with a single soldier in riot gear shooting the seagulls. (Ironically by the late 1970s Scott was having to churn out the very kind of West of Ireland landscapes he despised, in order to make some money). More personal feelings were also involved. One picture used a haunting combination of real and surreal imagery - hands turning into bunches of bananas, a beautifully detailed brick wall, a dustbin seen with strange clarity - to convey the curious sensations invoked in the process of interrogation, of which Scott himself had experience.

Scott eventually ceased this series of paintings because he felt that too strong a vein of fascism was coming through in them. He turned instead to making collages and montaged slides, in which many of the same images were fused together to make statements about sex and violence, history and violence and the war-game ethic. It seems possible that this exploitation of popular media imagery was encouraged by his studies at the Belfast College of Art in the late 1970s. Certainly a number of other students attending the college at this time were absorbed in similar processes, and using them to make works related to the troubles. Not only were collages of the debris a strong element in Sister Theresa's pictures.[1] Fergal McConnell was also exploiting photocopied images as a means of handling the scenes of flag-carrying processions observed from his Falls Road home,[2] and

1. See above, pp. 801-804.

2. See above, pp. 377-378.

273. Dave Scott/Landscape/ca 1972/oil/present
whereabouts unknown

was constructing whole pictures from grids of mock-identity cards

made from fragments of local traditional symbols, photographs of

soldiers and riots, portraits of the Pope, passport photos of him-

self and images of robots and clockwork toys. And Pete McGuinness,

another young artist from the Catholic community, was demonstrat-

ing the audience manipulations involved in media-imagery of the Nor-

thern Ireland conflict, while turning increasingly to video films as

an easily accessible means of challenging the intrusive, stereotyped

views purveyed by press, television and security force cameras in

Ulster.

McGuinness felt himself to be "a minority within a minority,"[1]

while he was at the College of Art. Not only was he strongly aware

of his Catholic background, he also felt he was set apart from the

majority of the other students by his entry into the college via

an adult education college rather than a school, by his overt inte-

rest in the political situation in the province, and by his commit-

ment to film, still as yet a relatively new medium for art-students

in the province. A strong feeling of being against the system comes

through in his work. His constant target has been the debasement of

visual and verbal language by the mass-media, and many of the pieces

made by him attack such debased imagery as applied to the events of

the past thirteen years in Northern Ireland.

McGuinness's earliest works on this theme were collages of press-

photographs. A very typical example was his juxtaposition of a Don

McCullin photo with horses from a fairground carrousel. This was

intended to show up a variety of deficiencies in ways of seeing the

Northern Ireland conflict. He deliberately chose one of McCullin's

very photogenic and dated pictures from the early 1970s, trying to

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1. Conversation 2 July 1979.

underline the falsely epic nature of his work, a quality he felt

was still being sought by the newspapers. The fairground horses

were shown careering round a corner, emphasising how photographers

use two-dimensional photographs to reproduce three-dimensional

events, and how people continually go round corners not seeing

each other.

Such relatively simple pieces were soon followed by more com-

plex expositions of media distortions of events in Ulster. In 1979 a

grisly photo of a bomb-victim, taken from the book Survivors,[1]

formed the basis of two pieces of work. In the first McGuinness

made two fibreglass casts representing the mutilated body, past-

ing on pieces of the Belfast Telegraph and spraying the figures

black and white. In doing this he was trying to convey the impli-

cations of positive and negative, the deficiencies of black and

white in conveying information, and the ease with which visual

imagery of Northern Ireland's troubles could be obtained, denying

privacy, dignity and self-determination to its inhabitants, who,

he felt, were still capable of true emotion about what was going

on. This last theme was more explicitly taken up in his second

Survivors piece. In this he made a number of postcards of the

bomb-victim picture (ill 274) and placed them on a display-rack

at the public entrance to the Art College degree show. Although

he did not expect people to remove them, he did place one card in

each space so that he could easily see if any were taken. Thirty

out of the total of fifty disappeared.

Pete McGuinness also turned his attention to images relating

to wider social issues in the province. He has attacked tourist

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1. A compilation of words and pictures about the survivors of the
   Ulster violence, made by the Belfast Telegraph journalist
   Alf McCreary and published by Century Books in Belfast in
   1976.
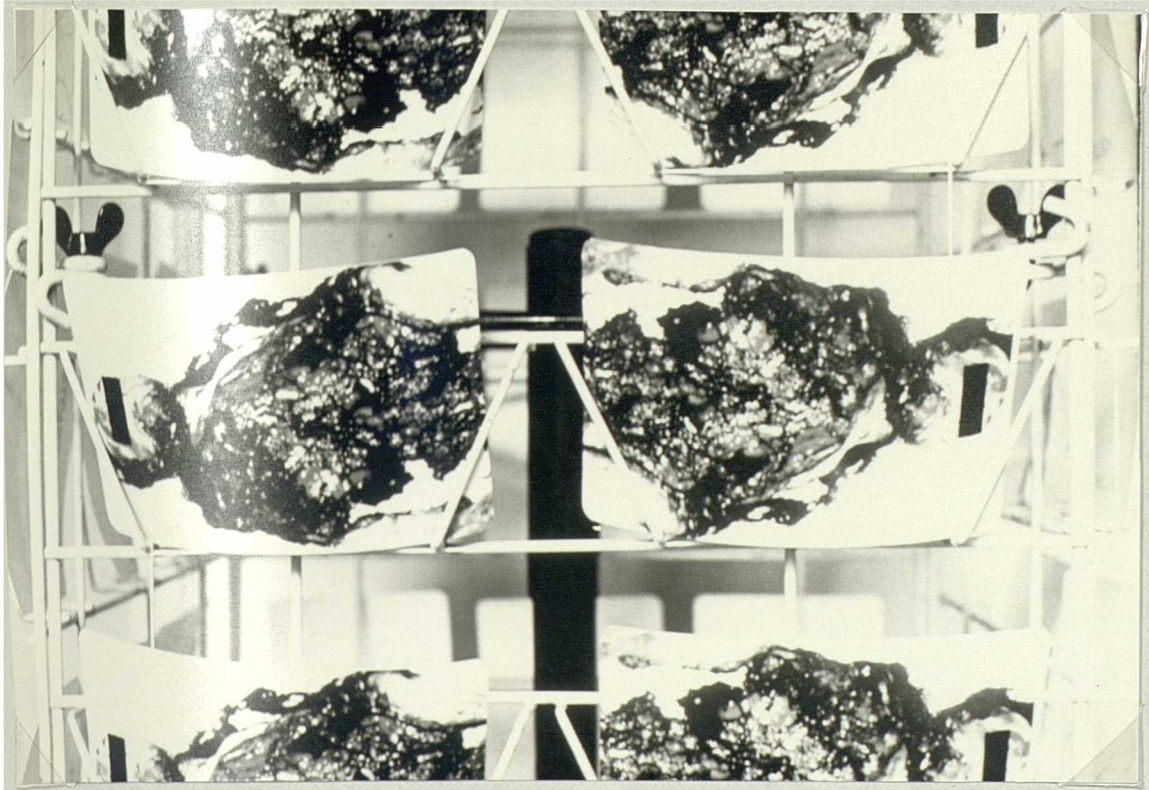
274. Pete McGuinness/Bomb victim postcards/1979/
     Photo: Pete McGuinness

posters of the beauties of Northern Ireland's countryside, not with
the superficial device of collaged imagery of street violence, but
with a single, careful black spot. This device, adopted from mage-
zine illustrations to an article on migraine, came to have overtones
of bullet holes, single and implacable, as well as references to the
whole theme of positive and negative which has a strong fascination
for McGuinness. Three sets of clothes, for a man, woman and child,
symbolising the family, were also attacked by him in the same way.

In his most recent work McGuinness has turned to exploring
ways of countering the debased imagery of the mass-media. Film,
like postcards, he sees as being available to the non-artist, and he
has tried to use it to give back to those outside the art elite,
even if only by a symbolic gesture, some measure of control over
visual communication. In his short film For the Prisoners, he shot
details of the countryside in Co Clare which it would be hard for the
prisoners in their cells to remember accurately, and in a planned
film called Belfast House he intends to show a camera going into a
house in the city, viewing its occupants and contents, underlining
the massive collection of such information by the security forces.

Dave Scott, Fergal McConnell and Peter McGuinness were all
strongly influenced in the production of their troubles works by
their knowledge of the widespread manipulation of media imagery by
young artists and art-students throughout the western world in the
1960s and 1970s. Scott became familiar with this kind of work in
London in the 1960s; McConnell had been abroad on various study-
trips; and McGuinness had considerable admiration for work of this
kind produced by Richard Hamilton in England, and by Adrian Hall, an
English artist who taught at the Belfast College in the 1970s.[1]

1. On Adrian Hall, see below, pp. 870-871.

But the concerns handled in this fashion by these young artists were rooted in their own close experience of the troubles, and in their identification with the problems of Northern Ireland's Catholic community; the themes of street violence, repression, victims and prisoners to which they turned were part of the traditions of that community; and the kind of overt, emotive, highly figurative style which they employed derived from its visual heritage.

In general the artworks relating to the Northern Ireland conflict by artists from the province's Catholic community can therefore be characterised as: numerous; the product of artists close to the impact of violence and often involved in politics or community work; painted; overt; romantic; concerned with bringing things together; and made with a sense of a local figurative tradition in which the theme of the heroic victim is very strong.

In contrast the troubles works by artists from the province's Protestant community discussed in the following section will be seen to be: generally less numerous; the product of artists isolated from the violence and involved in peace-movements rather than political and community work; often drawn, sculpted or constructed rather than painted; sidelong; and only semi-consciously dependent on a local tradition of neat, crafted work, in which the city and the maccabre are two very strong themes.

Protestant views?

Very few of the older, more established artists from Northern Ireland's Protestant community have made works relating to the present troubles in their province. Those who have, have made a limited number of pieces on this theme, and have then returned to more

275. T.E. Spence/The crucifixion of Ulster/1973/
coloured photo-gravure print reproduced
from an oil painting/22$\frac{1}{4}$ x 18$\frac{3}{4}$ ins
(56.5 x 47.5 cms)/Produced by the Peace
People in 1977/Collection: B. Loftus/Photo:
Pete McGuinness

accustomed subjects. Colin Middleton produced his handful of

Angry Shapes paintings and drawings (ill 109).[1] T.E. Spence, a

retired Quaker businessman and well known landscape painter,

confined himself to one work, titled _Ulster crucified_, which he

gave to the Peace People for their offices and which they repro-

duced as a colour-print (ill 275). Based on press photos rather

than direct experience, it was painted straight onto the canvas

without any preliminary drawing, and is related to a number of

religious paintings he has done.[2] It was done for himself and

he regarded it as having no great significance. Gladys Maccabe

would have liked to shut her eyes to the troubles entirely. How-

ever her eldest son insisted on driving her round the troubled

areas in the early days of the conflict. Despite herself, she was

so grieved by the fact that "our people were putting up barricades

against our people"[3] that she did a short series of drawings and

paintings of the troubled streets (ill 276).[4] The motivation for

these works was very much in accordance with Gladys Maccabe's

feeling for all-Ireland cultural traditions, and their lively

reportage is characteristic of her flair for crowd-scene of every

kind. But she never returned to this subject-matter again.

Lawson Burch was approximately thirty when the troubles broke

out in 1968. A native of Belfast, he had trained as an art-teacher

and had also attended evening classes at the Belfast College of Art.

Like a number of his contemporaries in the Protestant community he

resented the apparent favouring of pupils from certain schools by the

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1. See above, pp. 378-379.

2. An example is in the chapel of the Friends School at Lisburn.

3. Conversation on 13 January 1974.

4. Some of the drawings are reproduced in Gladys Maccabe, "The
   Agony of Belfast", _Everyman_, Benburb, Co Tyrone, no 3, 1970,
   pp. 81-6.

276. Gladys Maccabe/Barricades, Belfast/1971/
     medium and dimensions never recorded/
     Imperial War Museum (destroyed by fire)/
     Photo: IWM

Art College in the late 1950s and early 1960s and the recruit-
ment by the college of a large number of lecturers from England,
who were strongly committed to pursuing the kinds of art then
internationally fashionable. Burch himself chose to paint land-
scapes in a highly crafted, finished style, influenced by the
works of Colin Middleton. Yet paradoxically neither he nor
Middleton seem to have had a feeling of being rooted in a parti-
cular part of the Ulster countryside. Both have lived in prac-
tically every county in the province, and Burch has found himself
unable to identify with any particular area.

> "I find it difficult I think to identify myself with my
> immediate environment most of the time ... This is why
> I can't understand the patriot, you know. I mean what
> do patriots do, do they love their country in terms of
> hedges and fields and mountains and rivers and streams?
> You know I think that probably in every country I could
> find things that I could identify with, mountains and
> trees ... But I've always found it difficult ... I
> lived for example for a couple of years in Tyrone on
> the Donegal border, at Castlederg, and possibly felt
> more at home there with my environment, but couldn't
> quite fit into the community there who regarded me as
> some sort of an import." 1

Part of this rootlessness may be attributable to the nature of
Burch's employment, for from 1967 onwards he was a peripatetic
reading-teacher moving round both Catholic and Protestant schools,
in the country and the cities. This mode of life also affected
his troubles pictures which he began to paint in 1973. They were
in his own words "visual glimpses ... things seen from the car",[2]
rather than works formed from the experience of the troubles in
one particular area, and they were painted by a man who, partly as
the result of his work, found it very difficult to distinguish between
Catholic and Protestant.

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1. Conversation 19 November 1974.
2. Ibid.

Indeed some of the images employed by Burch, such as a clown wandering down a city street, a funeral and a crucifixion, might well seem to derive more from the Catholic than Protestant traditions. But in choosing children as the most frequent subject of these pictures, and by employing the mode of handling that he did, Burch was clearly influenced by the visual heritage of his own community. Children have constantly been stressed in the imagery put out by propagandists working for government bodies and Protestant political parties during the present conflict.[1] This seems to be evidence of a grave uncertainty about the future. It is also an oblique, unspecific, unpolitical way of attacking those who have been employing violence in the province during this past thirteen years. This obliqueness is very much part of Burch's paintings of children affected by the troubles. Indeed the owner of Child at a Window (ill 277), was outraged when I asked to have it photographed in connection with my work for this thesis. To her the painting was simply an attractive picture of a small girl, regardless of the fact that the artist describes it as being about children who are kept indoors by their parents in troubled areas.

Many of Burch's paintings deal with similar effects of the troubles on people at their periphery. Even in his street scenes the figures represented are generally wandering about their business in the dreary wastelands caused by the violence in Belfast. These are very different from the action-packed scenes of violence and its immediate effects habitually painted by Lawson Burch's contemporaries in the Catholic community. Moreover Burch has continued to employ the beautifully crafted, neat style favoured by

1. See above, Chapter 6, passim.

277. Lawson Burch/Child at a Window/1974/Present
location unknown/Photo: Sean Watters

artists like Luke and Middleton, with its careful layers of glazes
and scumbles, rather than the crude, vigorous, expressionist hand-
ling of his Catholic counterparts.

Craft and neatness are also characteristic of various series
of drawings relating to the Ulster conflict made by the artists
from the Protestant community. John Kindness[1] is a versatile
draughtsman, who since he left the Belfast College of Art in 1974,
has supported himself by freelance work as a graphic designer.
Even during his years at the College he was using his command of a
wide range of drawing techniques and styles to parody and question
various modes of vision related to the troubles. His work then
included a series of drawings of the Twelfth of July parade,
parodying Eisenstein's film notes, an idealised architect's draw-
ing of a block of flats complete with a sniper at the top, and a
schematic drawing of Belfast's shipyards laid out like a gun-cham-
ber, the ships resembling bullets.

At the end of his course at the Art College, Kindness wanted
to present his diploma material in book form, but the College
insisted he make a more substantial show. He therefore translated
these stylistic send-ups into three dimensions, constructing a
museum of the troubles, complete with shop dummies dressed up in
the uniforms of Belfast street gangs, a bomb factory and explosion
area, a shrine to a dead man, a sacred heart painting complete
with a sheep's heart and blackthorns (ill 278) and so on. Decaying
food and rubbish were liberally used, and the college authorities
were outraged. This was not at all suitable for visiting relatives
and representatives of art institutions.

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1. The following discussion of John Kindness' work is largely based
    on a conversation with him early in 1979.

THE SACRED HEART.

A CONVENTIONAL
PAINTING OF THE
SACRED HEART.
EXCEPT FOR THE
HEART & THORNS.
THE HEART WILL
BE A RAW SHEEPS
HEART & THE
THORNS ~~WILL~~ WILL
BE BLACKTHORN.

278.   John Kindness/The Sacred Heart, drawing
       for Museum of the Troubles/1974/actual size/
       Collection: the artist

The bad taste was of course deliberate. Kindness was fed up with the complacency with which artworks were being absorbed, and when he left the College in the late 1970s he continued to produce graphic works which employed offensive imagery and wildly varying styles in an attempt to jolt people into awareness of what was going on around them. He was involved with a number of other young artists and graphic designers in producing a series of political comics,[1] and he issued his own picture-story, The Hand. This booklet attempted to tell one of the stories of the troubles lying behind the media's treatment of the conflict, Its final image looks like an amateur photo of a dead body taken for a newspaper - it is in fact a mock-up (ill 279). The story lead-ing up to this is of Sammy, a Belfast youth, seen first in his (Loyalist) home sewing a red hand badge on his jacket, then out with his mates. He flaunts his bee-bap or skinhead haircut, throws a dead bird into the chip fryer at the Chinese take-away and is the victim of a random sectarian shooting on his way home. The story deflates romanticism of any kind about the troubles. Sammy's last thought is of revulsion at the dog's shit into which his head falls.

The mockery of romanticism in this booklet is aided by the deliberate use of a succession of wildly varying visual styles. A great admirer of James Joyce, Kindness wanted to add to each episode the prejudices a particular style would convey. Some of the allusions are high-flown. The frontispiece portrait of Sammy for example, is modelled on Ingres' portrait of Napoleon, who as a military hero would have gone down well in Belfast, Kindness thinks.
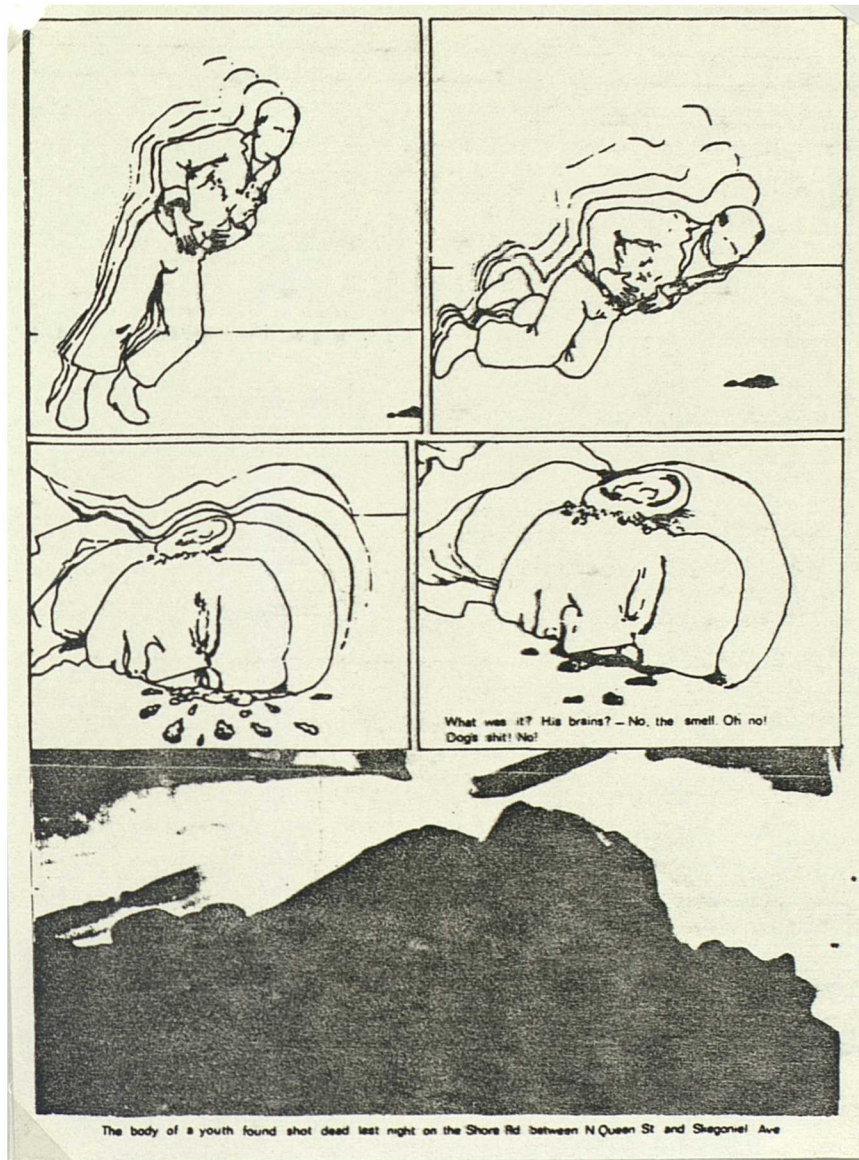
1. I hope to discuss these elsewhere in a study of the various kinds of press imagery relating to the Northern Ireland conflict.

But many of the ironies used would have been available to any reader. Sammy's bee-bap hair-style is described and illustrated in the manner of children's encyclopedias and his unheroic death is drawn like a Superman comic (ill 279).

The tale was also deliberately intended to be accessible to people of either community in Northern Ireland. Particularly after seeing the polarisation of attitudes in the Art College after the Bloody Sunday shootings, Kindness has been determined to put forward the effects of the troubles on ordinary human lives in a way which would support the politics of neither community. (Although his own background is Protestant, he was heavily influenced by his mother, a Scottish atheist). He was additionally concerned that The Hand should be easily available. Cheaply produced, by a Belfast print co-operative, priced at 20p. and widely sold through newsagents, it embodied Kindness's belief that artists should make far greater use of increasingly cheaper modern methods of printing for unlimited editions of their work. Sales were quite good and the level of interest was high but he felt that the response was not sufficiently enthusiastic to warrant another venture of the same kind. A similar picture-story about three girls from a tobacco-factory remains unpublished.

Donald Owen Craig[1] was another young artist from the Protestant community who wished to use his considerable abilities as a draughtsman in order to shatter local complacency about the Northern Ireland conflict. In February 1977, sparked off by the experience of hearing a record of Bessie Smith singing Strange Fruit, Craig began to make a series of drawings about the violence which he hoped to publish in booklet titled Strange Leaves. The forty or so drawings which he

1. The following discussion of Donald Owen Craig's work is based on a conversation with him on 25 October 1977, and with his sister on 6 February 1980.

The body of a youth found shot dead last night on the Shore Rd between N Queen St and Skegoneil Ave

279. John Kindness/page from The Hand/1975-6/offset-
litho/11³/₄ x 8¹/₄ ins (30 x 21 cms)

swiftly completed convey a fierce loathing for war, and are made in pen and ink in an incisive style which owes much to the work of Goya, Grosz, Klee and Shahn (ill 280). (Craig had studied at the College of Art in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and had a strong knowledge of art history. In other works he made variations on paintings by Ghirlandaio, Piero di Cosimo and Tintoretto). Biblical influences were also very strong. The frontispiece to the projected book showed a bible open at the passage describing Jesus weeping over the city, with parts of the pages blanked out and covered by ink stains, a form of visually teasing imagery Craig imitated from German propaganda leaflets of the First World War. Drawings separate from series also used religious imagery, notably several depictions of Christ on a cross flying the Union Jack and the Tricolour.

In making these images Craig was driven not by direct contact with the Northern violence but by a longstanding fascination with war and by his own personal sufferings. He collected toy soldiers and always went to war games when they were mounted in Belfast. He also knew much sorrow in his own life, which ended in 1979 at the age of thirty, and he seems to have poured much of his personal anguish into his bitter images of the troubles.

Jack Pakenham,[1] like Donald Owen Craig, has sought to shock Northern Ireland's apathetic spectators of the troubles with works drawing heavily on private and personal emotions. Pakenham was born in Dublin in 1938, but was raised in an orphanage in Millisle in Co Down until the age of nine, and since then has lived in Belfast. He trained as an English teacher, not an artist, continues to teach English in a secondary school in East Belfast, and is as interested

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1. The following discussion of Jack Pakenham's work is based on a conversation with him on 8 Nov 1976.

280. Donald Owen Craig/"Smile Please"/1977/pen and
ink/8¹/₄ x 11 ins (21 x 28 cms)/Private
collection/Photo: Maire Concannon

in writing poetry as in painting. His pictures have always been disturbing, much influenced by his admiration for Francis Bacon, and his series of paintings about the troubles are deliberately unsettling.

> "I did not wish merely to record or illustrate since
> the camera did this more than adequately but wanted
> to produce a kind of collective scream that would
> work directly on the nervous system, shocking
> people who had become almost apathetic, anaestheti-
> sed over the years by horror after horror, shock
> after shock." 1

However for a long time Pakenham could not find the exact and appropriate imagery to produce this shock. He tried using the clown-figure which has featured almost as much in his work as that of his friend Gerald Dillon. But it was to be a ventriloquist's doll, bought for his son several years previously, which unleashed a series of about thirty pictures painted with fevered intensity in 1975 and 1976. For Pakenham it became a potent image of manipulation and menace.

> "And so the doll with his inane optimistic grin even in
> death, his pathetic little body in grotesque positions,
> became for me both victim and terrorist... the ultimate
> manipulated little man whose words are only what some-
> one else gives him
> ... the friendly humorous Ulsterman who sets up his
> friend for an ambush with a Judas smile
> ... the innocent who faces his torturers, grinning in
> the vain hope that it is all some kind of game like
> those played by the school bullies and he will be
> allowed to go home." 2

The little figure is deliberately ambivalent, neither man or woman. He plays games with people's lives, becomes a pawn himself, is hanged, tarred and feathered, and blown to pieces, shoots his counterpart in a scene modelled on Goya's two men killing each other as they sink into a bog, faces two ways like Ulster politicians,

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1. Artist's statement, September 1976.
2. Ibid.

and prefers to see, hear and tell nothing like most of Northern Ireland's population (ill 281).

This vision of the Northern Ireland conflict as a game has been held in common by many local artists. But it tends to be those from the Protestant community like Middleton, Craig and Pakenham who see it as a very grim game, while their counterparts in the Catholic community, like Ferran and McWilliams, take a more lighthearted view, This is probably because in general Ulster Protestants feel more manipulated by the paramilitaries than do the province's Catholics, and in particular it has been the Protestant Ulster Defence Association which has adopted the title of a children's television programme "Romper Room", for its sessions of torture and punishment. Pakenham himself was prompted to seek a manipulative image for his paintings because of the involvement of many of his former pupils in the UDA, and he was able to turn to a file of drawings of UDA demonstrations for the hoods which he used in several of his pictures, finding their con-notations of masks and blindness particularly appropriate.

Other images came readily to hand. The shattered windows giving onto darkness could be seen everywhere in Belfast streets and are a constant image in the works of Magritte, by whom Paken-ham has been greatly influenced. The bare room in which his dummy is often to be found is reminiscent of the attic studio in which he works. The steep perspective given to its floorboards and to the pavements in other paintings in the series is used deliberately to convey the acute unbalance of Ulster society. Private and public worlds come together in these disturbing scenes in a violent, aggres-sive fashion.

281. Jack Pakenham/"Speak No ... See No"/1975-6/
      acrylic and emulsion/36 x 36 ins (91.5 x 91.5
      cms)/Photo: Jack Pakenham

Indeed Jack Pakenham's use of strongly painted images to convey deep feelings about the Northern Ireland conflict makes him something of an exception amongst artists from the Protestant community. Most of them approach this topic with oblique, often drawn images which demonstrate their political and cultural unease about it. This obliqueness has even included concealment of identity. Robert McDowell, who studied first at the Belfast College of Art and then in the mid-1970s at the Slade, has used the pseudonyms Hugh Alexander and Sean O'Dubghail for his small number of collage-pieces and performances relating to the troubles. This ploy he felt enabled him to speak with several voices, and to break with past failures.[1] It was also part of his mocking, wordy send-up of existing and potential artistic approaches to the troubles. Thus "Hugh Alexander's" I Study Violence in Northern Ireland (ill 282) is a parody of the artwork as sociology.

Graham Gingles[2] distances himself from the troubles in a different fashion by making small, boxed, mostly drawn images which are both fragmentary and universal. When the present conflict commenced in the late 1960s, Gingles had just returned to Northern Ireland after completing a year's teacher-training course at the Hornsey College of Art (he had previously studied at the Belfast College). At first he made no references to the violence in his work. This was partly because he felt that the media images of events like Bloody Friday were so powerful as to make the artist virtually redundant, but also because of his own particular political and geographical context. Although he himself is politically uninvolved, he comes from a strongly

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1. Conversation 24 February 1980.

2. The following discussion of Graham Gingles' work is largely based on a conversation with him on 30 September 1982.

282. Hugh Alexander/1 Study Violence/1972/Collage/
34½ x 27 ins (87.6 x 68.6 cms)/Collection:
Robert McDowell/Photo: B. Loftus

loyalist background (his grandfather's UVF rifle hangs on the living-room wall), and knowing the internal discriminations within the Protestant community, he felt no sense of identification with the Civil Rights protests, which he saw as being largely made on behalf of the province's Catholic population. Moreover he had no direct contact with the violence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as he both lived and worked in relatively peaceful areas some distance from Belfast.

Like Donald Owen Craig and Jack Pakenham, Gingles was driven to use troubles imagery largely as the result of distress in his own personal life. A series of deaths amongst those close to him precipitated him towards visual analyses of the nature of mortality. After a few large pictures of victims of the violence sprawled on pavements, depicted in the painterly, expressionist style he had employed since his early days at the Belfast College of Art, he began in approximately 1972 to make the small, boxed reconstructions of violent incidents which have continued to preoccupy him to the present day (ill 283).

In many of these pieces there is a very strong awareness of what Gingles calls "the if factor". Thus the fire-blackened remains of a little room, with a charred and shrivelled dummy-corpse, provide eloquent testimony of the swift and fateful power of death to destroy somebody who might so easily have escaped if he had walked out a minute or two before. A desire to commemorate individual victims is also dominant. Many of these little memorials are personal monuments to acquaintances of the artist killed in the troubles, or to victims of other forms of violence with whom he has felt some form of involvement, whether the couple found dead by him in the wreckage of

283. Graham Gingles/Untitled/1977/mixed media/
9³/₄ x 15³/₄ ins (25 x 40 cms)/Collection:
the artist/Photo: the artist

a car on his way home from work, or the man who hanged himself in the public lavatories of the town nearest to Gingles' home.

The commemorations of these victims are grim. Blood spatters walls; flies feed on corpses, as life on death; little dummies are bound to chairs or lie in tombs. There is never, as in the Catholic portrayal of victims of the violence, any sense that life follows death, or that suffering has some meaning. The Protestant fear of gruesome mortality remains very strong, Only in recent years have these little boxed memorials become less claustrophobic, with references to the world-wide effects of crime and political violence (in the piece illustrated here, the left-hand section initially commemorated an Israeli shot in a helicopter at the time of the Munich Olympics), or to the funeral monuments of foreign culture, whether Viking ship-burials, Egyptian tombs or Italian roadside shrines to the victims of traffic accidents. In the majority of these works Gingles reconstructs crimes (his brother works in a forensic laboratory in Queen's University, Belfast) and in doing so questions both the artist's reconstruction of reality, and the viewer's voyeuristic involvement with it.

In these little boxes, and in others Graham Gingles has made on sexual themes, artful construction, often with use of mirrors and distorted perspective, draws the viewer in to examine the details of the fascinating though repellent scenes they contain. This voyeuristic element is related to diverse parts of the artist's personal history, ranging from childhood memories of "What the Butler Saw" machines, to the experience of living in a small Ulster community where every move is observed. It also appears to be linked to the essentially private intention of these works. Although they have been

exhibited on a number of occasions in group and one-man shows in dealers' galleries and art institutions in Ulster, the Republic of Ireland and mainland Britain, few have been purchased. Gingles has no real need to sell his works, for he continues to support himself by teaching art, and he regards these constructions as made for himself, with no public role.

In the style of their making as well as in their content, these little boxes reveal Graham Gingles' strong involvement with the visual traditions of his community. Not only are they distinctively rooted in those traditions by virtue of their emphasis on personal rejection of death and violence as without any meaning, political or spiritual. They also display that fascination with neat, crafted, drawn structures and grids in which violence erupts, which is to be found in the work of so many artists from this community. This kind of approach comes easily to a man like Graham Gingles, whose father was a painter-decorator, and for whom art was not so much a road to truth and beauty, but the kind of job you might pursue if you showed some talent, and you were not inclined to go into your father's business or the local bank.

Something of the same feeling for the relationship between established order and violence seems to underly the few three-dimensional pieces relating to the troubles produced by artists in the Protestant community. In his   Irish State pieces (ill 113) Gordon Woods challenged the grids and protection devices of science, and his own activities as a builder, with the often wicked but inexorable forces of nature. In his gradually constructed and destroyed geometrical floor-sculptures of sand, rope and wooden bars, John Aiken has explored general aspects of the way in which

architectural forms carry with them interrelated experiences of order, violence and decay, drawing partly on his own Northern Ireland background.[1] And in his Connector (ill 284), Bob Sloan has similarly balanced construction and destruction, purposeful labour and inexorable fate, connection and distance.

Sloan[2] comes from a working-class family in the Donegall Pass area of Belfast. He was one of a whole group of young artists who were encouraged by the teaching of Ken Jamison and Wilfred Stewart at Annadale School in the 1950s, and who were also affected by the general commitment and strong social consciousness of the teaching staff in the school at that period. His interest in art was balanced by an equally strong involvement in mathematics, science and geometrical design, and it was only after some persuasion by his art-teachers that his parents agreed to let him attend the Belfast College of Art.

Like most of those who went to the art college at this time, Bob Sloan felt that it had given him virtually nothing in the way of an art training. However, he subsequently spent two years in the early 1960s at the Central School of Art in London, where he was given considerable encouragement. Because he had been offered so little technical information at the Belfast College, he began during this period an exploration of the processes of sculpture which has remained a feature of his work ever since. He also began the experiments with the concept of balance which have continued to be a major theme in all his output.

In 1965 Sloan returned to Northern Ireland and a career in

1. On Aiken's work see Dorothy Walker, "Installations and Performance in Ireland", Flash Art, Milan, Oct-Nov 1979, p.41; ibid, Introduction to Without the Walls (exhibition catalogue) ICA, 1980; ibid, "Without the Walls", Art about Ireland, Dublin April-May 1980, p.21 and "John Aiken interviewed by Micky Donnelly", CIRCA, Belfast, Jan-Feb 1982, pp.16-20.
2. The following dicussion of Bob Sloan's work is based on a conversation with him on 2 Sept 1982.

284. Bob Sloan/Connector/1975-7/wood, marble, chrome,
steel, rope, sandbags/33 x 167$^1/_4$ x 19$^3/_4$ ins
(84 x 425 x 50 cms) Arts Council of Northern
Ireland (now dismantled)/Photo: Bill Kirk

teaching art. He soon became involved in the early civil rights

activities and when the marches started he virtually stopped mak-

ing his own artworks for a number of years, because he felt them to

be totally irrelevant to what was going on around him. From the

late 1960s until approximately 1974 he was involved with the Nor-

thern Ireland Labour Party, designing election posters[1] and leaflets

for them, and doing paste-ups and cartoons for their newsheet

Labour Challenge. Then gradually in the mid-1970s he began to make

artworks again. He had no intention of dealing with the troubles in

them, for he felt the conflict was too close and too serious to handle

in a public fashion, and that he could only make statements about his

own personal situation, which might subsequently be seen as relevant

to wider events. However between 1975 and 1977 he found himself gra-

dually developing in Connector (ill 284), a sculptural analysis of cer-

tain themes related to the Northern Ireland situation.

The piece was a fusion of various ideas. The E.M. Forster dic-

tum "only connect", drawings of a little bridge over a road up to

the Giant's Ring at Ballylesson, the Peace People's habit of meeting

on bridges, the upside-down concept of bridges keeping people apart,

and of the tensions required to keep bridges in position, his own

involvement in renovating an old house, and commitment to manual

labour, the strange contrasts between the new business buildings con-

structed in central Belfast in the mid-1970s and the temporary assem-

blages of sandbags and safety barriers made as a result of the

troubles - all these were elements which fed into this work. Yet,

paradoxically when it was eventually dismantled, supposedly because

birds had attacked seeds sprouting in the sandbags and children had

1. Such as the 1969 poster illustrated in Gary Yanker, Prop Art,
    Studio Vista, 1972, p.92.

swung on the ropes, Bob Sloan found himself annoyed at its lack of

permanence. However, after developing the theme of ritualised bar-

riers in constructions made for the Northern Ireland contribution

to the Free International University's workshop at the documenta 6

exhibition at Kassel in West Germany in the summer of 1978, he took

this theme no further.

The oblique approach to the Northern Ireland conflict apparent

in Connector and the constructions associated with it, and their

emphasis on the tensions between man's engineered constructions and

the disruptive natural forces within him, are characteristics shared

by a number of works relating to the troubles made by artists from

the province's Protestant community. Thus in the paintings made by

Patric Coogan in the early 1970s, ambiguous and ominous bags and

parcels threaten explosions which will destroy the crumbling but

beautiful brickwork and paving stones of Belfast's back streets (ill

285).

By the time he attended the Belfast College of Art in the late

1960s Coogan[1] was already a mature man. Although he came from a

mixed background, his training and inclinations led him to pursue

the kind of painfully-acquired meticulous technique long favoured in

the Protestant community. Like Conor, Luke and Middleton he had

already mastered a craft before he entered the art-college. Memories

of his work as a sign-writer can be found emerging in his works, and

the series of paintings started in 1972, which came eventually to

refer to the troubles, derived their initial motivation from his see-

ing the demolition of the beautifully-painted houses in the small

streets near to the Art College. He felt moved both to return to his

roots, and to record a fast-disappearing Belfast.

1. The following discussion of Pat Coogan's work is based on a num-
   ber of conversations and letters, but principally on a conver-
   sation on 11 Oct 1976.

285. Pat Coogan/untitled/ca 1973/oil on canvas/
     present location unknown/Photo: Sean Watters

Other influences were also involved. While at the Art College

he was taught for a year by the hyper-realist English painter Char-

les Oakley, many of whose works hint at the menace lurking below

the surface of ordinary objects in Ulster.[1] At this time Coogan also

developed a strong interest in the surreal paintings of de Chirico,

and made a series of variations on one of them. His own deserted,

meticulously painted streets with their lurking sense of violence owe

much to the work of this artist. He sees this element of disruption

as an acknowledgement of all that is unruly in his own nature, know-

ing that most of the time he paints buildings because he can control

them. On only one occasion has he made a work openly portraying the

violence and its impact on a specific victim; he was appalled when a

short time later a close relative was killed in similar circumstances.

Of all the elements affecting Pat Coogan in the making of these

paintings however, it was the example and teaching of his friend and

mentor John Luke which was the most important.[2] Their friendship con-

tinued from approximately 1960, when Coogan attended evening classes

held by Luke at the art college, till the older artist's death in

1975. From him Coogan learnt both an intense absorption in technical

skills, particularly the glazes in which Luke had achieved such mas-

tery, and a profound feeling for painting as a form of meditation on

the eternal present manifest in the most ordinary objects. To Coogan

painting a brick wall glowing in the sun is like trying to capture a

religious revelation. So greatly does he value every-day objects

that each brick in such a painting is remade by him as he works, result-

ing in a rich, contemplative presence to which no reproduction can do

justice.

1. See Catto, Art in Ulster : 1, pp.70-74.
2. On Luke see above, pp. 713-715.

Pat Coogan is not the only artist precipitated by the present conflict into an appreciation of Belfast's red brick beauty. In 1973 Camille Souter, an artist who lives and works in the Republic, but is long familiar with the North, made two paintings of this subject following a visit to Belfast to walk through the back streets and see what was really going on,[1] and one of Dave Scott's paintings focussed on the details of a brick wall, just as the artist had done while he was being questioned by the army.[2] The city streets and pavements also became an important element in Joe McWilliams' series of rainbow pictures. But Coogan's images of brick and stone are set apart from these works by that meticulous, lovingly crafted technique, and that tension between man's control and the violence within him, so characteristic of artists from the Protestant tradition.

The same absorption in making pictures of Belfast in which technical struggle is crucially important can be found in a series by David Crone[3] dating from the late 1970s. Crone, like Bob Sloan, was one of the group of talented young artists brought on at Annadale School in the 1950s. Despite parental qualms about the possibility of obtaining a job with a training in art, he studied at the Belfast College, an experience which he supplemented by working trips to England during the college holidays, and a visit to the documenta and Venice Biennale exhibitions in 1964, subsidised by an Arts Council of Northern Ireland travel scholarship. Since leaving the College he has earned a living teaching art.

1. Conversation with Camille Souter, 28 July, 1975.
   The paintings are in the Ulster Museum. One of them is reproduced in The Delighted Eye (exhibition catalogue), The Arts Councils of Northern Ireland and the Republic, Belfast and Dublin 1980, no 76.
2. Above, p. 817.
3. The following discussion of David Crone's work is based largely on a conversation with him in March 1980.

Initially, when the present troubles in Northern Ireland broke
out in 1968-9, David Crone felt that the media imagery of the con-
flict made paintings relating to it redundant. He was also put off
approaching the violence in his own work by seeing George Campbell's
paintings, which he felt to be very superficial.[1] And he found it
impossible to cope with earlier images dealing with conflicts else-
where, such as Picasso's Guernica. Moreover he himself had no direct
contact with the violence around him, though he was very aware of the
overall sense of oppression.

Gradually however Crone began to be ashamed of his longstanding
habit of going away from Belfast to find the kind of formally satis-
fying landscapes which he explored and analysed in his semi-abstract
paintings.[2] Simultaneously the experience of teaching foundation
year students for the College of Art from the mid-1970s returned him
to an interest in painting figures (drawing from the model is an
important element in the foundation year course). And because this
new job involved travelling right across Belfast every day by train
and bus, he found himself absorbed in the whole experience of moving
through a city on forms of public transport which allowed an openness
to people, weather and buildings not possible in the cocoon of a car.
What he gradually evolved therefore in the late 1970s were a series
of paintings in which figures move in and out of the buildings and
light and weather of the city, subject to the ceaseless change and
flux so apparent to Crone since the present troubles began, ambig-
uously positioned between the real world of the city streets and the
fantasy world of the shop windows, trapped within their environment,
and also vaguely menacing (ill 286). In these works it was not only

1. See above, p.782.
2. See Catto, Art in Ulster : 1, pp.25-29.

286. David Crone/Figures in Landscape/1979-80/
watercolour and charcoal/$15^3/_4$ x $19^3/_4$ ins
(40 x 50 cms)/Photo: D. Crone

the narrative themes which were important to Crone. The paint

itself, his struggle with it, and the forms it threw up were also

of crucial significance. In his troubles works, as in those of

Bob Sloan and Pat Coogan, the tension between making and chance,

order and violence, has been a major concern.

Denis McBride[1] has shared David Crone's concern with bringing

together the feelings associated with the country and the city. The

two artists are in fact long-standing friends. They were at Anna-

dale and the College of Art at roughly the same time, and have con-

tinued to discuss their work together. McBride himself comes from

a mixed family in the lower Ormeau area of Belfast. From childhood

he was familiar both with the periods of strain and worry associa-

ted with the summer marching season, and with the feeling for

country life to be found amongst the people in his area of the city,

with their closeness to the markets, and their strong involvement in

horse dealing and bird fancying.

This interrelationship of country and city has continued

throughout his career. While he was training as an art-teacher in

London in the mid-1960s he would return to the space and relaxed

time-scale of Ulster virtually every weekend, and after his marriage

and move to the tranquility of Glenarm, a village on the Antrim coast,

he continued to maintain his city links, with his journeys into Bel-

fast to teach at the College of Art and his frequent trips to Lon-

don's museums and art galleries.

McBride's sharp awareness of Northern Ireland's sectarian ten-

sions and feeling for the interpenetration of country and city life

1. The following discussion of Denis McBride's work is largely
   based on a conversation with him on 7 August 1979, although
   I am also indebted to Liam Thompson for supplying me with a
   copy of his interview with McBride in August 1977.

was apparent in his work even before the outbreak of the present

troubles. In 1964 he was present at a demonstration outside the

Belfast City Hall led by Ian Paisley, protesting at the flying of

the flag at half-mast on the occasion of Pope John XXIII's death.

This event made him realise Paisley's strength and magnetism. Round

about the same time he remembers seeing a press-cutting about Pais-

ley and Faulkner leading a loyalist march through the strongly

nationalist village of Dungiven. The two events stimulated a paint-

ing titled London 1964? which encapsulated his reflections on them

from his position as a student in the metropolis. Painted in a pop

art style, it was based on the kind of multiple reflections to be

found in the windows of London's tube-trains, and incorporated frag-

ments of gable-end slogans relating to Paisley. Since the late

1960s McBride has been at Glenarm, which is relatively untroubled

(though he at one time took his turn as a night-time vigilante), but

working in Belfast left him exposed to a certain amount of danger.

Thus he was very close to the bomb which exploded beside the art col-

lege buildings in 1972.

Denis McBride's paintings of the troubles are therefore those

of a man who has a strong personal awareness of the impact of vio-

lence, but yet can to a certain extent distance himself from it.

Belfast from Glenarm is a fairly typical title. In it he used the

physical marks made by the troubles, bullet-marks on walls, the

strong and sculptural shapes of fortified police stations, the inter-

ruptions to traffic flow caused by ramps, all city phenomena, but

analysed at leisure for their visual content, in the slightly Cubist

style McBride was using in the early 1970s. In another painting of

the same period, of birds flying at Glenarm:

> "there were these very squat sea-gulls, with their wings
> fully out and they were chasing each other around the
> rock crevices and so on. And in certain lights they
> became quite cross-like. That was just an image I had
> picked up from Belfast at the time when there were so
> many thousand dead." 1

Most of McBride's paintings about the troubles were stimula-

:ed by very gentle personal feelings about the sorrow of it all,

rather than by reactions to the spectacular trappings of violence.

Media reception at Glenarm is poor. News received by word of mouth,

or at some interval after the event, and pondered over has influen-

ced him most:

> "the images are not derived from burned-out buses, or
> buildings that have been blown-up. I'm just saddened
> by things that stop you. Kids of four or five, there
> was one wee girl that I think, was shot at a barricade,
> six years old. And you look at your own child of six
> and its really sad that something as arbitrary as a
> bullet flying through the air, nobody shoots six-year
> old children. But something just as unlucky as being
> in one spot at a particular time, should end that
> relationship in a very hard way ... I can work from
> that very sort of sad level, work from an image which
> is derived from reading of incidents like that." 2

The image which resulted in this particular case was a visual

expression of the story of the little girl's life, building from

the bottom of the picture upwards with sweet, pretty colours.

This gentle sadness was not merely personal indulgence but

related to what McBride knew of the victims of violence. A friend

from student days whose sister was raped and murdered talked very

gently about the troubles, with no feelings of hatred or vengeance.

One of his students who survived an assassination attempt appeared

to nurse no desire for retaliation, expressing only sadness that he

had seen an ordinary working-class man, shooting another working-

1. Denis McBride, interviewed by Liam Thompson, August 1977.

2. Ibid.

class person. In his painting Gone but not forgotten, McBride tried

to give expression to this feeling that people should simply be hurt

when someone dies and not exploit death as in paramilitary funerals.

He also made monoprints about sectarian murders in which he bruised

and wounded lines, as the bodies of the victims had been bruised and

wounded. In an attempt to explore the feelings of victims and mur-

derers he took photographs of himself in hoods, recalling both para-

military hoods and the hoods pulled over the heads of sectarian vio-

lence.

A similar sense of identification lies behind the pieces which

McBride made in relation to internment, a subject on which he felt

very deeply. He was strongly aware that he himself could have been

lifted, that with his beard and the sort of clothes he wore he was

a suspicious-looking character. He saw the whole process as unjust

and a horrific abuse of people's liberty, and was appalled by the

refusal of some to believe that it was actually going on. Two works

in particular relate to his feelings on the subject. One was the

grey envelopes piece, a sad comment on the way people could be pro-

cessed and shut away and forgotten. Remembering the piles of old

grey envelopes you see in a solicitor's office he tinted envelopes

grey to age them, and arranged them in stacks so that they looked

both individual and the same, like the internees. The other work

was was Ulster Bouquet.[1]

In recent years McBride has given up making paintings about the

troubles, partly because be became slightly appalled at the kind of

things he was producing, partly because he developed an interest in

other subjects. However in 1977 he painted a picture which brings

1. See above, pp. 379-380.

out most effectively his feelings about the sadness of the con-
flict, living in Glenarm, where deaths are few but very personal,
much more being known about them than in the city. Northern Inci-
dent (Peaceful) (ill 2), is about the suicide near Glenarm of a
young Belfast man who shut himself in his car and poisoned himself
with carbon monoxide from the exhaust. His death may or may not
have been related to the troubles. He was apparently a proficient
sportsman, who swam and went hang-gliding and sand-yachting. It
appalled McBride that somebody with such energies should drive
twenty-eight miles out from Belfast to die a slow, deliberate death.
As in so many of his pictures sweet colouring is offset by menacing
shapes, the machinery of the car and its billowing cloud of gas,
trapping the man in his death. The city has brought its sadness to
the country.

McBride, with his mixed background and his combination of
Protestant reticence and Catholic-style lush figuration, is the kind
of Northern Ireland artist who reminds the observer of the importance
of not over-emphasising the differences between painters and sculp-
tors from the province's two communities. Friendships, admiration,
shared problems and shared obsessions have continually linked Ulster
artists from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds when handling the
present troubles in their work. A very sizeable proportion of the
small number of artists working in the province meet each other at
such social occasions such as private views of exhibitions, and any
antagonism or sense of separation there expressed generally derives
from personal antipathy, aesthetic opposition or professional jea-
lousy rather than political opposition. Individual friendships dis-
regard the community divide. Thus Fergal McConnell and Colin McGookin

shared an interest in media-imagery during their studies at the

Belfast College of Art, and it was McGookin who suggested to his

friend the possibilities of a work made from identity cards.[1]

Colin Middleton and Brian Ferran are also well acquainted and

have on occasion exchanged paintings. Moreover Middleton's skill

as a craftsman and pattern-maker has had an influence on Ferran's

work and that of Catherine and Joe McWilliams as well as on that

of Lawson Burch. Similarly Gerald Dillon's clowns have meant as

much to his friend Jack Pakenham as to Sister Theresa O'Neill. In

addition all local artists have confronted some of the problems

involved in making images relating to the troubles. Time and again

they have cited their need to establish a distance from this subject-

matter, their sense of being swamped by media-imagery of the violence,

and the confusion created in them by the bewildering procession of

events during the past thirteen years. It is therefore of little

surprise that the same obsessions have emerged in their work, so that

for example, the feeling that the troubles are a strange kind of game

is held in common by artists as diverse as Brendan Ellis and Colin

Middleton, John Kindness and Sister Theresa.

Yet the differences between the kind of works relating to the

Northern Ireland troubles produced by artists from the province's two

communities described above remain very discernible. Indeed they can

be clearly detected even in the images about the troubles made by

children in Protestant and Catholic schools in Northern Ireland.

Whereas the Hell's Angel emblem reproduced in Chapter 4 (ill 102)

refers to the conflict with exactly the kind of indirect, abstract,

maccabre, secret society symbolism seen as characteristic of Protes-

tant traditions, in the school over the road the pictures made at the

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1. See above, pp. 377-378 and 380-382.

same time by Catholic schoolboys of the same age showed what was going on around them with the direct figurative approach traditional to their community, (ill 287).[1]

To a certain extent one can attribute these differences to political factors. Artists from the Catholic community have generally been much closer to the violence of the past thirteen years and to the political activities connected with it. Catherine and Joe McWilliams, Liam Andrews, Martin Forker, Brendan and Fergal Ellis, Dave Scott, Brian Sproule, Peter McGuinness, Sister Theresa and Fergal McConnell have all been living in troubled areas of Belfast. John Vallely, the McWilliams and Dave Scott, were all to a greater or lesser extent involved in People's Democracy, while Brian Sproule's circle of friends includes a fair number of people with republican views. This closeness and involvement extends to the very youngest. A Catholic school-child will describe to you his drawing of a violent gun-battle outside an army-post as "The view from my window", (ill 287), a Catholic art-teacher will tell you that most of his former pupils are now members of the Provisional IRA. Artists from the Protestant community have generally been far less directly involved in the conflict, living in peaceful areas of the country or the city, with little contact with violence or political activities.

Besides the closeness of Catholic artists to the troubles, there is a sense in which a whole range of expression is permissible to them in a way that it is not to Protestants. Personal experience of street-level harassment in the case of John Vallely, Dave Scott,

1. These isolated examples have been selected on the basis of a number of visits to schools in Belfast and Derry in 1974, subsequent study of the school art shows mounted at the Arts Council of Northern Ireland headquarters in Belfast and a view of the entries submitted to the Irish National Teachers Organisation Peace Poster competion in 1973.
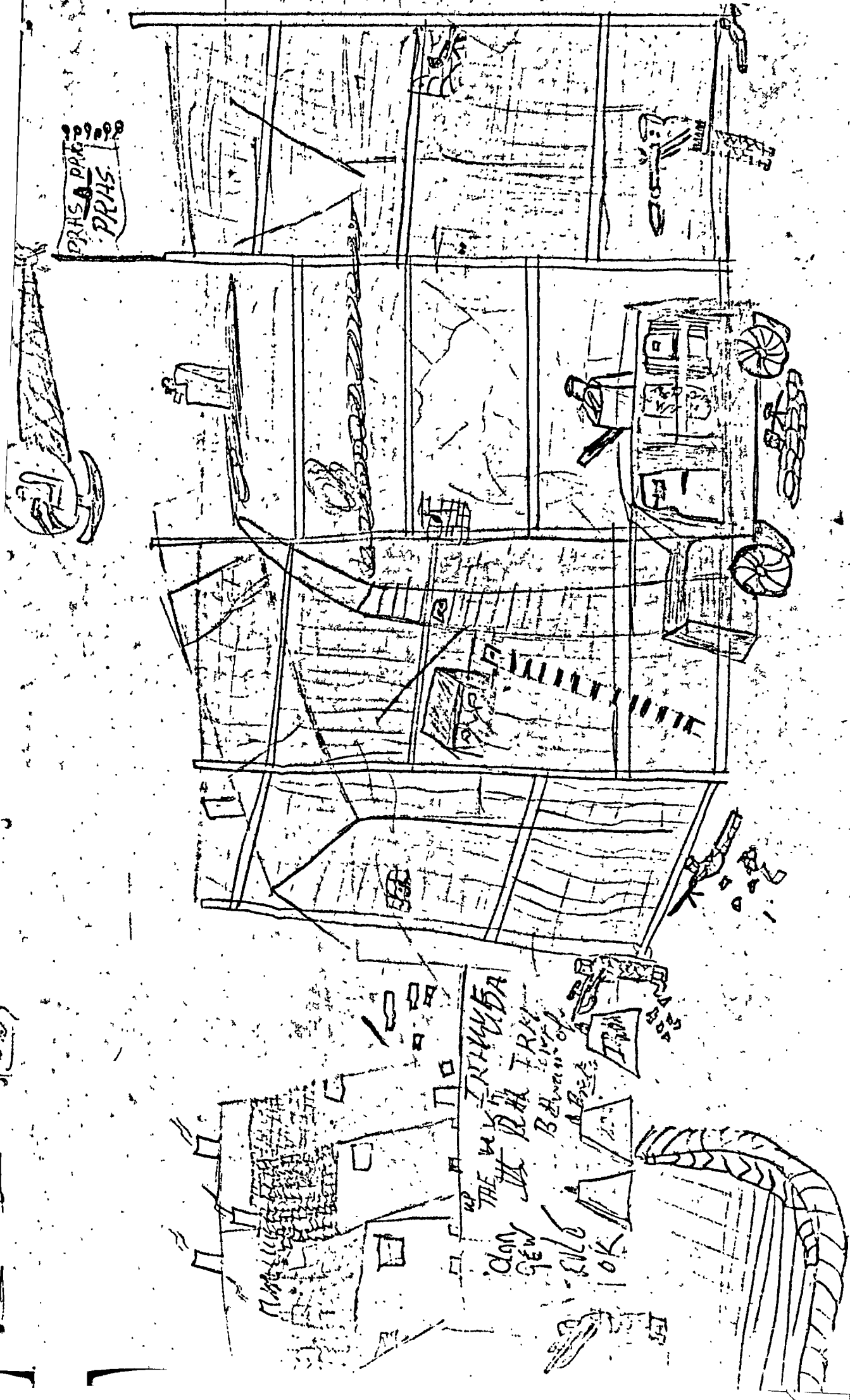
287. Drawing from a Catholic secondary school in West Belfast/ 1974/actual size

Brian Sproule and Fergal McConnell, and real or imagined artistic

discrimination in the case of Joe McWilliams, the Ellis brothers,

Peter McGuinness and Brian Sproule have legitimated for them a

whole series of protest paintings, in both the political and artis-

tic sense, for which there are no Protestant equivalents. Again the

same situation obtains for children. While their teachers may be

deeply opposed to the republican paramilitaries, they cannot help

but sympathise with the street level pressures which encourage

children to make drawings in which buildings are labelled "Informers

in these Flats", or a gruesome depiction of Bloody Sunday is accom-

panied by slogans like "Brits Out" and "God Safe Ireland". For most

Protestants on the other hand, the troubles are in themselves evidence

of dissent against their traditional role in the province. Hence, in

part, their relative unwillingness to depict them, and to let their

children depict them.

But the differences between the handling of the troubles by

artists from the two communities in Ulster are attributable to more

than political factors. It has been clear from the above account

that these artists' choice of content and style for their imagery

relating to the troubles has remained strongly conditioned by the

visual traditions available to them. Thus artists from the Catholic

community remain obsessed with the theme of the heroic victim, depic-

ted in a colourful painterly fashion, while their counterparts from

the Protestant community are more concerned with the relationship

between order and violence, handled in neat, drawn or constructed

images in which the grid pattern is a frequent motif.

The persistence of such traditional modes of vision in the work

of Ulster artists is largely attributable to the institutions through

which they obtain an understanding of the nature of art. This can

best be understood if one considers some of the attitudes towards

visual imagery mediated to Northern Ireland artists by such insti-

tutions at various turning-points in their careers.

In the first place the reception given to the earliest

attempts and aspirations of Ulster artists by their parents is

likely to vary considerably, according to the community to which

they belong. Whereas Catholic parents tend to encourage their

children to paint, and to pursue a career as an artist, their Pro-

testant counterparts often attempt to direct their children towards

more secure and financially rewarding occupations. Thus while T.P.

Flanagan was urged on in his earliest artistic efforts by his aunts,

John Vallely was first taught art byhis father, and Joe McWilliams

was bought a box of paints as a small child, Bob Sloan's parents had

to be persuaded by his art-teachers to let him attend the Belfast

College of Art, and Graham Gingles' career in art was regarded as

something of a second best option. Schoolteachers confirm this

general difference in parental attitude. When visiting two primary

schools on either side of the Falls/Shankill peace line early in

1974, I was told that the parents of children in the Protestant

school took little interest in their artwork, while approximately a

third of their Catholic counterparts would pin up their children's

paintings on the walls at home.

Indeed Catholic schools themselves tend to display considerably

greater enthusiasm for art than their Protestant counterparts. Not

only are their art classes generally more exuberant but throughout

the school buildings walls are covered with pictures and statues, both

religious and secular, in strong contrast to the bare formality of most

Protestant schools. (It must be remembered that although all Northern

Ireland school-children take the same art-exams, regardless of

their religious affiliation, their teachers come from training

colleges separated by the sectarian divide). The same differen-

tiation also remains manifest in the churches and chapels used by

the different denominations. The net result, as a commentator on

the recruitment of artists in America has noted, is that children

from a Catholic background are more likely to turn to art because

it is seen as an expression of and sharing in the creativity of

God.[1] (The same commentator believed that the parents of these

children also took pride in a gift which would lead them to mix in

superior social circles. This is clearly applicable to Northern

Ireland where the Catholic community is still largely massed within

the lower social groupings).

That children from Northern Ireland's Protestant and Catholic

communities are encouraged by parents, schools and churches towards

different forms of imagery and different attitudes towards art as

such, has been clearly apparent to some of the lecturers at the Bel-

fast College of Art. Charles Oakley's comments are fairly typical.

> "Very, very generally the 'Bible illustration' figurative
> art appears to be a more Catholic idiom, and Protestant
> art a pale reflection of things that are imagined to be
> up-to-date and 'British'.
> These differences are still visible in the Diploma shows
> sometimes - what is instilled from birth does become
> part of your way of seeing, and is really difficult to
> change." [2]

Indeed, as Oakley indicated, the Art College itself has had

little impact on these separate ways of seeing. The considerable

increase in funds made available to the College since its incorpora-

tion in the Ulster Polytechnic in 1971 have made it possible to take

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1. Mason Griff, "The Recruitment of the Artist", in The Arts in
   Society, ed Robert N. Wilson, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1964,
   p.86.
2. Letter to the writer, 19 Feb 1974.

the staff and students on study-trips to Europe as well as England
and the Republic of Ireland, to bring in a wide range of visiting
lecturers, and to provide the kind of equipment and facilities whcih
encourage diverse experimentation. But, largely because of the
province's small scale and general poverty, most of the students have
continued to live at home or to visit home regularly at weekends. The
resulting strength of their links with their local community have
become very apparent in the above discussion of the work of those
who have produced imagery relating to Ulster's present troubles.

Moreover when the Northern Ireland art student leaves the Bel-
fast College the institutions which shape his or her subsequent
career continue to reinforce rather than challenge those links. Almost
invariably he or she will pursue a career teaching in the relatively
well-organised and well-funded local education system. In doing so
he or she will inevitably be reinserted into the visual traditions
of his or her community, given the virtually total sectarian division
between schools in the province and their reluctance to accept teachers
from across the community divide.

Some alternatives to local modes of vision have been provided by
exhibitions brought in to the province from outside, but these have
been severely limited by the troubles and a number of other factors.
On the whole the Ulster Museum has survived unscathed, and since 1971
it has been able to exhibit in its vastly improved art galleries both
its own growing collection of international modern art and a wide range
of large-scale temporary exhibitions of modern art, crafts, and photo-
graphy. Its pattern of attendances appear to have borne little rela-
tion to the impact of the troubles, as they climbed to a peak in 1974,
dropped back again between 1975 and 1977, and commenced a gradual rise

again in the late 1970s.[1]

However despite its location in Belfast's relatively peaceful university area, the museum has to a limited extent felt the impact of the violence of the past thirteen years. In 1971 a proposed loan exhibition of masterpieces of twentieth century British art was abandoned because it was feared it might suffer damage, at a time when the violence was at its height, and in 1978 the Art for Society show which came to the museum from London's Whitechapel Art Gallery was opposed on political grounds by members of the museum's staff and its trustees.[2]

For the Arts Council of Northern Ireland the troubles have meant greatly reduced attendances at its own gallery,[3] several closures due to bomb damage,[4] destruction of other local venues round the province supported by it[5] and the closure or cancellation of incoming exhibitions for fear of possible damage to them. In the summer of 1969 a

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1. Ulster Museum, Reports, HMSO, Belfast, 1969-1980.

2. See below, pp. 879-883.

3. In 1969 visitors to the Arts Council gallery averaged about 350 a day; at the height of the troubles in the early 1970s there were rarely more than 35 and often as few as 5 or 6; and by the late 1970s the level was generally around 50 visitors a day (Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Annual Reports, Belfast 1969-1981, and information supplied by Brian Ballard, the Council's exhibitions officer, in 1979.)

4. The Arts Council gallery suffered damage from bomb attacks on neighbouring buildings in September 1971, July 1974 and April 1982. On the two latter occasions the damage was sufficient to require closure for several months to allow repairs to be made.

5. From 1969 to the mid-1970s schools and town halls round the province were requisitioned as army billets. Not only were they temporarily unavailable as exhibition spaces, but they often became the target for terrorist attack and disappeared completely. Derry's gallery space for example, which operated very successfully from 1965, became an army billet in 1969. It was vacated in 1973, renovated with financial assistance from the Ministry of Defence and burnt down within two months of its opening in 1976. Only in 1978, after the acquisition of another space, did the city once again have a gallery, which since then has acted as a major centre for both local and outside art, music and poetry.

big show of British and American artists from the Kasmin Gallery

was being exhibited by the Arts Council in Belfast. As buses and

houses burned they became uneasy. They were occupying a building

which also housed staff from a number of government departments;

their plate-glass windows, chosen to lure passers-by, began to

look increasingly vulnerable to bricks and bombs; and their insu-

rance company telephoned to point out that they were not covered

in the event of civil disturbance. The exhibition was removed to a

safe place, word got round and other galleries in London and else-

where became reluctant to lend exhibitions. This reluctance became

more marked after the Arts Council of their own accord cancelled an

exhibition of optical and kinetic art to be loaned from the Denise

René gallery in Venezuela. Since then outside shows have been moun-

ted but generally in low-key fashion.

These pressures on institutional venues, coupled with the small

number of dealers' galleries in the province until the late 1970s,

have also helped to reinforce the strongly centralised organisation of

exhibitions of local art in the province, and the lack of the kind of

independent, avant-garde venues in which contemporary artists feel

prompted, even encouraged, to challenge the status quo in its var-

ious cultural, political and social manifestations. Since the beginn-

ing of the present troubles there has been no regular independent group

exhibition showing the work of young artists in the province, and only

since 1978 have the Orchard Gallery in Derry and Art and Research

Exchange in Belfast provided independent venues for local and outside

avant-garde art.[1] Without such centres of licensed protest, Northern

which
1. The Octagon Gallery/has been operated in Belfast by a small group
   of art-enthusiasts since 1972 is relatively independent and
   sympathetic to young artists but not specifically committed to
   avant-garde work.

Ireland artists, already wary of anything which might increase the antagonisms in the province, have rarely made public political gestures. Indeed the only one known to me is the painting made by Gordon Woods in the aftermath of the shooting of thirteen civilians by the British Army on Bloody Sunday (ill 288).

Woods is a lecturer in art education at the New University of Ulster at Coleraine. Previous to the Bloody Sunday shootings his work had contained no reference to the Northern conflict, and consisted largely of landscape paintings. In the aftermath of the shootings, friends who were involved in the Civil Rights march came back from Derry appalled, and the university students went on strike, holding a three-day discussion of the situation. Woods throughout stressed the relevance of art to any situation, and as a form of proof painted 13 Human Deaths, I think? (ill 288), straight off in one hour twenty minutes, abandoning his usual slow and scrupulous technique of building up thin layers of paint on the canvas. He used the horizontal bands of colour then prevalent in his paintings but in a much more direct and violent way. The bottom band is heavily disrupted, and the thin line of red across the centre is totally out of character, a squeal of violence and pain across the streaked greens and browns suggesting the windblown grass surrounding the area in which he lives. The title was deliberately chosen, "Human" to stress the nature of humanity, and the question mark because it was still not known if some bodies had been dragged in to add to the number of the dead, or others removed for fear of identification as IRA officers. The painting was put up on an easel in the university hall and greeted with spontaneous applause. Many students discussed it with Gordon Woods and it led to the greatest sense of communication he had experienced through his work. Next day he found that the porter
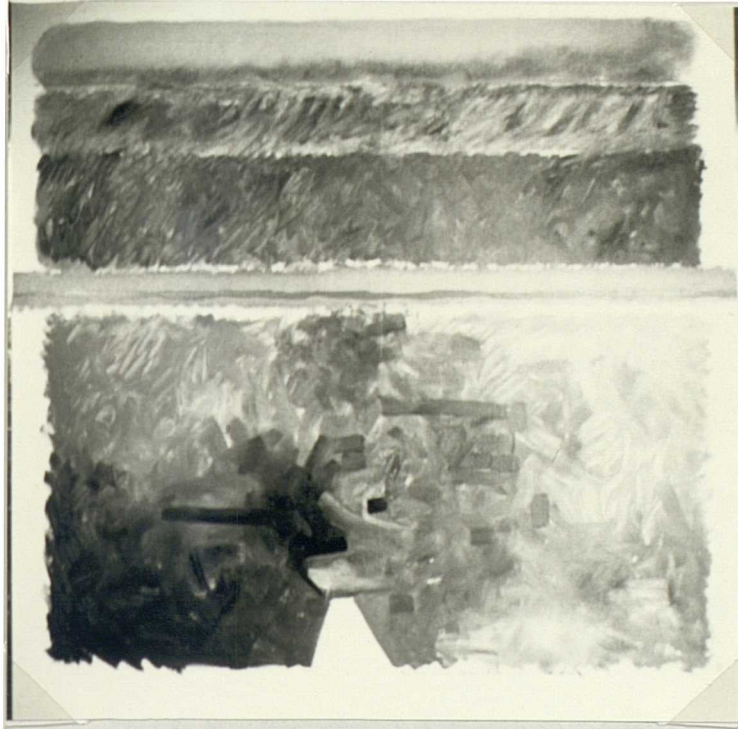
288. Gordon Woods, 13 Human Deaths, I Think?/ 1972/
oil on canvas/48 x 48 ins (122 x 122 cms)/
Collection: the artist/Photo: Gordon Woods

had pasted a piece of paper over the bottom concealing the words
"13 Papish Bastards", which somebody had scribbled on. Woods
removed the paper, saying that the statement was part of the pic-
ture. Even years later the painting stirred up strong feelings. A
Belfast gallery-owner refused to include it in a show of Woods'
work, fearing that it would cause trouble.[1]

Indeed Woods' freedom to make such a protest-piece in the first
place was largely due to his fairly prestigious employment by a new
university, drawing its students at that period from both communities
in Northern Ireland and from outside the province, and generally
fairly free from sectarian tensions. He had the public status and
open venue generally denied to artists in the province.

For not only is there considerable centralisation of exhibition
opportunities for young artists in Northern Ireland. Their acquisi-
tion of public status within the province is also largely determined
through awards and commissions administered through the Arts Council
of Northern Ireland, or by the various local churches.[2] Independent
patronage or sponsorship by local businesses, councils, or community
organisations is virtually non-existent. The prime movers and con-
trollers of such apparently independent ventures as the Art in Con-
text scheme of public works of art which has operated since the early
1970s, or the community murals painted in Belfast since 1977, are
always central organisations such as the Arts Council or the Belfast
College of Art. Local artists are not generally claimed as repre-
sentatives of the Ulster people, and when they are able to exhibit
outside the province it is very rare for them to do so as Northern
Ireland artists. Most frequently such opportunities come to them in

1. My discussion of this piece is based on a conversation with Gor-
   don Woods in January 1974.
2. This point can be confirmed by studying the artists' biographies
   provided by Theo Snoddy for Catto, Art in Ulster: 1, p.151ff.

the shape of exhibitions of Irish art, organised in the Republic,

more rarely in general group-shows of modern British art.[1] The insti-

tutional organisation of art in Northern Ireland, as well as local

political and social factors, and the personal predilections of its

artists, orientate those/to an approach towards the troubles heavily
                      artists

influenced by the visual traditions of the community to which they

belong.

Outsiders

When one looks at the works relating to the present conflict in

Northern Ireland made by artists originating outside the province,

the specific characteristics of the troubles imagery produced by

Ulster artists, and the particular factors contributing to those

characteristics become more clearly apparent. These works by out-

siders fall into two main groups, those made by artists who originate

in the Republic of Ireland, and those by artists from mainland Bri-

tain.

Artists from south of the Irish Border who have handled the

Ulster conflict in their work have often chosen to do so with the-

mes shared with their Northern contemporaries. Like them they have

re-examined the role of such traditional symbols as the Mother Ire-

land figure and the suffering hero. Like them they have turned to

major works in European art history as a source of inspiration. And

like them they have approached the general issues raised by the con-

flict through personal reactions to its impact on those close to them.

But they have handled these themes in a very different way from the

Ulster artists, using not the modes of vision traditional to the two

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1. Confirmation of this can be found in the same source, which also
   makes plain that dealers' galleries and group-shows in the
   Republic continue to play a significant part in the promotion
   of Ulster artists.

communities in Ireland, but cooler, more knowing styles currently
or recently in international vogue. Moreover they have shown a
far greater interest than their northern brethren in the wider
issues relating to the Ulster conflict, such as the involvement of
international economics, the role of the family in Irish politics,
and the network of political relationships between mainland Britain,
Northern Ireland and the Republic. And in contrast to the political
reticence of Northern artists, they have also made a number of very
overt political protests about events in the North. These southern
approaches to the Ulster conflict are the constructions of individual
artists working not only in a political context markedly divergent
from that which has obtained in Northern Ireland during the past
thirteen years, but also in an artworld whose institutional organi-
sation predisposes them to types of work very different from those
favoured by their Northern contemporaries.

That the Northern conflict has encouraged some artists from the
Republic to reappraise themes and symbols traditional in Irish visual
imagery has already been established in previous chapters. What needs
to be emphasised here is that they have done so with cool, distancing
styles appropriated from recent and current international art fashions
rather than local, more distinctively Irish modes of vision. Thus the
variations in style and handling employed on the one picture surface
in Micheal Farrell's Madonna Irlanda (ill 33) ultimately derive from
the experiments of the Pop artists in Britain and America in the
1960s, and by their deliberate negation of the concept of individual
artistic style convey an attitude of cool, distanced observation and
disinvolvement very different from the emotional and aesthetic personal
commitment implied by the local detail, unified style and strongly

handled paint of a Northern work such as Dave Scott's Belfast

Shawlie (ill 31).

This elimination of the artist's personal involvement is even

more apparent in recent works exploring the contemporary resonances

of traditional Irish symbolism made by James Coleman and Noel Sheri-

dan. In these installations combining reconstructions of existing

traditional images with videos exploring their ritual associations,

the emphases on the importance of the artwork's concept and its sta-

tus as a process rather than a product, and the role of the viewer

in its development, are related to the various kinds of conceptual

and installation art made in Europe and America in the 1970s.[1] Thus

in James Coleman's Strongbow, first set up in 1978:

> "A cast of the tomb of Strongbow, symbol of Anglo-Norman
> settlement in Ireland, is associated with a colour video
> of two hands in the position of prayer, one the green of
> Irishness and the other the orange of later settlements.
> Slowly the hands begin to clap, the pace rises and, as
> the sound mounts to a crescendo, the green and orange
> increasingly mix." [2]

And in Noel Sheridan's Irish Dancer piece installed in the

Without the Walls exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Art in

London in February 1980, a video of boys' legs performing Irish danc-

ing was projected in a high booth whose walls and floor were smothe-

red with silkscreen posters of Irish republican heroes, while tradi-

tional music played, and a woman's voice urged:

> "Tense yourself, don't jump, leap, stay tense, don't
> forget now."

These works share with their more traditional Northern Ireland counter-

parts a highly personal, at times romantic assessment of the function

of Irish ritual symbols. But by presenting that assessment through

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1. Useful guides to recent international art developments are Edward
Lucie-Smith, Art in the Seventies, Phaidon, Oxford, 1980 and
John A. Walker, Art since Pop, Thames & Hudson, 1975.
2. Description by George Dawson in Without the Walls (exhibition
catalogue), Institute ofContemporary Arts, 1980. Coleman's other
installations dealing with Irish symbolic traditions are dis-
cussed in Jean Fisher, James Coleman, Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dub-
lin, 1982.

media normally accepted as serving documentation rather than art, they offer it to the viewer in a cool, open fashion drained of many of the aesthetic overtones of the traditional artwork.

Other forms of cool distancing adopted from recent international art fashions can be found in Robert Ballagh's many works relating to the Northern Ireland conflict.[1] His earliest paintings tackling the subject were of marchers.[2] They were the result of Ballagh's strong personal feelings about the weakness and vulnerability of such columns, whether of refugees in the Second World War and Vietnam, or of unemployed workers in Dublin during the 1913 lockout, and at contemporary labour exchanges, or of civil rights protesters in America and Northern Ireland. (Ballagh had participated in the northern marhces and had experience of unemployment shortly before painting these pictures). But the style in which these figures are depicted is not the kind of expressionism or crafted abstraction which come most readily to Northern artists, but the cool, ironic stylization favoured by many pop artists of the period, used here to reveal the lack of feeling for these rows of figures endlessly marching and counter-marching, often set in circular frames referring to the visual consumption of their plight through the world media.[3] Similarly, when in 1972 Ballagh chose to rework three previous political paintings by major European artists, he did so not with the expressionist bitterness to be found in the works of Northern artists like Donald Owen Craig (ill 280), but with the cool simplifications of the pop artist, emphasising the form and content of the original works by

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1. The following discussion of Ballagh's work is largely based on a conversation with him on 20 June 1975.

2. These were exhibited along with the bulk of Ballagh's work relating to the Northern conflict, at the Orchard Gallery in Derry in Sept-Oct 1979.

3. It was only at a later date that Ballagh saw the similar but slightly more romantic marcher-paintings by the Spanish artist Juan Genoves.

Goya, David (ill 289) and Delacroix, by eliminating any hint of

personal handling, and relating them to events in the North by a

leaflet juxtaposing them with news photographs of the violence,

rather than by incorporation of such imagery in the paintings

themselves.[1]

At the time that he made these works Ballagh had some hope

that they would be sufficiently simple to convey to a wide audience

a message of outrage at the various kinds of violence being prac-

tised in Ulster. In fact, although all three found ready purcha-

sers, there was little public understanding of them. Indeed, when

the painting illustrated here was exhibited in the window of the

Arts Council of Northern Ireland gallery in Belfast, there was no

comment on its reiteration of David's protest at the futility of

political strife, merely a polite objection to the nudity of its

women. This lack of comprehension encouraged Ballagh to further

variations on the paintings in the late 1970s in which their photo-

realist juxtaposition with indifferent guests at a private view,

or the clutter of the artist's studio, questions their pretensions

to deal with reality. During this same period he also made a number

of works in which, like the American pop artists Andy Warhol and

Jasper Johns, he probed the draining off of emotion from political

realities by such banal popular images as a mirror printed with the

image of a show-band massacred by loyalist paramilitaries, and the

actual numbers of the victims of the Ulster violence.[2]

The distancing from the Northern conflict in the works relating

1. A similar handling of previous masterpieces of European art can
be found in the work of the English pop artist Patrick Caul-
field, although these paintings by Ballagh were uninfluenced
by him.
2. In the Memorial Wall now installed in Victoria Street in Belfast.
The showband piece was prompted by personal feeling. Ballagh
knew the victims and was familiar with their way of life from
his own experiences as a travelling rock musician.
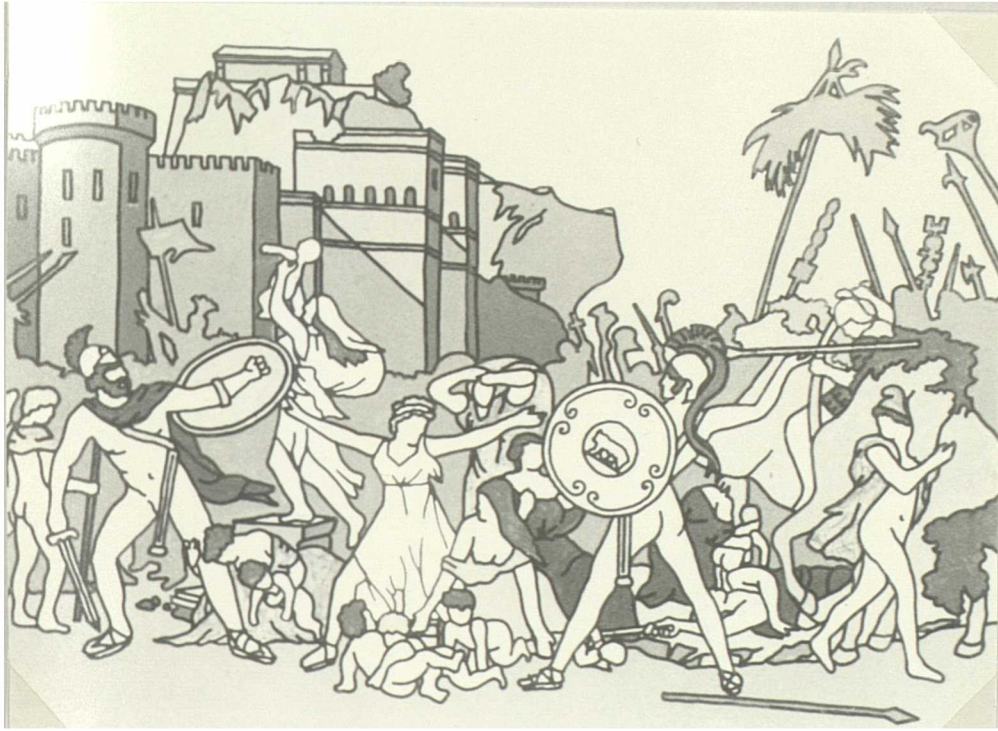
289. Robert Ballagh/The Rape of the Sabines, David/
     1970/acrylic on canvas/96 x 72 ins (244 x 183
     cms)/Crawford Municipal Gallery, Cork/Photo:
     Robert Ballagh

to it by artists from the Republic of Ireland is apparent not only

in their use of the cool, impersonal conventions recently favoured

by many internationally fashionable artists, but also in the inte-

rest displayed by many of them in the wider political issues linked

to the conflict. Thus Paul Cox, in a series of paintings made in

1972 and 1973, expressed his belief that the involvement of the Bri-

tish army in the North might have as much to do with the price of oil

as immediate issues, and that the media viewer of their involvement

was implicitly supporting such a role, by showing British soliders

walking across road markings or lying amidst oil cans, framed in

stylized television screens, on which gun-sights were superimposed

(ill 290).[1] And a few years later John Devlin emphasised the depen-

dence of the Northern conflict on the preservation within Irish family

life of the country's bitter political traditions, in a series of

works in which ordinary, indeed often highly respectable members of

Irish society, were shown to be involved with objects redolent of

extreme republican or tribal attitudes (ill 291).[2]

Both these artists sought to expose such connections with the

distanced formality of pop-art and photo-realism. For his analysis

in _Menage a trois_[3] of the political interrelationships between main-

land Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic, Brian King chose to

develop his previous use of the highly fashionable type of installa-

tions in which natural forces such as heat, cold, wind and tides pro-

duce a sequence of events.[4]

1. This discussion of Paul Cox's works is largely based on a con-
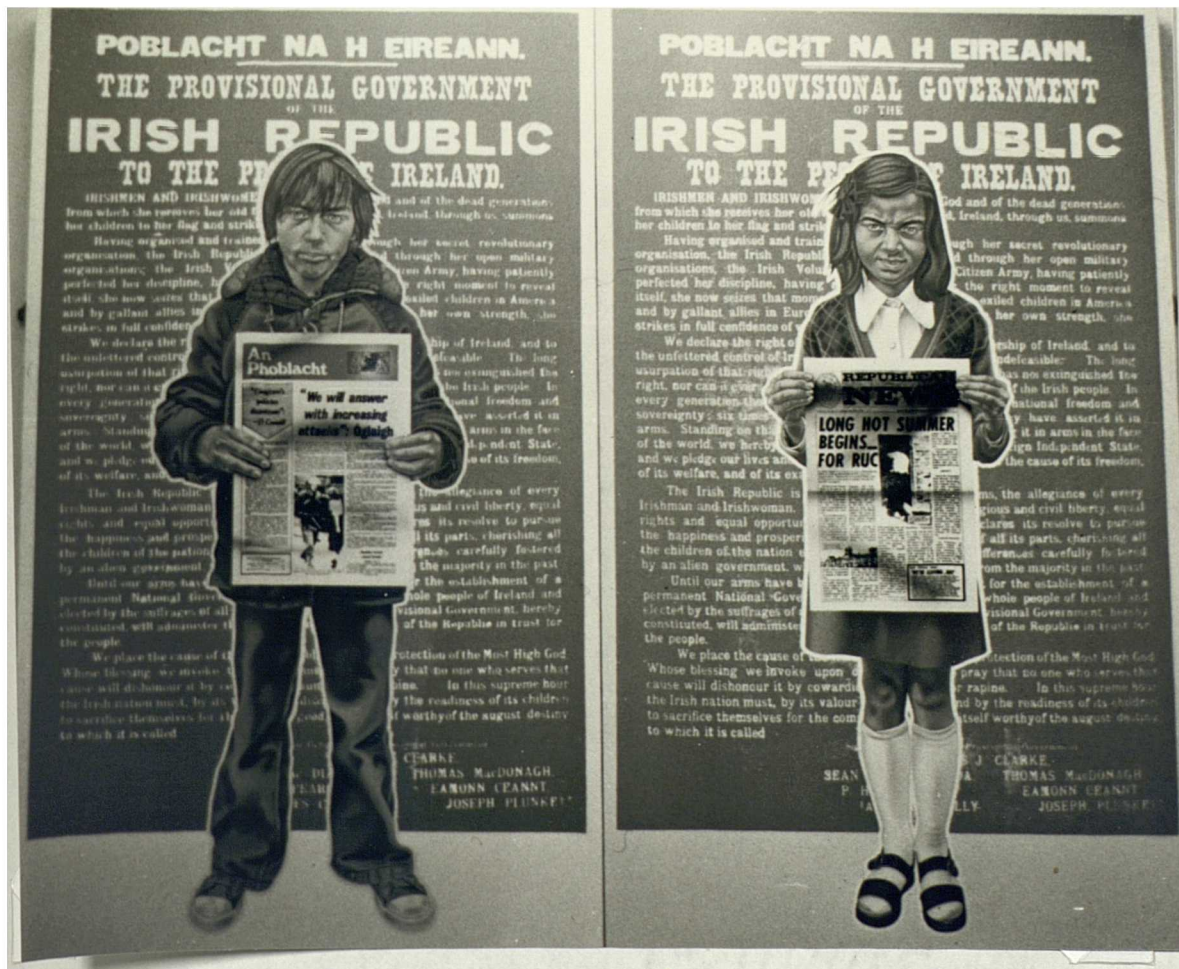   versation with him on 29 July 1975.
2. Conversation with John Devlin, 15 April 1980.
3. Presented at the _Without the Walls_ exhibition.

4. On these earlier works by King see Dorothy Walker, "Installa-
   tions and Performance in Ireland", p. 40.
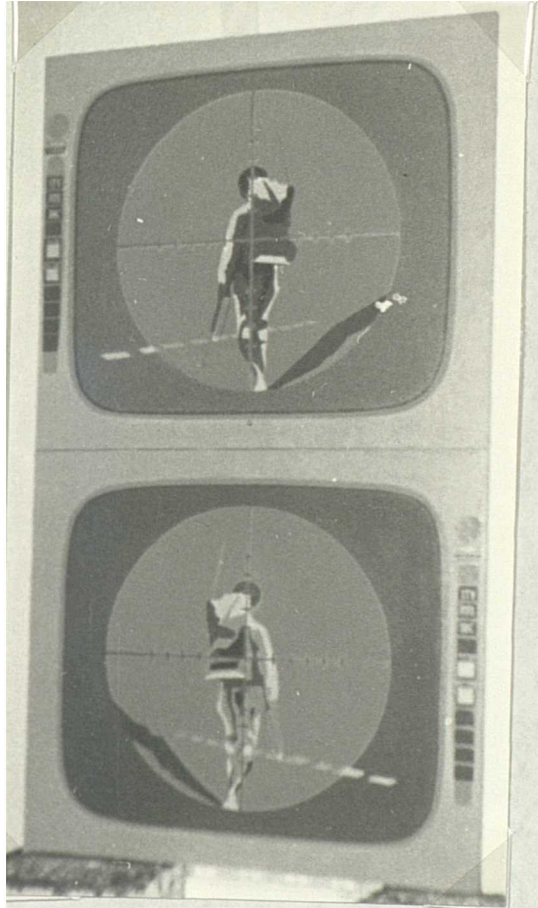
290. Paul Cox/Television soldier/1972-3/acrylic on board/present whereabouts unknown

291. John Devlin/Les Enfants Terribles/1976/oil,
acrylic and silkscreen/67 x 80½ ins (170.2
x 203.2 cms)/Photo: John Devlin

"He constructed a large open cube, lined with mirrors,
being the land area of Great Britain at the scale of
1 sq inch to 1 sq mile, inside that, another cube of
the land area of the Republic, filled with turf
briquettes, and suspensed over that, a perspex cube
of the land area of Northern Ireland, containing
orange water, On a pedestal beside the cubes, he
placed a £20 note with the message: 'Take the money
if ... You ... Voted Conservative, or Accept the
Monarchy, or Went to public school, or Wash your
car on Sunday morning, or Believe the BBC, or Could
recognise an Old Etonian tie.' The money was taken
within minutes of the start of the exhibition, acti-
vating a beam mechanism which released a metal arrow.
This dropped right through the Northern Ireland box
releasing the orange water into the turf beneath.
Nothing more happened for a few days until the satura-
ted turf started to expand and to break its box, invad-
ing the clean, inward-looking England box with a soggy
mess of turf which would eventually break the mirrors."[1]

Yet again the artist's personal touch was virtually eliminated,

leaving natural processes and the intervention of the viewer to com-

plete an analysis of the wider political interrelationships involved

in the Northern conflict.

Yet it is also true that artists from the Republic have made

the kind of overt, highly personal, political protests about that

conflict rarely attempted by their Northern contemporaries. As

early as 1969 Micheal Farrell gave vent to his personal feelings

about the situation in Ulster in an impromptu speech he made on

reception of the Carroll's prize at the Irish Exhibition of Living

Art, held that year at Cork. He is recorded as having said:

"Art is above politics but not (above) humanity. As an
artist and a man I have never used my work for any
political end. I am so moved by wrong and know what
is right with regard to the horrific happenings to the
North of this island. This is a personal statement. I
am withholding my work from the North of Ireland. I
will not let it go to be shown in a gallery supported
by that regime. I will in the future not allow my work
to go North and this will be made a condition of sale
until that State has achieved the basic fundamentals of
of a decent society." 2

1. Dorothy Walker, "Without the Walls", p.22.
2. Report in The Irish Times, quoted in Cyril Barrett, Micheal Far-
   rell Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, 1979, p.10.

A number of other southern artists, including Robert Ballagh, associated themselves with this resolution. Although both Farrell and Ballagh subsequently revised this stance, in light of their greater appreciation of the complexities of the northern conflict, and their growing belief that the artist's participation was more politically effective than withdrawal, they continued to make pungent public protests about events in the province. In 1972 the opening of the Living Art exhibition was again the setting for a dramatic break with artistic conventions prompted by northern events. On this occasion it was Robert Ballagh who chose to make public his anger about the Bloody Sunday shootings, (ill 292).

> "He has thirteen figures chalked all around the gallery
> at strategic points... someone has lain down and he's
> drawn a chalk line around him and they've done that
> thirteen times. He's deliberately put them where on
> the opening day nobody could avoid them. He has gone
> over each of them and poured pig's blood over each of
> them, so that at the opening of the gallery everybody
> came in with their suitable twee champagne and they
> were tramping through it and they bloody walked it all
> through the bloody gallery, up the stairs and they were
> stepping through it. And the thing worked." 1

At this exhibition Ballagh and Brian King were also involved in a performance with Brian O'Doherty, an artist from the Republic who achieved a considerable reputation as an art-critic in New York in the 1960s. O'Doherty, dressed in white, lay on a table while Ballagh and King painted him, one with green paint starting from his head, and one with orange paint starting from his feet.

> "As the green and the orange drew nearer to each other,
> the white peace-space shrank and an extraordinary
> tension and even anxiety was felt at its disppearance.
> The colours met, however, and continued on, mixed over
> the body, which was the obvious solution and brought a
> corresponding sense of relief." 2

1. Description by the Northern Ireland artist Roy Johnston recorded at a meeting of the Troubled Image Group in Belfast on 19 Nov 1972. Chalking round the outline of a murder victim, is part of security forces procedure. See the photograph in the News Letter, Belfast, 2 March 1973, p.1.
2. Dorothy Walker, "Installations and Performance in Ireland", p.39.

292. Robert Ballagh/Bloody Sunday protest at the
opening of the Irish Exhibition of Living
Art in 1972/Photo: Robert Ballagh

At the same time Brian O'Doherty changed his name to Patrick
Ireland until such time as British troops left Ireland and all its
citizens were granted civil rights.

Since this time both Farrell and Ballagh have continued to be
publicly involved in political protests about developments relating
to the northern conflict. In the mid-1970s Farrell wrote to the
President of the Republic protesting at Ireland's maintenance of the
death penalty for major crimes, including those committed with poli-
tical intent, a gesture he recorded subsequently in an artwork
exhibited in Dublin in 1977,[1] and in 1980, when one of his _Madonna
Irlanda_ series was shown in the _International Connection_ exhibition
at the Round House Gallery in London, it bore an inscription stat-
ing that it would not be completed until the two Irelands were one.[2]
Meanwhile Ballagh has continued to lend his support to political
protests about events in the north, providing a drawing for example
for the cover of a recent book on the H-blocks issue (ill 293).

Clearly the freedom of artists from the Republic like Farrell
and Ballagh to make such public political protests is strongly linked
to the actual political context within which they have operated. Dis-
tanced as they are from the immediate impact of the violence in
Ulster, they can make clear-cut statements about it without fearing
that their protests might lead to attacks on themselves, or further
exacerbate the conflict. Moreover they are from a state in which open
association with a socialist or republican viewpoint is very rarely an
impediment to the artist's career. Both Farrell and Ballagh are highly
successful and indeed Charles Haughey, the present Prime Minister of the

1. In a one man show at the Dawson Gallery. See Kent Russell,
   "Ballagh, Farrell and Fisher", _Hibernia_, Dublin, 2 Sept 1977,
   p.26.
2. Frances Spalding "A Sense of Ireland", _Art about Ireland_, Dublin,
   vol 2, no 1, April-May 1980, p.20.

ON THE BLANKET
TIM PAT COOGAN

THE
H·BLOCK
STORY

293. Robert Ballagh/Book cover/1980/red and
     black on white/actual size

Republic, was recently painted by Ballagh.[1] Similarly the academic

painter Thomas Ryan and the young illustrator Jim Fitzpatrick have

been able to provide visual imagery to those opposed to the involve-

ment of the British forces in Northern Ireland (ill 294), without any

harm to their different forms of success. Such political freedoms are

not available to artists in Northern Ireland, or, as we shall see, in

mainland Britain.[2]

However, the distinctive nature of the works relating to the

northern conflict produced by artists from the Republic of Ireland,

with their cool, international modernity, their interest in wider

issues and their openness to overt political statements, cannot

solely be linked to the political context within which they have been

produced. These characteristics are also related to the institutional

organisation of the visual arts in the Republic,[3] which has encouraged

artists from that country to a strong interest in commercial art, a

marked commitment to travelling, exhibiting and working abroad, and

a well-established sense of their public role in their native land.

In the first place the virtually total disorganisation which

prevailed in art-education and art-training at every level in the

Republic until very recently,[4] resulted in the country's aspiring

artists either seeking a training in commercial art, or travelling

abroad for both formal and informal art education, or, most usually,

doing both. Thus the technical perfection, knowing coolness, and

1. On Ballagh's socialist views see Hayden Murphy's piece on him in
   The Irish Imagination 1959-1971 (catalogue of Rosc 71 exhibi-
   tion), Dublin, 1971, p.36.
2. See below, p. 877.
3. Much of the factual information endorsing my subsequent remarks
   about art institutions in the Republic can be found in J.M.
   Richards, Provision for the Arts, The Arts Council/An Chom-
   hairle Ealaion, Dublin, and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation,
   London 1976. Also useful is Christina Murphy, "Only 60 full-
   time artists", The Irish Times, Dublin, 19 May 1980, p.12.
4. See Ciaran Benson, The Place of the Arts in Irish Education, Arts
   Council, Dublin, 1979, Christina Murphy, "College of Art Row
   was only a beginning", The Irish Times, 26 Jan 1977, p.10; ibid
   ."Art and the Student", The Irish Times, 3 March 1977, p.8; and
   Dorothy Walker, "Art Finals: A Comparison", The Irish Times, 18
   July 1979, p.8.
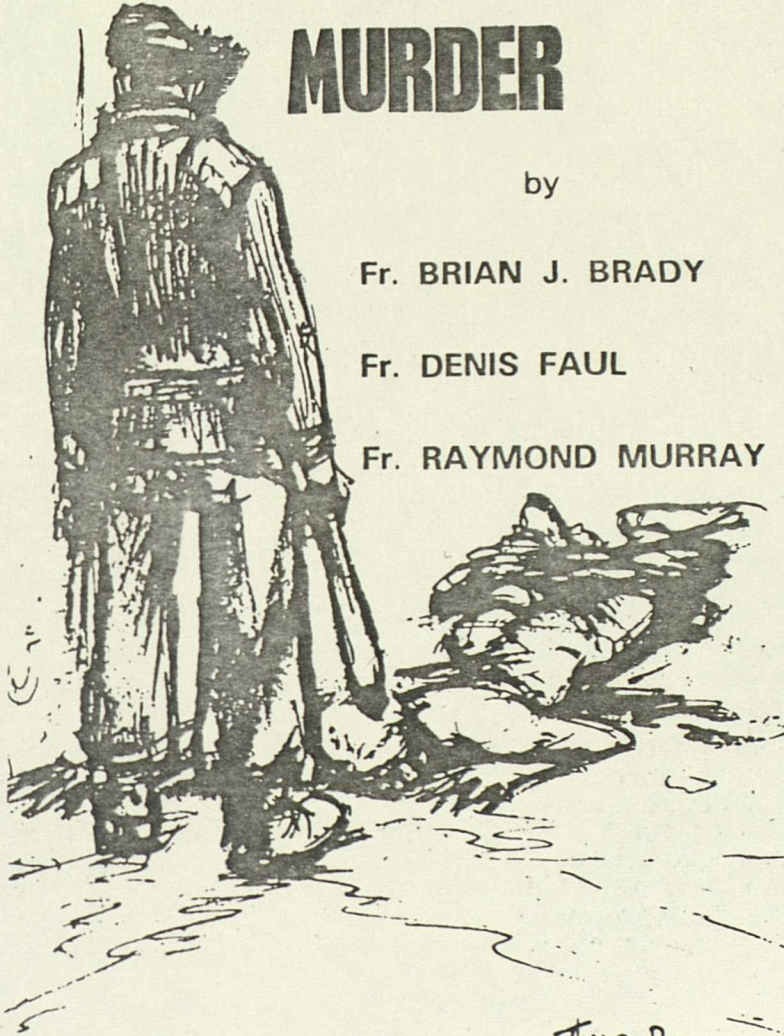
A BRITISH ARMY MURDER

by

Fr. BRIAN J. BRADY

Fr. DENIS FAUL

Fr. RAYMOND MURRAY

Thomas Ryan — RHA

LEO NORNEY (17 years)
killed by Black Watch Regiment, 13 September, 1975

294. Thomas Ryan/Booklet cover/1975/brown on
      white/actual size

involvement in the latest modern art movements manifest in the work

of the artists discussed in this section, can only be accurately

understood if one knows that virtually all of them have at some stage

in their career worked as commercial designers, and all have spent

lengthy periods studying and working in major art-centres in Europe,

America and even Australia. (Indeed Farrell has lived in Paris since

1971, and James Coleman has been based in Milan since 1970).

The inclination to work abroad is further linked to the dis-

organisation of the Republic's education system in that very few

jobs as art-teachers have been available to southern artists, par-

ticularly when compared with their contemporaries in Northern Ire-

land and mainland Britain.[1] This state of affairs also has further

implications, in that artists in the Republic are not reinserted into

their country's native visual traditions as are their art-teaching

counterparts in the north. .

In the second place, the public recognition accorded to artists

in the Republic is far greater than it is in Northern Ireland. With

the boom in the Irish economy which commenced in the late 1960s and

only began to falter very recently, southern artists have had continued

opportunities to show in dealer's galleries,[2] to carry out commissions

for industrial patrons, and to obtain state recognition by the award

of highly-publicised bursaries,[3] or by inclusion in state-backed

exhibitions promoting the image of a country increasingly confident

of its ability to combine modern economic expansion with its more tra-

ditional values.[4] These opportunities, coupled with their involvement

in the international art world, and with the mutual support and

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1. The Irish Imagination 1959-1971, p.10.
2. Dublin has approximately 20 such galleries, most of them highly
    successful.
3. Such as the Aosdana scheme launched by Charles Haughey's present
    govern in 1981.
4. Such as the Delighted Eye, International Connection & Without the
    Walls shows mounted as part of the Sense of Ireland festival in
    London in February and March 1980.

encouragement provided by artist-organised group-shows of modern

Irish art such as the Living Art and Oireachtas exhibitions, and

by art-centres like the Project in Dublin, have helped to foster

in the artists discussed here a strong sense of their local and

international standing. And that in turn has encouraged the moder-

nity, wide analyses and overt political comment so characteristic

of their works relating to the Ulster conflict. In the Republic as

in Northern Ireland artists' individual views of the troubles are

conditioned as much by the institutions shaping their careers as by

their more directly obvious political context.

In some respects the artists in mainland Britain who have dealt

with the Northern Ireland troubles in their work, have approached

them in a manner similar to their contemporaries in the Republic of

Ireland, sharing with them a preoccupation with media representation

of the conflict, and with the international developments linked to

it. However the attempt by many of these British artists to chart

and assess the distances between the observer and events in Ulster,

or between the realms of peace and violence, is distinctive. So too

are the styles of operation they have chosen to employ. Many of them

have made strongly conceptual pieces dominated by soft, shabby, muted

imagery, with much use of ephemeral materials. This kind of imagery,

and the highly personal approach generally accompanying it, are

characteristics also exhibited in the various performance-pieces by

English artists relating to Northern Ireland. In these an element of

sado-masochism has frequently been visible as well. In contrast to

these highly personal works there have been a handful of very overt

Political statements relating to the Ulster conflict made by English

artists.

To a certain extent these salient aspects of the artworks relat-

ing to the Northern Ireland conflict made by artists in mainland

Britain can be linked to the personal and political contexts of their makers. Thus emphasis on distance from the violence, highly personal imagery, and inclination towards softness, can be related equally to the geographical distance of Northern Ireland from the mainland, the lack of political discussion of the conflict in Britain, the personal links with the province of the majority of these artists, and the fact that a significant proportion of them are women. But these factors are themselves related to the institutional organisation of the visual arts in Britain, with its centralisation on the metropolis, its domination by dealers, critics and art institutions, and its general lack of confidence in artists as political commentators and representatives.

For two English artists in particular the impact of the media on people's perceptions of the Northern Ireland conflict has been a major preoccupation. Both are women who have had experience of living and working in the province during the troubles. Philippa Goodall, an art lecturer from Birmingham, who was born in Northern Ireland, was in the province from 1968 to 1973, during her husband's employment there as an architect. During the early part of their residence in Ulster they lived near Ballymena, where she taught in a boys' secondary school, after completing her training as an art-teacher at the New University of Ulster at Coleraine. For the last eighteen months they were in Belfast.

Although Philippa Goodall[1] had some direct contact with the violence during that latter period, and indeed began to make images relating to the troubles after the Bloody Sunday shootings, it was not until her return to Birmingham in 1974 that she made a whole

1. The following discussion of Philippa Goodall's work is based on a conversation with her on 20 Jan 1976.

295. Philippa Goodall/Untitled/1973/photocopy with
pencil and coloured ink/16½ x 11⁵/₈ ins (42 x
29.7 cms)/Collection: the artist/Photo: B.
Loftus

series of works on this theme. In them she used media pictures

of soldiers, guns and gunmen (ill 295)[1] to analyse and criticise

their unreal image of the conflict. Often they are filtered

through grids as a kind of visual equivalent to the way they are

sieved and selected prior to reaching the public. Their drama is

undermined by first photocopying them and then tinting them with

soft, sweet, shabby colours. And their machismo element is further

eroded by ironic juxtapositions with superman, (Goodall is a commit-

ted feminist), flowers and the bodies of the victims on Bloody Sun-

day.

Suzan Swale[2] is also an art lecturer from the Midlands, and

taught in the Belfast College of Art during the academic year of

1973-4. Although she knew others who had taught in Northern Ire-

land she had never been there previously herself. Always of a

nervous disposition she found the physical and mental violence

terrifying. (She was close to a number of bombs, and endured the

strains generated by the first loyalist workers' strike in May 1974).

And yet, like Philippa Goodall, she found the violence unreal -

until it appeared in the media. So it was that most of the works

about Northern Ireland that she made deal with media imagery. On a

bed of sand a coffin wrapped in polythene and covered with a mirror

spews photographs out of a hole where the head should be - the pic-

tures are a jumble of violent scenes from Belfast and details from

great works of art. On a panel single shots from the television cove-

rage of the Bloody Friday bombs freeze for our horrified gaze the

image of men scooping the remains of the victims into polythene bags.

1. Here an advertisement for The Times used in 1972, and the Sunday
     Times colour supplement for 9 April 1972, titled The Guns of
     Ulster.
2. The following discussion of Suzan Swale's work is largely based
   on a conversation with her on 19 July 1974.

296. Suzan Swale/Paper Garden wall-floor piece/1974/
Photo: Suzan Swale

These are interposed with photographs of Ms Swale's husband. In

front of a vastly enlarged photograph of a bombed office, its

papers strewn all over the road, some newspapers are hung out on

lines like washing, while others lie in stacks on the floor. Ants

crawl out from between them (ill 296). The photograph on the

wall is the reality, in front of which the papers look ineffec-

tual. Yet it too comes from a newspaper.[1] The lines on which the

papers hang are lines of communication, covering the space between

the viewer and the "reality". Yet as so often in these works by

Swale, they reveal distances rather than shorten them. Few of them

even touch the "reality". None of them touch the viewer.

Adrian Hall is another English artist who has taught at the

Belfast College of Art during the present troubles. He was the

principal lecturer in sculpture there from 1972 to 1979. A Cor-

nishman, with previous teaching experience in New Zealand, he has

made a number of works exploring the wider political developments

linked with the Northern Ireland conflict. In Silk Street (ill 297)

he attempted to demonstrate some of the ways in which those involved

in the struggle have been manipulated by powers external to the

province. The work brings together photographs and drawings of three

main kinds of subject matter: the new buildings in Silk Street on the

fringes of the City of London; the violence in Northern Ireland; and

sexual pornography. Hall intended it as a protest against the people

who write the lines, whether in Northern Ireland, or the pages of

Playboy magazine or on the English building sites employing Irish

labourers. Most of the images selected in pursuit of this aim had

1. It appeared on p.7 of the Belfast Telegraph for 21 Jan 1972.
   The caption ran "Documentation of terror. Documents strewn
   over the roadway of Victoria St today after terrorists plan-
   ted a bomb in the offices of Barrie's, potato importers."
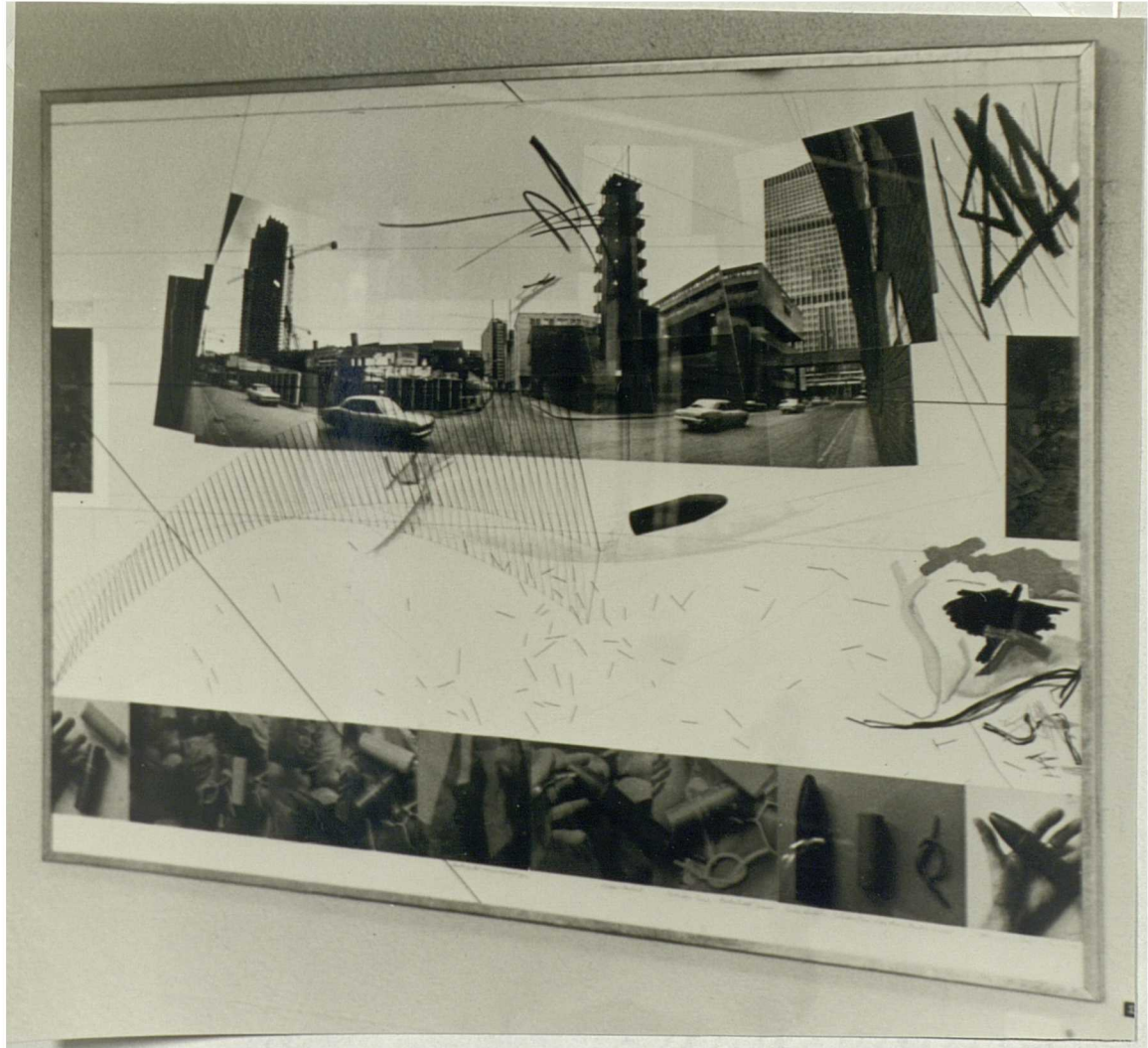
297. Adrian Hall/Silk Street/1978/mixed media drawing
      with photographs/33 x 45 ins (83.8 x 114.2 cms)/
      Irish Contemporary Art Society/Photo: Adrian Hall

some kind of personal resonance for him. The rubber bullet was given to him by a friend, the Silk Street buildings were outside another friend's flat in London, and one of the Northern Ireland photographs had for a long time been stuck up on his studio wall. (It shows a bullet-riddled and blood-stained hut in Whiteabbey, Co Antrim, in 1976, following a shooting attack on a mixed group of Catholics and Protestants enjoying a card game).

In contrast the images employed by Conrad Atkinson[1] to demonstrate the links between events in Nothern Ireland and developments elsewhere appear to be public, political and almost completely impersonal. Thus in his Silver Liberties piece (ill 298), made for the Art for Society exhibition in 1978, an Irish tricolour forms the background to juxtaposed photographs of men alleged to have been tortured during interrogation in Northern Ireland, of Steve Biko, the black leader killed in prison in South Africa, and of Liddle Towers, alleged to have been kicked to death by police in Newcastle-upon-Tyne after his arrest on a charge of being drunk and disorderly.[2] Simiarly the work about Northern Ireland made by Atkinson for the exhibition "Un Certain Art Anglais" shown in Paris early in 1979 consisted of two large rosettes, one a development of the Easter parade rosette reproduced above (ill 116), the other showing Northern Ireland as a red heart in the centre of Europe. And both the installations and the postcards prepared for Atkinson's show at the Project Gallery in Dublin in April 1980, titled The Golden Triangle and the Weight of History, assembled maps, sketches, statistics and diagrams in order to convey the impact of the violence in Northern Ireland, and the links between the conflict and wider economic and political

1. The following discussions of Conrad Atkinson's work is based on conversations with him on 6 March 1975, 7 June 1975, and 26 February 1980.
2. See Conrad Atkinson, Picturing the System, Pluto Press/ICA, 1981, p.22.
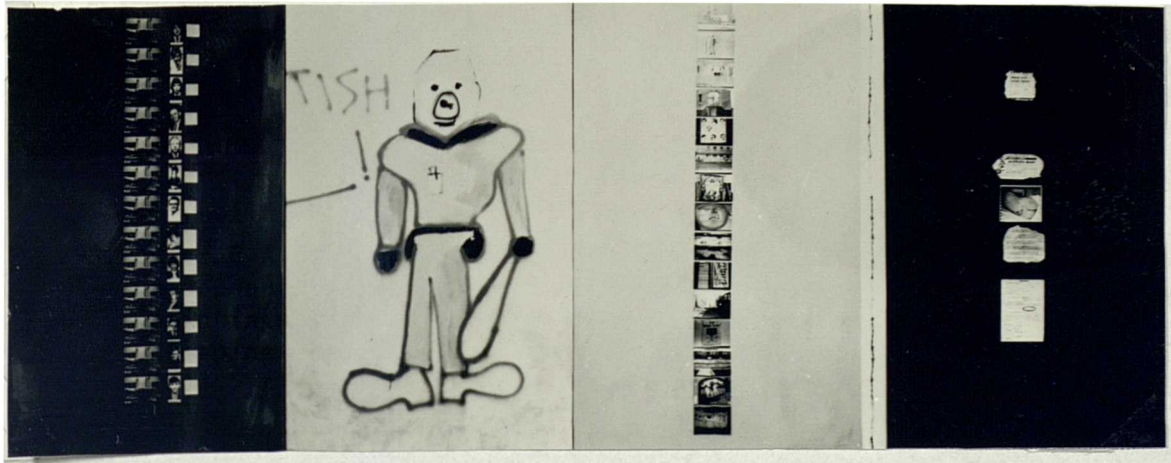
298. Conrad Atkinson/Silver Liberties – A Souvenir of
     a wonderful Anniversary Year/1978/4 acrylic
     paintings with collage of photos and newspaper
     clippings and barbed wire/total 84 x 192 ins
     (213.5 x 487.8 cms)/Photo: Eeva Inkeri

developments in Europe.

Moreover the same emphasis on apparently impersonal document-
tation was apparent in an exhibition by Atkinson dealing with the
internal politics of Ulster. This show, commissioned from the artist
by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland and mountained in their gal-
lery in Belfast in 1975, was titled A shade of green, an orange
edge. The bulk of it consisted of photographs of wall paintings,
graffiti, posters and leaflets taken by Atkinson during a series of
visits to Ulster three months previous to the exhibition,[1] a wall
of photos documenting the Bloody Sunday shootings, and a display
advocating the introduction of a Bill of Rights in the province.
This last included a series of video-taped interviews with former
internees.

Yet Conrad Atkinson's apparently impersonal handling of the
Ulster conflict is deceptive. In much of his recent work on this
theme the imagery has become increasingly emotive, with his intro-
duction of the heart as a symbol of Northern Ireland's central
importance in European politics, and his use of his own hands as a
base on which to display words and images relating to the Irish
problem.[2] And his interest in this subject-matter in the first
place was closely related to his own background as a native of Clea-
tor Moor, a Cumbrian mining village largely populated by descendants
of Irish immigrants, and still marked by bitterness between Protes-
tant and Catholic, orange and green.

Indeed exploration of the Northern conflict motivated partly by
personal links, is very common amongst these British artists and

1. These were accompanied by a collection of written grafitti,
   snatches of verse and comments relating to the conflict lar-
   gely compiled by this writer.
2. A practice also used in connection with a number of other poli-
   tical issues in recent years by Atkinson, and often annotated
   with the following quotation from the Russian constructivist
   artist El Lizzitsky: "May the overthrow of the old world be
   imprinted on the palms of your hands."

helps to explain some of the characteristics of their work. Thus

Philippa Goodall's deliberate muting of media images appears to be

linked to her continuing warm feelings for the country in which

she was born, and Suzan Swale's exploration of the distances between

the viewer and the event were rooted as much in her personal sense

of distance from England and her husband as in the perceptual dis-

locations introduced by the mass media. Similarly Rita Donagh and

Sonya Knox, two artists working in Britain but with Irish roots, have

been much concerned with charting the distances in time and space

between various elements in the Ulster conflict.

When Rita Donagh[1] commenced her Ulster Series she had not visi-

ted Northern Ireland[2] but was strongly aware of her own family links

with the Republic.[3] Gradually in a long sequence of drawings and

paintings, she plotted areas of time and space and emotion relating

to the Ulster conflict, with the kinds of signs and symbols employed

by map-makers and geometricians. The opposition of red and green at

the Irish border, the location of megalithic burial places in an area

of the Republic, the fragments of debris flying through a photo of a

bomb explosion by Clive Limpkin,[4] the crosses put out for those kil-

led on Bloody Sunday and in the Kent State massacre, the paving-stones

on which city victims die, all were analysed and logged in this

fashion. It was only however when she saw a photograph in the Sunday

Times[5] of the body of a victim of the Dublin bombs covered with

1. The following discussion of Rita Donagh's work is largely based
   on a conversation with her on 7 Nov 1974.
2. She has subsequently been to Belfast a number of times, generally
   as a visiting lecturer for the College of Art.
3. Three out of four of her grandparents were Irish.
4. Reproduced in The Battle of Bogside, Penguin, 1972.
5. Reproduced on p.3 of the issue for 19 May 1974, and illustrated
   in Rita Donagh, (exhibition catalogue), Whitworth Art Gallery,
   Manchester/Arts Council of Great Britain, London, 1977.

299. Rita Donagh/Evening Papers, Ulster/1972-74/
      oil, collage and pencil on canvas/55$\frac{1}{8}$ x
      78$\frac{3}{4}$ ins (140 x 200 cms)/British Council/
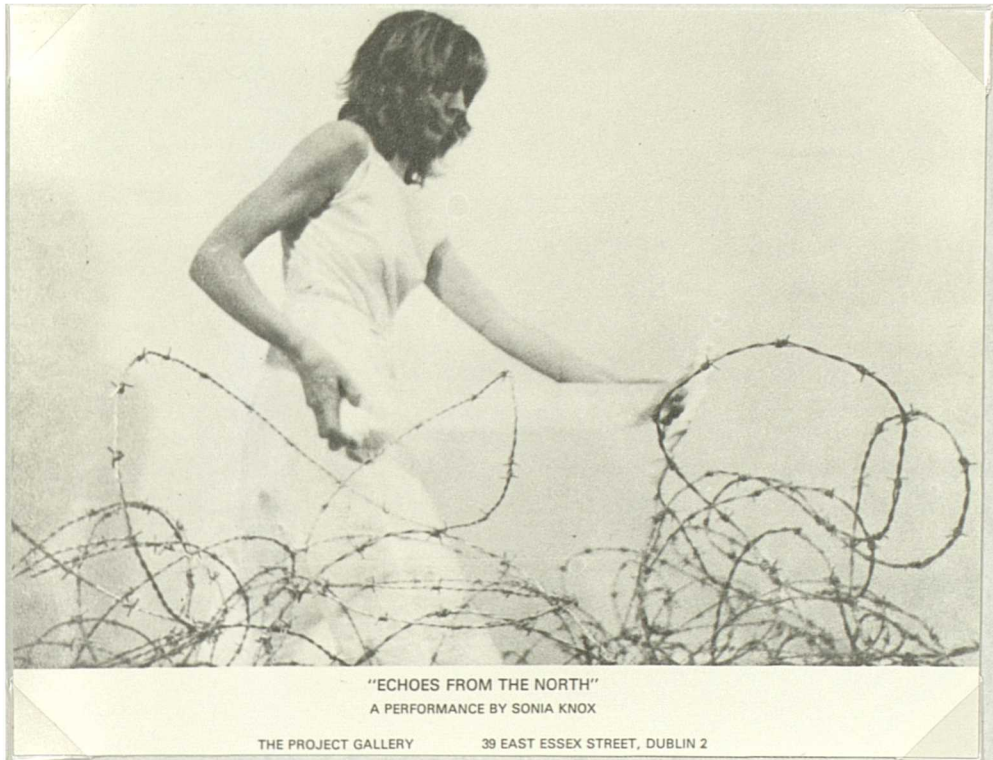   Photo: John Mills

newspapers that a whole range of personal feelings were unleashed in her - about the kindness of the gesture, the immediacy of the bomb exploding as people bought their newspapers going home from work, the killing of the Irish by the Irish, and her own links with the city of Dublin - and she was enabled to complete a final picture with this huddled, obliterated form (ill 299).[1]

Sonya Knox, an artist reared in Northern Ireland who has trained and worked in England, has also, like Rita Donagh, sought to chart and map out the relationship between public and private areas of emotions and events relating to the Ulster conflict. In her performance Echoes from the North (ill 300), first made at the Acme Gallery in London in the summer of 1977, and then repeated at the Project Gallery in Dublin on 14 August 1978 and the Belfast College of Art on 9 Oct 1979, she has recalled by various means her memories of an Ulster Protestant childhood and their implications for an understanding of the present conflict, in what she has described as

> "A process of bandaging/unbandaging revealing/disguising,
> protecting, hard materials/soft, endurance." 2

In a simple grey dress reminiscent of a nurse she walked round and round through a great tangle of barbed wire, parts of which she bandaged together and then pulled out to nail to the walls, while the four cassette recorders which she gradually unwrapped spoke her memories of the tangled, conflicting attitudes towards their political identity of herself, her parents and those amongst

1. My discussion of the evolution of this series is largely based on my conversation with Rita Donagh together with Sarah Kent's analysis of these works in Hayward Annual '78 (exhibition catalogue) Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978, pp.78-9: photographs of Ms. Donagh's preparatory drawings kindly supplied to me by the British Council; and Rita Donagh (exhibition catalogue).
2. Booklet accompanying the performance.

"ECHOES FROM THE NORTH"
A PERFORMANCE BY SONIA KNOX

THE PROJECT GALLERY   39 EAST ESSEX STREET, DUBLIN 2

300.   Sonya Knox/Invitation to "Echoes from the
       North" performance/1978/Collection: B. Loftus

whom they lived.[1] Implicit in all the elements of this work was

the constantly shifting power of memory to shape political atti-

tudes, and the contradictory desires within observers/artists

confronted with the personal and public impact of the Ulster con-

flict, to reveal and suppress their thoughts and emotions about it.

From these descriptions and discussions of images relating

to the Ulster conflict by artists from mainland Britain it should

be apparent that not only do they concentrate on particular themes,

but also that they employ modes of vision distinct from those to be

found in the work of artists in Northern Ireland and the Republic.

The figurative imagery so noticeable in the artworks produced north

and south of the border is virtually absent. The maker's touch is

not eliminated, as in the images constructed by the artists from the

Republic - indeed in some of these works, such as Silk Street and

Evening Papers 1972-4 it is an important element in the picture's

message - but that maker is an assembler of existing images, a docu-

mentor of facts and actions, and an organiser of muted statements,

rather than the creator of an overt, strongly committed and perso-

nal viewpoint.

It is possible to envisage these stylistic characteristics as

related to a number of factors. One can see their muted, low key-

approach as linked to the lack of political debate in mainland Bri-

tain about the Northern Ireland issue. Or one can attribute the

soft, gentle nature of many of them to their production by women

artists (an analysis somewhat undermined by the cutting anger of much

of Suzan Swale's work). Or one can locate them as stages in the

individual output of artists much influenced by some recent fashions

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1. This analysis of Sonya Knox's performance is based on watching
   it in Dublin and Belfast, and on conversations with her on
   these occasions.

in art. Certainly the Ulster images by Adrian Hall and Rita Donagh

are clearly related to their recent absorption of some of the prac-

tices of conceptual and land art, in which the image on the wall

becomes the document of thought or action. Equally, it is true that

Sonya Knox's performance contains an element of the masochism fre-

quently characterising this recently fashionable art form, and that

Suzan Swale's pieces must be seen in the context of the commitment

of the sculpture department of the Belfast College of Art in the

early 1970s to facilitating work exploring the area between two and

three-dimensional artworks.

But the very influence of these fashions on English images of

the Northern Ireland troubles is related, like the dominance of women

artists as makers of these images, and the almost unanimous avoidance

in them of overt political comment, to the institutional organisation

of the British artworld.[1] Since the mid-1960s most British artists

have trained in art schools strongly emphasising their need to pursue

an individual creativity, and have then supported themselves by

teaching art, while attempting to achieve recognition through accep-

tance by a London dealer's gallery, and critical acclaim for their

one-man-shows mounted in that setting. During the 1960s the opera-

tion of this sytem was effervescent and optimistic, paralleling the

economic boom then taking place in Britain. Young British artists

were patronised by a wide range of individuals and organisations, well-

advertised in the newly-established newspaper colour supplements, part

of fashionable society and launched into international prominence as

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1. Pending the publication of the Arts Council of Great Britain's
     report on the living conditions and career structures of visual
     artists, the best summary description of the current organisa-
     tion of the British artworld, and its implications appears to
     be Richard Cork's "Art for Society's Sake", in Art for Society
     (exhibition catalogue), Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1978, pp.47-
     54.

evidence of Britain's new economic and cultural vitality. However, with the economic slump in the 1970s, patronage by anybody except art institutions virtually disappeared, the relevance of the visual arts to a depressed nation was increasingly questioned, and governments, particularly Conservative governments, became increasingly wary of promoting abroad any art which appeared to question the political and social system obtaining in Britain.[1]

In response to this situation many artists in Britain appear to have sought to produce kinds of imagery which side-stepped the increasingly inefficient metropolitan dealer-critic system. Hence the turning to forms of imagery favoured by British artists handling the Northern Ireland troubles, with their emphasis on unmarketable documentation, installation and performance, their high involvement of women, less committed to career structures than many men, and their occasional deliberate flouting of convention by incorporation of overt political comment.

Yet the continuing grip of existing institutional procedures and conventions on such attempts to produce art-forms outside the system is very apparent in the works relating to the Northern Ireland conflict described above. Philippa Goodall's attempts to distribute her Ulster images in book or postcard form came to nothing. A large postcard of press-images of the impact of violence in Ulster produced by Suzan Swale had no effect on the English friends to whom she sent it. Her other Northern Ireland pieces, while rejected as altogether too arty by her former students at the Belfast College of Art, were shown in the Grabowski Gallery in London in the

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1. Thus when works by Conrad Atkinson relating to the Ulster conflict were exhibited in Paris and New York, there were objections on both occasions from the British Ambassador (Atkinson, op cit, pp.23-24 and p.55).

summer of 1974, and one of the works was bought by the Tate Gallery.
Most of the works in Rita Donagh's Ulster Series are owned by
institutions like the British Council and the Ulster Museum, and an
attempt to make them more accessible through the Gallery London led
only to/highly esoteric review in the art-magazine Studio
International.[1] Adrian Hall's Silk Street was bought by the
Contemporary Irish Art Society. Sonya Knox's performances have
been confined to art-centres and art-colleges. And even Conrad
Atkinson's attempts to handle the Northern Ireland situation in ways
not normally permitted by the British art-system, have provided
evidence of its continuing grip. While his images of the Northern
Ireland conflict have been widely shown in Ulster, in mainland Britain,
in the Republic of Ireland, in France and in America, no works
relating to the conflict by Northern Ireland artists appear to have
been shown outside the island of Ireland except for the handful
included in the Art for Society exhibition at the Whitechapel Art
Gallery in 1978. The metropolis continues to dominate the modes
and functions available to artists' images in Britain today.

Indeed, the reception accorded to the Art for Society exhibition
when it came to Northern Ireland in November 1978 strikingly
emphasised the different roles given to visual imagery on the
mainland and in the province. In order to establish this it is

1. Catherine Lampert, "Rita Donagh", Studio International, May-June
   1975, pp. 240-1.

necessary to give an account of what actually happened.

The Art for Society exhibition consisted of works by over a hundred socially and politically committed artists from all over the United Kingdom, and was initially shown at the Whitechapel gallery in London in May and June of 1978. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland negotiated to bring it over to Northern Ireland, offering it to the Ulster Museum as part of the Queen's University Festival in November 1978. (It is common practice for large exhibitions sponsored by the Arts Council to go into the much bigger temporary exhibition gallery at the Museum.) The Museum was pleased to accept, although they later asked to be given the right to 'edit'. It is not known whether any of the Trustees saw the exhibition in London. They certainly had ample opportunity to do so as the exhibition ran at the Whitechapel for over a month.

When the work arrived and began to be unpacked some of the museum's attendants were concerned by the nature of particular works and threatened to boycott the show, claiming that they had union support. The works to which they particularly objected were Conrad Atkinson's Silver Liberties (ill 298) and another piece which used the slogan "Ban the National Front." The Northern Ireland media gave wide coverage to the attendants' threat. Subsequently the trustees of the Museum, claiming that they were acting completely independently, said the show would not go ahead unless five pieces were withdrawn. They were Conrad Atkinson's piece, two paintings by the Northern Ireland artist, Jack

Pakenham, attacking all paramilitaries, and two pieces by English women artists on the subjects of rape and the stereotype of the muscle-bound male.

The Whitechapel Gallery and the Arts Council then put forward a compromise in which the pieces in question would be shown elsewhere, whilst the main exhibition went ahead in the museum. A simple statement would appear in both venues explaining that there had been objections to those works. In the light of this suggestion both sides agreed to a meeting of all interested parties on Monday 6th November. Midday on the 5th however the organisers had a sudden phone call telling them that the trustees had reached an irrevocable decision not to show. Later the same day a one sentence press release was issued to the same effect.

At this stage I have to declare an interest in the proceedings. I had an uncontroversial poster in the exhibition and had staying with me an English artist who had come over to instal his equally uncontroversial work in the show. Together with other artists involved, community activists, the museum's professional staff, trade unionists and the general public we made individual protests about the trustees' decision and helped co-ordinate a largely spontaneous picket and sit-in of about a hundred people at the Museum on Friday 10th November. Meanwhile the artists responsible for the 'objectionable' works telegramed the Museum and the Arts Council, offering to withdraw if it would help the exhibition to go ahead. As an upshot of this the trustees agreed to see a deputation

of three people, and eventually after listening to arguments from them, and the various other parties involved, revoked their decision. The exhibition was shown in two parts, the rejected works in the Arts Council gallery and the rest in the Ulster Museum.

The general view of this whole episode held by the press and by public opinion in Northern Ireland, is summed up by a cartoon, drawn by a local artist and reproduced in the "Belfast Telegraph" (ill 301). People felt that the attendants had bullied the trustees. Certainly the role of the attendants in the affair was very interesting. To a large extent their protest was manufactured by two of their number, both Loyalists, one a city councillor representing Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party. As is usual with that party they made skilful use of the media, particularly radio and television, to put across their stridently expressed views. It is a moot question whether they represented the remainder of the attendants, who were by no means all hardliners and included a number of Catholics. These spokesmen claimed that by displaying such provocative works the Museum would expose the attendant staff to abuse and possibly danger. By themselves creating such a furore they had of course brought about a situation in which abuse or attack were likely. (It should be remembered that an exhibition by Conrad Atkinson was shown three years earlier in the Arts Council gallery without any fuss or repercussions, and that earlier in 1978 the Almost Free Show displayed Long Kesh hankies by loyalists and republicans in the same gallery without prior publicity and encountered no problems despite drawing in to the gallery many of Belfast's younger and tougher citizens.) It seems likely too that there may have been a certain amount of low-level intimidation of the other attendants and some of the professional staff who protested about the exhibition's cancellation. And to many of the attendants,
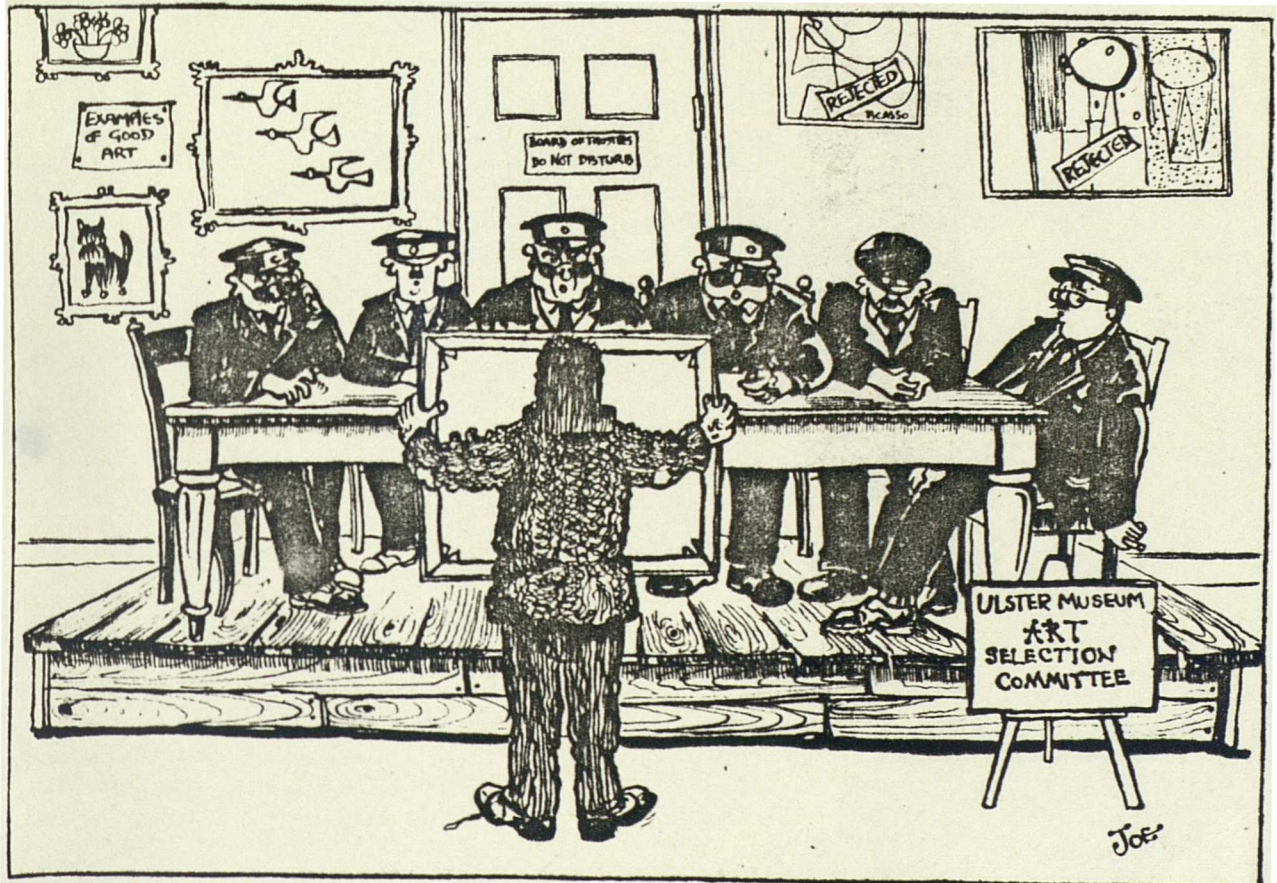
301. Joe/Cartoon about the cancellation of the Art
     for Society exhibition at the Ulster Museum
     in 1978/Belfast Telegraph, 10 Nov 1978, p. 8

making life difficult for the trustees gave them added leverage in an existing dispute about wage levels (though this was not, as was claimed at the time, a dispute which had official union backing).

However, and this was a point widely ignored at the time, there was no need for the director and the trustees to capitulate to the attendants. There is in the Ulster Museum no demarcation about hanging or handling of exhibitions, which can be, and indeed often are undertaken by the curatorial staff. Why then did the trustees align themselves with their attendants, thereby considerably undermining the professional status of their staff and the national standing of their museum, which had recently been a runner-up in the Museum of the Year award?

The answer lies partly in the composition of the Board of Trustees itself and partly in a wider conflict of attitudes about events in Northern Ireland. Under the Museums (Northern Ireland) Order, 1973[1] the board of the trustees is composed of one person appointed by the Queen's University, one person appointed by the New University of Ulster, three persons appointed by the Belfast City Council and nine appointed by the Department of Education. Despite constant pressure from the unions there was no representative of either the attendant or the curatorial staff union, which might have defused the situation. (Belfast was also grossly over-represented considering the museum's national status, although that probably did not affect the issue.)

It would be unfair to cast either the trustees or the attendants as complete villains. Much of the feeling aroused during this episode was generated by a belief that Northern Ireland is culturally and politically dictated to by the metropolis. Most artists in the province were strongly

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1. HMSO, Belfast, 1973, No 416 (NI 7), clause 6.

opposed to censorship of the exhibition, and their criticisms of the show when it was eventually made available generally centred, as in mainland Britain, on the elements of mystification and banal propaganda involved in many of the works included in it. But those in Ulster who opposed the exhibition's display of works challenging local political and sexual conventions did so not merely out of bigoted support for loyalism and puritanism, but also because the works in question were predominantly English, avant-garde, large and one-sided in their attitudes. Conrad Atkinson later claimed that he would have made Silver Liberties (ill 298) somewhat differently if he had known it was to be shown in Northern Ireland. Certainly its scale and its total rejection of Ulster Protestant traditions and politics,[1] was an example of that cultural colonialism and naive political expousal of the Irish republican cause so often found amongst liberal and leftwing observers in England and so bitterly opposed by Ulster loyalists. Art for Society was a title which very accurately conveyed the clash in world views centreing on this work.

Conclusions

For indeed the artists approaching the Northern Ireland troubles in their work have not done so in a fashion dictated purely by their personal aesthetic consciousness or by political developments in the province during the past thirteen years. Their approach to this subject, the themes and images they have used, and the style in which their works have been made have all been related to their location within the practices and conventions of a distinctive way of seeing pervading all visual imagery across the spectrum from fine arts to mass media, and that way of seeing whether it be peculiar to Ulster Protestants, Northern Ireland Catholics, citizens of the Irish Republic or inhabitants of mainland

1. See Atkinson, op cit, pp. 19-20.

Britain, is crucially related to social, political and economic as well as cultural factors. The artist may be seen as existing for society, but is inescapably in society, and produces work for the full understanding of which a knowledge of the social construction of culture is a necessity.

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CHAPTER 8 : CONCLUSIONS

The introduction to this thesis proposed that the approaches to visual imagery adopted in it would achieve two ends, namely the provision of insights into the nature of the Northern Ireland conflict, and of exemplary modes of discussing the relationships between visual imagery and political developments. It is now appropriate to consider whether these aims have been achieved, and the wider theoretical and practical considerations raised in their pursuit.

By looking at visual imagery in Northern Ireland as an interrelated whole, instead of accepting the usual separation of fine art, popular imagery and the mass-media, it has been possible to discern two distinctive ways of seeing in the province, held by its two politico-religious communities. The separation between them is not absolute. Borrowings, overlap and shared characteristics have been apparent. But in general the opposition between a Protestant mode of vision favouring timeless, abstract, crafted, divided, unarty, hierarchical, legitimate and public images, and a Catholic mode of vision favouring historical, figurative, arty, all-encompassing, romantic, rebellious and private images has become very apparent. And this opposition has been seen to spread right across the field of visual imagery, from the most elaborate works of the fine artist to the simplest badge or cartoon. What in effect this overall approach to visual imagery in Northern Ireland has revealed therefore is that the conflict in the province is not only between people who hold very different political and religious viewpoints, but also between people whose very mode of seeing and therefore comprehending political, religious and other aspects of their lives is distinctive and to a large degree

separate. More particularly the constant evidence in this thesis of the involvement of religious traditions and practices in these distinctive modes of vision severely erodes the commonly-held view that the Northern Ireland conflict has nothing to do with religion.

A number of objections to these conclusions may be raised. It may variously be argued that they merely reiterate a view of Northern Ireland culture already widely held in the province, that they set individual makers of visual imagery in Ulster within a determinist framework allowing no freedom or value to their work, and that they are of little relevance to discussions of the relationship between visual imagery and politics in other contexts.

Certainly the distinctive cultures of Northern Ireland Protestants and Catholics have long been a matter for comment at every level of society in the province.[1] However what I hope this thesis has achieved is an exposition of the way in which those cultures have been and continue to be constructed by a series of groups and individuals affected by a variety of political, social and artistic factors, so that the images and modes of vision pertaining to them have acquired layers of meaning, and are continually available to a very wide range of uses and functions. In other words these distinctive cultures are not vague, mysterious, determinist forces but constructed entities amenable to change.

This approach in itself is fiercely opposed to any form of reductionism, and I have constantly been at pains in this thesis to represent the makers of Northern Ireland's imagery as affected but not

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1. Perhaps the most eloquent discussion of this theme is W.R. Rodgers' "Conversation Piece. An Ulster Protestant", The Bell, Dublin, vol 4 no 5, August 1942, pp. 305-314.

wholly determined by political, social, artistic and economic factors. Moreover, although I have seen the question of value as a matter to be discussed elsewhere than in this study, I do not wish it to be thought that the Protestant or Catholic mode of vision are in themselves sectarian, or that one or other has the greater cultural or human value. Both have their strengths and weaknesses. (Speaking personally I find the ability of the Protestant mode of vision to bear witness to the horrors of war encouraging, but its equal tendency to neat, abstract conformity worrying. Conversely Catholic imagery's figurative grasp of humanity with all its flaws has a strong appeal for me, while I find highly disturbing its often over-easy sublimation of suffering and failure. But these are matters for discussion elsewhere).

That the divided culture of Northern Ireland, and the social, political, economic and artistic factors encouraging it are distinctive, there can be no doubt. It has been evident throughout this thesis that the small scale of the province, the strength of its political and religious divisions, its geographical, economic, political and cultural marginality, and the dominance of kinship networks within its society[1] have fostered the development of image-makers whose work tends to extend into a number of fields, rather than being confined to a specialised practice, and who are generally located within the Protestant or Catholic visual tradition, rather than within international modes of vision. In this situation the wholeness of visual imagery and its close inter-relationships with social, economic and political factors are particularly apparent.

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1. On this see in particular Rosemary Harris, Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster, Manchester University Press, 1972.

Nevertheless the validity of discussing visual imagery in this way rather than as a direct product of political events, or the transcendent creation of individual imaginations can be extended, both to political cultures closely paralleling that which obtains in Northern Ireland, and to more general situations in which visual images and political develop- ments are interconnected. The confrontations of Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, and of whites and blacks in South Africa and Rhodesia come readily to mind as examples of conflicts between world-views similar to that taking place in Ulster. And more generally it is possible to see how the ways of approaching the interrelationships between visual imagery and political developments employed in this thesis could be used in analysing political culture in more central, less divided polities in which the existential reality of the divisions between categories of visual imagery are more apparent, and their living function less immediately obvious than in Northern Ireland.

The attention to context of images emphasised in this study could be replicated in analyses of press images, locating them in the newspaper as a whole entity constructed by many hands. The focus on the inter- section between private and public imagery could be employed in a study of the dissemination, styles and use of personality posters. The exploration of visual images as part of living rituals could be applied to research on the regalia of state occasions including that employed by the spectators. The concept of visual images as part of transactions between groups and individuals could be utilised in analyses of the commissioning and celebration of public monuments. The evolution of images through their continuing use could be explored in relation to such potent elements in national consciousness as the paintings of John Constable. The sense of the interplay between fine art and popular imagery

and of the way institutions mediate styles of seeing could underpin

studies of the actual living relationships between the fine arts and

the worlds of advertising and political propaganda. And the interest

in the way visual traditions are constructed could support an analysis of

the development of Protestant religious imagery in Britain between the

Reformation and the present day, and its relationship to the validation

of the nation-state.

Positing such possible approaches to visual imagery in other contexts

raises the question why in fact they have not been adopted (it would

certainly have made the writing of this thesis much easier if such studies

had already been in existence). As has already been made plain in the

introduction the theoretical basis for them is not lacking. In particular

Mary Douglas's adaptation of the socio-linguistic studies of Basil

Bernstein[1] provides clear indications of ways in which visual language

can be related to social, political and religious factors, and T.J. Clark's

development of Pierre Macherey's emphasis on the significance of gaps and

sticking points in visual imagery[2] offers an important means of locating

some of the most revealing elements in any visual code. Similarly the

overlap and interconnection between modernisation and traditionalism

generally emphasised throughout this thesis is a topic familiar in much

recent writing in the fields of history, political science and sociology.

That these theoretical generalisations have not generally been

pursued into the areas explored in this thesis appears to be due to the

separation and limitation of academic disciplines described in the

introduction, and to a more general aversion in academic studies to

1. In Natural Symbols, Barrie & Rockliff, 1970.
2. In Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the 1848 Revolution,
   Thames & Hudson, 1973.

grappling with current issues in the field. This latter tendency is strongly underlined by some of the defects in this piece of research and the reasons for their existence.

Undoubtedly the weakest chapter in this thesis is that about the Green traditions. This is due to a number of factors. Some of these are peculiar to Northern Ireland. Partly because of the nature of the culture native to the Catholic community, and partly because of that community's political situation, written and illustrative records of its visual traditions are very patchy. And given the nature of the present troubles, and my own strong English accent, I have been cautious in my research about contemporary uses of visual imagery within that community.

But these localised problems point to more general defects in existing academic approaches to visual imagery. The organisation of academic institutions and the training provided by them lays such a heavy emphasis on written and visual documents that it requires a very strong commitment to move outside the library, lecture-halls and seminar-rooms in order to observe, record, question and analyse the living functions of visual imagery. So rarely does this happen indeed that the student who attempts this approach is often faced with a dual task. Not only must he or she provide a thesis, but also a description of the very field of evidence on which that thesis is based. Hence, in part, the length of this piece of research.

The rarity of such studies also leaves the student ill-equipped for tackling them. This thesis would have been considerably improved had its writer had some training in interview techniques (without which all the academic paraphernalia of questionnaires and representative samples lose virtually all their value), better knowledge of photography as a working tool, and a far stronger grasp of the institutional organisation

and technology of modern printing, advertising and mass-media. Instruction in such basic techniques and background information rarely appears to be part of the training of the art historian or the sociologist.

The kinds of tunnel vision described in the introduction to this thesis will persist until the academic community encourages the crossing of disciplinary boundaries, and a two-way interchange between its own personnel and the practical specialists of the outside world, whether they be wall-painters, local historians or advertising agents. The images in conflict are not only those of William and Mary, Orange and Green, Politics and Artists, but of art-historians and sociologists, anthropologists and historians, academics and practitioners. Their divisions perpetuate the war in the mind's eye.

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