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Introduction [The Irish Book in English, 1891-2000]

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Introduction

Clare Hutton

In conversation with Neil Corcoran in 1985, Seamus Heaney described ‘the act of publishing’ as ‘a sign, a gesture, a form of solidarity’.¹ He went on to explain that although he normally publishes his work with the long-established London imprint of Faber, he decided to publish *Sweeney Astray*, his translation of the medieval Irish text *Buile Suibhne*, in Ireland first, under the imprint of Field Day Publications: ‘I liked the idea of it being published in Derry. It’s a kind of all-Ireland event situated just within the North, and there’s a little bit of submerged political naughtiness in that.’²

The preface to the Field Day edition, published in 1983, makes it clear that Heaney saw the very act of translating the Sweeney text as an artist’s intervention in the politics of ‘contemporary Ulster’ since the work itself might be interpreted ‘as an aspect of the quarrel between free creative imagination and the constraints of religious, political and domestic obligation’.³ Place of publication is therefore key to reading the work’s overall design, and Heaney’s comments may be taken as an explicit instruction for readers to be attentive to the interrelatedness of bibliographical facts—such as date, place of publication, and imprint—and the act of reading. The case with ‘Derry’ and Field Day is particularly complicated as even the place-name can be viewed as contentious, and the decision to publish in this context is necessarily bound up with Heaney’s desire to initiate cultural renewal, particularly in the wake of the Bloody Sunday killings of 1972, which influenced the composition of *North* (1975).

A few salient details may be drawn from the example of Heaney’s publishing history. Heaney is one among a number of major twentieth century Irish writers to establish a literary career in London, and then desire publication in Ireland. At the very beginning of his career, in 1964,

¹ Cited in Neil Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber, 1986), 40. This book quotes extensively from conversations Heaney had with Corcoran in Dublin on 5 and 6 July 1985.

² Heaney, cited in Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, 40.

³ Seamus Heaney, *Sweeney Astray: A Version from the Irish* (Derry: Field Day Publications, 1983), viii.

he sent a collection of poems to the leading Irish cultural publisher of this era, the Dolmen Press in Dublin, which was run by Liam Miller (1924–87), a distinguished book designer with great enthusiasm for fine literature and printing. While the collection was under consideration, three of Heaney's poems were published in the *New Statesman*, an event which prompted Faber, always on the lookout for talented new poets, to send Heaney a letter. Heaney's response to this approach was one of surprise ('I just couldn't believe it')—the firm was deeply associated with T. S. Eliot, who was then still alive, though he had long retired from an active editorial role and did not write the letter. Nonetheless, for the young Heaney 'it was like getting a letter from God the Father'.⁴ Though he behaved 'honourably enough' in ensuing negotiations with Dolmen, had he told Miller that he was being courted by Faber, Miller might have thought twice about returning the manuscript saying he wasn't 'quite sure', and, as Ruth Ling notes (in 'Faber and Irish Literature', chapter 24), the annals of late twentieth century Irish literary publishing history might read very differently.⁵

The important fact in these early exchanges between Heaney and his potential publishers in London and Dublin is the encouragement he received from the Faber editor, Charles Monteith, who, like Miller at Dolmen, was not impressed with Heaney's initial manuscript, but asked for 'first refusal if ever I thought I had a book'.⁶ Heaney's response to this encouragement ('in about four months I wrote a hell of a lot') is inextricably bound up with the cultural prestige which the Faber imprint confers, the desire to reach as wide a readership as possible, and the probable spur of economic advantage and aesthetic security offered by a Faber contract for a first title, which would include options on future titles.⁷ Though poetry rarely makes publishers and poets rich, it is also significant that Faber was in a much more stable position than Dolmen, which, like many small Irish publishing houses, ran on a precarious financial basis. By the time he came to publish *Sweeney Astray* with Field Day, Heaney's career was well established with Faber who published *Sweeney Astray* in 1984, the year after the Field Day edition. Clearly, Heaney's gesture of 'solidarity' with the Field Day cause—formulating a cultural response to the political crisis in the North—was solidly underwritten by a continuing economic and contractual relationship with his publishers in London.

What the two editions of *Sweeney Astray* demonstrate is that writers sometimes construct themselves differently for different audiences, and

⁴ Heaney, cited in Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, 23.

⁵ Heaney, cited in Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, 23.

⁶ Heaney, cited in Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, 23.

⁷ Heaney, cited in Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney*, 23.

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deploy different publishers in order to do so. Heaney clearly had a sense of ‘target audience’ for the first edition of *Sweeney*, an audience he might not have reached through the Faber imprint, or which he might have alienated by dint of *Sweeney* (‘A Version from the Irish’) being published in London. In making the decision to publish in Ireland, he was following in the footsteps of several other major twentieth century Irish authors who, though predominantly published in London, also published work under an Irish imprint. The reasons for making a commitment of this kind vary. Synge, for example, wanted *The Aran Islands* to be published in Dublin by Maunsel and Company, because, as he explained to his London publisher Elkin Mathews: ‘One or two of my plays have made me very unpopular with a section of our Irish Catholic public and I feel it will be a great advantage to me to have this book printed and published in Dublin on Irish paper—small matters that are nevertheless thought a good deal of over here.’⁸

Yeats, with his sister, the printer and artist Elizabeth Corbet Yeats (1868–1940), established the Dun Emer Press (later known as the Cuala Press) in order to revive printing ‘as an art’ and publish limited and expensive first editions of his own works and works by his friends, thereby establishing a ‘literary principality’ for those ‘who love beautiful literature and careful printing’ in which the genius of his own works could be enjoyed.⁹ Inspired by the excellence of Cuala’s example, and the desire to see excellent Irish writing being published in Ireland, Dolmen (in business from 1951 until 1987) and Gallery (established 1970, still in business, and discussed in Chapter 26) have published many texts by leading Irish authors.

Despite such ventures, and the vision and ability of those who have been involved, most commercial editions of works by major figures of the twentieth century Irish literary canon—Yeats, Joyce, Beckett, O’Casey, Bowen, Friel, Heaney, McGahern, and Muldoon—have been published outside Ireland, predominantly in London, by British publishing houses. To trace the history of the ‘Irish’ book in the period between 1891 and 2000, it is therefore necessary to examine the lists and archives of numerous publishing concerns in London and further afield. Yet the publishing histories of the established authors of the canon tend to be the exception rather than the rule, and for this reason, as well as the need to keep the scale of this project manageable, those individual histories have been largely

⁸ Synge to Elkin Mathews (11 Nov. 1905), Ann Saddlemyer (ed.), *The Collected Letters of J. M. Synge: Volume 1 1871–1907* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 136.

⁹ The first prospectus of the Dun Emer Press, quoted in full by Liam Miller, *The Dun Emer Press, later the Cuala Press* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1973), 29; John Butler Yeats to W. B. Yeats (6 Aug. 1906) in Joseph Hone (ed.), *J. B. Yeats, Letters to his Son W. B. Yeats and Others 1869–1922*, 2nd edn. (London: Secker and Warburg, 1983), 98; Cuala Announcements, 1916, TCD.

omitted from this volume. Instead, the emphasis of this volume is on the history of ‘ordinary’ publishing in Ireland, a history of intrinsic cultural and general interest, which has tended to be overshadowed by ongoing fascination with the well-known names and notable political events of twentieth century Irish literature and history. Significantly, in uncovering the ordinary facts of twentieth century Irish book culture—such as the ongoing economic challenge facing Irish firms serving a small market, in competition with larger and more established British firms, and the culture of censorship which followed the partition of the island in 1921—it is possible to see why so many Irish authors have opted to publish overseas.

The idea that scholars can and do study the history of books, the cultures of book production, and the role of books in history is now well established and accepted within the academy. The history of reading, a logical extension of the same branch of intellectual enquiry, has had a more problematic reception because many are reluctant to accept that it is possible to trace reliably the reading habits and practices of individuals (or indeed whole societies) from sources such as booksellers’ lists, library records, letters, diaries, and autobiographies. It is certainly true that historians of reading face significant methodological and archival challenges. It is also true that book history and the history of reading are broadly concerned with revealing the same thing: the impact of print culture on the intellectual horizons of individuals, and the *mentalité* of the culture under review. In an attempt to map out the contours of the history of the book in twentieth century Ireland in as generous a way as possible, this four-part volume begins with a series of paired chronological surveys which examine the cultures of Irish publishing and reading respectively, within four specified chronological periods, the dates in question being cultural and political landmarks, rather than bibliographical ones (1891–1922, 1922–39, 1939–69, and 1969–2000). These surveys of Irish publishing and reading culture are supplemented, in Part II, by a series of thematic overviews, and in Part III, by a series of eight case studies, which explore the achievements of individual publishing houses in more detail. The fourth and final Part includes a chapter on sources for Irish book history, appendices, and a bibliography. Inevitably, there are some small instances of repetition between chapters; these have been countenanced, editorially, owing to the novelty of the history outlined here, and the desire to facilitate readers who choose to jump from chapter to chapter instead of reading the book in sequence.

In designing the structure of the volume, the editors had to decide which publishers to focus on for case study, and did so on the basis of the following rationale. The firms in question had either achieved literary and typographical excellence (the case with Cuala, Dolmen, and Gallery); or longevity and success in business (the case with M. H. Gill, the only Irish firm to survive

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from the nineteenth century to the present day); or survival through significant political upheaval (the case with Maunsel, in business in Dublin from 1905 to 1925, and Blackstaff, in business in Belfast from 1971 to the present day). Two other firms selected for case study—the British firms of Macmillan and Faber and Faber respectively—were chosen in view of their significant output of Irish literature, and to counterbalance the emphasis on domestic production elsewhere in the volume. Clearly, others might choose differently, as literary reputations rise and fall, and archives make their way into the public domain. Here one might invoke some phrases from Seamus Deane: the selection is one of ‘necessary incompleteness’ and is ‘at the mercy of the present moment’.¹⁰

The first of the ‘reading’ surveys—Chapter 2, ‘Reading and the Irish Revival, 1891–1922’ by Ben Levitas—draws on the lists of best-selling titles incorporated in the *Bookman*. The cultural revival and the devotional revolution had a clear impact on book buying, with Gaelic League and Catholic Truth Society pamphlets being sold in great volume. Yet the majority of books sold in Ireland in 1900 were cheap imports from Britain, despite a keen campaign by cultural revivalists such as Douglas Hyde to ‘encourage the use of Anglo-Irish literature instead of English books’ and to rid Ireland of ‘penny dreadfuls, shilling shockers... and the garbage of vulgar English weeklies’.¹¹ Other parts of Levitas’s chapter look at the growth of the library network, and the rise of the cultural conservatism associated with the ‘Vigilance’ committees which began to form from 1911, determined to promote a ‘profoundly and emphatically Catholic’ nation which would ‘hurl back from our shore the inroads of atheistic and immoral books’.¹² This kind of mentality is explored in greater detail in two of the thematic surveys included in the second part of the volume, Chapter 10 on ‘Publishing for Catholic Ireland’ and Chapter 12 on ‘Censorship and the Irish Writer’. Both of these chapters deal with extremely broad subject areas, and, as is the case elsewhere in this volume, identify areas calling for further research (*viz.*, publishing for ‘Protestant’ Ireland, religious publishing in Northern Ireland, censorship by British authorities, and censorship in Northern Ireland).

The Irish Treaty of 1921 granted substantial self-government to twenty-six counties of Ireland, and let the six predominantly Unionist counties of North-East Ulster remain part of the United Kingdom, but with their own parliament. These arrangements have proven to be tragically divisive. As Deirdre McMahon notes, the Treaty, followed so soon by a bloody civil war,

¹⁰ Seamus Deane, *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*, 3 vols. (Derry: Field Day, 1991), v 1, xx, xxi.

¹¹ Douglas Hyde, ‘The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland’ in Charles Gavan Duffy (ed.), *The Revival of Irish Literature* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1894), 159.

¹² Robert Kane, *Catholic Truth Society of Ireland Annual and Record of Conference*.

was not so much a cause for celebration in the Irish Free State as a poison seeping through political life.¹³ The challenge facing contributors looking at the post-independence era—of working out the social, economic, and political machinations of print culture in two separate and culturally distinct legislatures—is very significant. Nicholas Allen’s ‘Reading Revolutions, 1922–39’ (Chapter 4) confronts these difficulties by offering case studies of three very different readers: the Belfast born Protestant William McCready who regarded himself as ‘a good Northern Irishman’; the Catholic Sinn Féin revolutionary and bibliophile, P. S. O’Hegarty; and Rosamund Jacob, a Quaker from Waterford whose cultural interests ranged from animal rights to feminism and psychoanalysis. Chapter 6, Frank Shovlin’s chapter on reading in the period between 1939 and 1969—which saw the appearance of Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim-Two-Birds* (1939), Patrick Kavanagh’s *The Great Hunger* (1942), and Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1956)—looks at library provision, the ongoing popularity of fiction (which induced panic among the intelligentsia), reading in educational contexts, and, most intriguingly, the phenomenal popularity of the Western, the detective novel, and light romance. As Shovlin notes, the popularity of these genres is partly attributable to cinema (especially Hollywood), and was common, in this period, across the English speaking world. On the other hand, the interest in titles such as *The Song of Bernadette* (1942), Franz Werfel’s story of the Marian apparitions at Lourdes, was more particular to the Irish context.

‘There are definite limits’ wrote one exasperated librarian in his annual report, ‘to the number of copies of a single novel which the Libraries Department can afford to purchase . . . but there are no apparent limits to the demand for a single book. There have never been, for example, fewer than 1,000 readers waiting for *The Song of Bernadette*.’ Among a generation which had ‘seen and made history’ (in the words of another librarian) books about Ireland, by Irish authors, and of local or national interest were extremely popular too, particularly if they related to Irish history in the period 1916 to 1923. The obsession of Irish readers with the nation’s past and cultural output was evident in the period immediately following independence, and, as Rónán McDonald notes in Chapter 8—his survey of Irish reading culture from 1969 to 2000—has continued in more recent decades. Such introspection may, arguably, be seen as an inevitable component in the process of decolonization. Ironically, a cultural revivalist like Douglas Hyde would have regarded some of the consistently best-selling Irish published

¹³ Deirdre McMahon, *Republicans and Imperialists: Anglo-Irish Relations in the 1930s* (London: Yale University Press, 1984), 1, 2.

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books of the 1990s—the ‘chick lit’ titles produced by Poolbeg—as little better than the ‘vulgar’ English ‘shilling shockers’ he so abhorred.

Reading in the age of mass literacy is an individual and private experience, which varies with class, gender, generation, geographical location, economic status, personal preference, and access to material. Despite this, there are ‘national’ trends; as Robert Darnton argues, ‘interpretive schemes belong to cultural configurations’.¹⁴ The chapters on reading in this volume—including Chapter 17 on ‘The Irish Book in the United States’, and Chapter 18 on ‘Reading Ireland in Australia’—break open new conceptual ground by mapping the contours of twentieth century Ireland’s very different interpretive communities. There is considerable scope for more work in this area, particularly, for example, on topics such as the reception of the Irish literary canon (both near to and far from home), micro-studies of individual reading habits and the habits of small culturally specific groups, and the reasons for the success, in the 1990s, of fictions by and about Irish women in urban contexts (a genre particularly associated with the Poolbeg publishing house, which adopted the tag ‘Irish for best-seller’ in 2000).

Book history, which involves the melding of research methods drawn from sociology, literary studies, history, and economics, has justifiably been described as ‘interdisciplinarity run riot’. As D. F. McKenzie noted, the subject:

permits the resurrection of the most marginal texts and their makers (the documents and writers who have always been excluded from the merely literary canon), and thereby the study of all who were kept from the centres of power by reason of their sex, race, religion, provincial or colonial status. In that, it opens up the possibility of a far more comprehensive reconstruction of cultural history.¹⁵

‘Reconstruction’, however, depends on the creation, survival, and accessibility of archives, and of individuals and institutions acting cooperatively and deeming that specific material is worth preservation. There is, in addition, an evaluative (and pragmatic) element at work in deciding which texts are worthy of sustained critical attention, and why. The selection of topics from the vast array which book history potentially offers reflects both the ideological formation and scholarly training of those engaged. Given the riches of twentieth century Irish literature, and the ongoing tradition of what Siobhán Holland terms ‘owner-managed’ and ‘editorially led’ publishing houses in Ireland, it is perhaps inevitable that the chapters in this

¹⁴ Robert Darnton, ‘First Steps Towards a History of Reading’, in James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein (ed.), *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 2001), 176.

¹⁵ D. F. McKenzie, ‘History of the Book’, in Peter Davison (ed.), *The Book Encompassed: Studies in Twentieth Century Bibliography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 290–301 (296).

volume on publishing concentrate, in the main, on ‘cultural’ rather than ‘trade’ or ‘commercial’ publishing.

Chapter 1, ‘Publishing the Irish Cultural Revival, 1891–1922’, is complemented by two publisher case studies, on the Cuala Press (Chapter 22), and Maunsel and Company (Chapter 23). Yeats is a central figure in this narrative. Deeply committed to the Cuala enterprise, which, in his own view, issued texts with a ‘special value’ and ‘intimate connection with the literary movement in contemporary Ireland’, he was also involved in the negotiations which led to the foundation of Maunsel in 1905.¹⁶ In 1894, he had informed T. Fisher Unwin, one of his London publishers, that ‘if ever a first rate publishing house arise in Ireland I must needs publish in part with them’.¹⁷ As R. F. Foster has observed, the qualification represented by the phrase ‘in part’ is striking: it suggests that Yeats knew, even at this early stage in his career, that his loyalties to publishers and readers would always be split between Britain and Ireland, whatever the success of the revival.¹⁸ In her survey of ‘The Iconic Book in Ireland, 1891–1930’ (Chapter 16), Nicola Gordon Bowe shows that Maunsel succeeded in turning out many typographically excellent books. It did so in financial circumstances which were always fraught with difficulty. At the same time, the editor, George Roberts, succeeded in alienating many important authors, including Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Joyce. The Talbot Press, established in 1913 as the cultural imprint of the Educational Company of Ireland (est. 1910), ran on a smoother basis, and served some revivalist authors by subsidizing cultural publishing with the steady profits made in the educational sector, an extremely important and ideologically charged area of Irish publishing which is discussed by Patrick Walsh in Chapter 14. M. H. Gill and Son, which has traded as Gill and Macmillan since 1968, was first established in 1856. During the 1890s, the firm evinced little enthusiasm for Yeats’s variety of cultural revivalism but, as Gillian McIntosh points out in her case study of the firm (Chapter 21), Gill served the interests of Catholic nationalists by publishing a steady list of histories, light novels, textbooks, devotional texts, prayer books, and some of the publications of the Gaelic League.

Pat Donlon acknowledges, in Chapter 15 (‘Books for Irish Children’), the tradition of publishing strong nationalist narratives for children which continued in the wake of independence. Nonetheless, the period between independence and the outbreak of the Second World War was particularly

¹⁶ Cuala Announcements, 1916, TCD.

¹⁷ WBY to T. Fisher Unwin (19 Oct. [1894]), in John Kelly (ed.), *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986–), 4 vols. (hereafter *CLY*, i, ii, iii, iv), i, 403.

¹⁸ R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: A Life*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, 2003), i, 149.

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difficult for publishers in the Irish Free State, as Terence Brown and Nicholas Allen argue in Chapter 3, ‘Publishing after Partition, 1922–39’. Those who survived the violence and political instability which accompanied the War of Independence and the Civil War found themselves working in a climate of reaction and cultural caution which developed as the 1920s wore on, and culminated in the Censorship of Publications Act of 1929. What made this Act work, however, was the fact that many individuals, including some working in the world of books, were broadly in favour of censorship and the idea of a register of prohibited publications *before* 1929, and were happy to act on their own initiative once the bill had become law. As Frank Shovlin notes, the Donegal County Librarian decided, at the end of 1921, ‘to exclude all those authors, no matter how eminent in literature, who are too prone to dip their pens in . . . the cesspool of their own imagination’. In Brendan Behan’s experience, Plato was one such casualty. When he went looking for a copy of the *Symposium* he encountered a bookseller who told him: ‘we saw a slight run on it, and the same sort of people looking for it, so we just took it out of circulation ourselves. After all we don’t have to be made decent minded by Act of Dáil. We have our own way of detecting smut, however ancient.’¹⁹

In such a climate, publishers erred, naturally, on the side of caution, and authors, other than those who could be accommodated within the strictures of the *status quo*, sought publication outside Ireland. The British publishing houses of Victor Gollancz, Cape, and Macmillan were the most energetic publishers of new Irish writing during this period. Guided partly by the advice of Stephen Gwynn (1864–1950), the firm of Macmillan—the topic of Chapter 20—had done much to promote the Irish Literary Revival from the 1900s onwards, and consolidated its strong Irish list in the decades immediately following Irish independence, thanks to its domination of Imperial and Commonwealth markets, high production values, and editorial professionalism. In Dublin, meanwhile, The Talbot Press discovered a winning formula for its local market in the light romantic novels of Annie M. P. Smithson (1873–1948), which typically included an engagement or marriage between a Catholic and Protestant, and the clash of nationalist and unionist mentalities in the context of personal commitment. Autobiographies and histories dealing with the revolutionary period, such as Dan Breen’s *My Fight for Irish Freedom* (Talbot, 1924), were also highly successful during this period.

The impact of the ‘economic war’ of 1932 to 1938 on the Irish book trade was considerable, as British publishers found the books which they wished to export to Ireland becoming subject to duties. In turn, Irish publishers

¹⁹ Brendan Behan, *Brendan Behan’s Ireland* (London: Hutchinson, 1965), 19.

found the British authorities retaliating in good measure, with Irish books, including those crossing the border to Northern Ireland, generally being subject to prohibitive duties. Adding to the difficulties that censorship had already put in place, the only significant Irish publishing firms to survive this era were Gill and Talbot, who worked with caution and diplomacy, serving the steady indigenous religious and educational markets, and firmly rejecting anything which threatened to upset the pieties of Irish public life. As Gabriel and Gillian Doherty note in Chapter 5, their survey of publishing in Ireland between 1939 and 1969, the deterioration of the international situation in 1939 further disrupted the business, with military censorship, paper shortages, and printing firms finding that it was impossible to get replacement parts. Conditions were quite unpredictable, and ‘Emergency’ measures could upset arrangements almost overnight. In mid-September 1939 Elizabeth Yeats found herself confronting a ban on sending printed material to Britain. In typically panic-stricken and assertive terms, she appealed to P. S. O’Hegarty, an old family friend, bibliophile, and Yeats enthusiast, who had become the director of the Irish Post Office: ‘if we can not send “On the Boiler”—& the Gogarty books & our own prints away by post—we will have to shut our doors. What is sold in Ireland would not pay one of my workers.’²⁰

Cuala, of course, remained *sui generis* within the world of the Irish book trade. The policy of selling limited hand-printed editions by advance subscription to ‘people who really want something rather exclusive and are ready to pay for it’ had remained unchanged from the moment the press was founded in 1903.²¹ It was impossible to sustain this kind of readership in Ireland, particularly after W. B. Yeats’s death in 1939, and by 1946 Cuala had closed its doors, the regular subscribers in the US and Britain having dwindled away.

The 1940s, however, were not all bad. 1944 saw the foundation by John Feehan (1916–91) of the Cork-based Mercier Press, the name being chosen to honour the Belgian Cardinal, Désiré Mercier (1851–1926) and to reflect the firm’s commitment to publishing books which explored ‘spiritual and intellectual values over material ones’. This development is explored in detail by Mary Harris in Chapter 13, in her survey of regional publishing, which includes a section on publishing in Northern Ireland since 1921. Though this volume does not cover publishing in the Irish language (which will be dealt with in Volume II), it is worth noting the foundation, in 1947, of Sáirseál agus Dill, an Irish language publishing house, by P. S. Hegarty’s son, Seán Sáirseál O hÉigartaigh. Before his death in 1967 the firm had

²⁰ ECY to P. S. O’Hegarty (15 Sept. 1939), Kansas.

²¹ ECY to James Healy ([after 15 Jul. before 12 Aug.] 1938), Stanford.

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published over a hundred titles, including original fiction, reprints of classic works, biography, history, and children's books. These were welcomed by Irish language readers who had long complained that the texts being provided for them through the state-supported publication and translation agency 'An Gúm' ('The Scheme', est. 1927) were either dull (there were too many books on conspicuously 'Irish' themes, chosen for ideological reasons) or unnecessary (readers of Irish would not generally choose to read translations of books which they could easily procure in English). In March 1949, a month before 'Éire' became the Republic of Ireland, it was claimed that the government could not even *give* An Gúm publications away.

The failings of state-sponsored attempts to control the direction of book culture through censorship and the sponsorship of Irish language publishing were obvious. But for the shining exception represented by the Dolmen Press (established in 1951 and discussed by Derval Tubridy in Chapter 25) little was to change in the world of Irish publishing during the 1950s—a period of very heavy emigration—until late in that decade when new economic policies were introduced. The Republic of Ireland began to open to a new self-confidence, as Tony Farman notes in Chapter 9, which examines the financial and market factors affecting the Irish publishing business between 1895 and 1995. RTÉ began broadcasting on New Year's Eve 1961, and television quickly opened people's eyes to new possibilities of debate. The censorship laws were liberalized in 1967, and a boom in paperback publishing made access to a wide range of literature easy and affordable. As Siobhán Holland notes in her survey of Irish publishing since 1969 (Chapter 7), profits arising from 'original, creative' work by writers 'solely resident in Ireland' became exempt from income tax that year, though this positive development was countered—in 1972—by the introduction of VAT on books, a move which put Irish publishers at a disadvantage in relation to their British competitors, for whom books were zero-rated. In 1967 the Irish University Press, which Michael Adams has described as more of a 'book factory' than an 'academic publishing house', was established, inspired by the world-wide expansion of the university sector, the market for reprints, and the tax-free status of the Shannon Industrial Estate, where the press established a vast state-of-the-art printery.²² The dramatic collapse of this venture in 1974 had one unexpected benefit: it pitched a large number of talented young editors, production staff, and promotions people out of work. Former IUP employees who went on to found their own successful publishing businesses include Michael

²² Michael Adams, 'The World of Irish University Press' in Clare Hutton (ed.), *The Irish Book in the Twentieth Century* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2004), 158.

Adams (Irish Academic Press and Four Courts), Sean Browne (Academy Press), Seamus Cashman (Wolfhound), and Jeremy Addis (*Books Ireland*).

By the early 1980s there was tremendous energy in the Irish publishing business, which now had its own industry self-help organization, *Clé* (the Irish Book Publishers Association, est. 1970). In a dramatic (and ironic) reversal of cultural policy, the government in the Republic became increasingly helpful to book publishers through the auspices of the Arts Council (An Chomhairle Ealaíon) which began to provide grants for individual titles as well as interest-free loans. As Gillian McIntosh points out in Chapter 11, this support mirrored the earlier support given by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland to Northern Irish publishing firms, particularly the Blackstaff Press (est. 1971, and the subject of Chapter 27, a case study by Eamonn Hughes). The escalation of violence in Northern Ireland from 1969 has provided another paradoxical boost to the culture of the Irish book, to the extent that the violence has generated responses in the form of histories, autobiographies, political polemics, fiction, drama, and poetry, and the publication of this work has been conducted by firms operating in the Irish Republic, Northern Ireland, and beyond. As Eamonn Hughes notes, anyone interested in any aspect of Northern Ireland over the last thirty or more years will very probably have several books published by Blackstaff Press on their shelves, whatever form their particular interest may take.

Two recent developments deserve to be noted before concluding. The first is the establishment of the business of literary agency in Ireland since 1986, a phenomenon discussed by Jonathan Williams in Appendix C. Before that date, Irish authors desiring the representation of an agent were obliged to seek one in London or further afield, an obligation with potentially far-reaching cultural ramifications (for the positioning of the decolonizing subject, the ‘commodification’ of Irishness, and so on). Now Irish authors can opt to work with an Irish agent, and such agents negotiate either internationally or within the publishing industry at home, an industry which currently includes—in an ironic sign of globalizing times—Penguin Ireland and Hodder Headline Ireland. These two publishing conglomerates set up offices in Dublin in 2003, having noticed, perhaps, that writers were less disposed to send their manuscripts overseas (a phenomenon which may be attributable to the growing professionalism of the Irish publishing industry). The second recent phenomenon worthy of note is the development of the internet and electronic media, discussed by Bruce Stewart in Chapter 19. Late twentieth century book culture cannot be contained within or defined in terms of national borders. The truth of this statement becomes particularly clear within the context of cyberspace: the idea of an Irish ‘e-book’ on the world-wide web is in some

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sense a blatant contradiction in terms. Be that as it may, the internet, as Stewart notes, has revealed a new world of possibilities for the so-called Irish book, including, most significantly, the challenge of coordinating an electronic library of Irish literature.

The traditional idea of the multi-volumed and collaboratively written ‘Oxford’ history is that of encyclopaedic summation. For the history of the Irish book in the twentieth century, a book of such a kind would be impossible because of the present state of scholarly knowledge, the novelty of the research methodologies, and the inaccessibility of much contemporary evidence (owing to the cultural sensitivities of living authors and active publishers about the privacy and commercial confidentiality of their exchanges). Though long and ambitious in scope, this volume is in no sense the final word. Instead it aims to frame new questions, open new archival ground, and help set an agenda for future research.