

Field Day Revisited (II): An Interview with Declan Kiberd¹

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Abstract

Intended to address the colonial crisis in Northern Ireland, the Field Day Theatre Company was one of the most influential, albeit controversial, cultural forces in Ireland in the 1980's. The central idea for the company was a touring theatre group pivoting around Brian Friel; publications, for which Seamus Deane was responsible, were also included in its agenda. As such it was greeted by advocates as a major decolonizing project harking back to the Irish Revivals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Its detractors, however, saw it as a reactionary entity intent on reactivating the same tired old "Irish Question." Other than these harsh critiques, Field Day had to deal with internal divisions, which led to Friel's resignation in 1994 and the termination of theatre productions in 1998. Meanwhile, Seamus Deane persevered with the publication enterprise under the company imprint, and planned to revive Field Day in Dublin. The general consensus, however, is that Field Day no longer exists. In view of this discrepancy, I interviewed Seamus Deane and Declan Kiberd to track the company's present operation and attempt to negotiate among the diverse interpretations of Field Day. In Part One of this transcription, Seamus Deane provides an insider's view of the aspirations, operation, and dilemma of Field Day, past and present. By contrast, Declan Kiberd in Part Two reconfigures Field Day as both a regional and an international movement which anticipated the peace process beginning in the mid-1990's, and also the general *ethos* of self-confidence in Ireland today.

Keywords

Field Day, Northern Ireland, multiculturalism, postcolonialism,
postnationalism, Declan Kiberd

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YU-CHEN LIN: *Were you in any one of the performances of Translations? What was the audience like?*

DECLAN KIBERD: I only saw a performance of *Translations* here in Dublin in the Olympia Theatre. The theatre was full. And what struck me most strongly was the conceit in the play, which was that the characters are mostly speaking Irish, but it was performed in English for the audience. That was satirical of the audience in Dublin, in a way it would not be in Derry, where the play began, for the simple reason that it was 1980 and Dublin, where people have had over 55 years to teach their children their own language.² The fact that the play had to be performed in English was a somewhat caustic comment on how limited the achievements in language revival were.³ Of course it's also Friel being caustic about himself: he has to write in English because he can't write in Irish. But the fact that the audience was trying to imagine this being done in Irish, a language in which in theory the audience should all by then be competent, struck me very strongly. And I think it was part of the emotional response to the play set in the 1830's, the moment of opportunity when Irish people might remain Gaelic but didn't. And there was a kind of sadness in the response to it. But the idea of Field Day touring the play is based on the notion that the play would have different meanings in different places, just as Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island*⁴ means one thing in Dublin and another when it's played in London. In an equivalent way, the Derry audience would probably make great efforts to learn the Irish language, and be relatively successful, despite the fact that they were living in a **British-occupied** city, and would have their own views on the failure of the language revival in the Republic, which as a failure would be linked to the other **failure**—the failure of the re-unification project. And official Ireland in Dublin has two main aims, one of which was the Re-Integration of National Territory, and the other, which was the Resurrection of Irish. These aims seem to connect in the minds of many people, including the leaders. But the people in the North, looking at the failure, experiencing the failure of the reunification project, would probably link it also to the failure of the language revival. So, the play is filled with all kinds of layers, depending on who the audience is and what the context is. There's also a fact, which I've written about in *Inventing Ireland*,

² Irish became a compulsory subject for school children in post-independence Ireland; they had to pass it to get their Leaving Certificate.

³ Despite state policies for the revival of the Irish language, the results were so disastrous that the Ministry of Education had to cancel the Irish requirement for the High School Leaving Certificate in 1973.

⁴ A play written by George Bernard Shaw in 1904.

that although the play is set in the 1830's, it's about modernization (Kiberd, *Inventing* 613-23). And northern nationalists looking at Dublin which has been modernizing very fast, and giving up what they saw as core values, would look with mingled feelings at the modernization project. Maybe Friel was making the point that this had all begun as far back as the 1830's when so many Irish people decided to speak English. So I found it very interesting to see in Dublin a play originating from Derry, and it helped me understand why Field Day wanted to tour.

But wouldn't it also be dangerous that a singleness of purpose might lose power in another context? Friel must have had some kind of audience in mind when he wrote his play.

Friel is an extraordinarily sophisticated writer, and would be aware that his play would have many audiences because by then he was a famous playwright. And also that it might win new audiences for theatre because they were performing in rural Irish halls, which had no theatrical performance by professionals for many years. He was deliberately trying to expand the audience with the theatre while at the same time showing that a play never has a stable, singular set of meanings. And it's also important to remember that Field Day—out of Derry—is a regional movement, at the time when all over Ireland you were getting the growth of local theatrical groups: Lyric in Belfast, Druid in Galway, Bell Table in Limerick, and so on. And with them a re-discovery of regional identity by local publishers, for instance, *Cló Iarchonnocockt* in Connemara, *Salmon* in Galway, are re-discovering a kind of Galway-western identity in the area at the same time as Druid Theatre would articulate the place and scene, with Tom Murphy⁵ having particular relevance to their area. And Field Day was part of that movement as well. Field Day has often been accused by people like Edna Longley of being hyper-nationalist, but in my reading it was also regional, and it was regional in a way all these were; it was a response to the breakdown of the nationalist narrative into smaller constituent parts. And this, of course, is partly in response to Europeanization, and both the Republic and the UK are part of the wider European project. By 1980, there was talk about a Europe of regions as a way of offering an antidote to a very large bureaucratic structure emerging. And I think the articulation of a Derry identity, just as the articulation of a Galway identity by Druid, is a response to these political forces. In

⁵ Born in Tuam, County Galway, Thomas Murphy (1935-) is a prolific Irish playwright closely associated with the Abbey Theatre.

other words, it goes way beyond the whole Anglo-Irish question, by which I think it has been too rigidly defined.

You were talking about Friel's intention. Would your remarks apply to the Field Day publication enterprise?

Yes, I would think so. John Hume,⁶ the political leader from Derry, was the major influence on all these people. He was one of the first people here to talk about the Europe of regions. In other words, one way of solving the Northern Ireland problem was to change the context within which it is described, widen and internationalize it, so that it ceased to be conducted solely on the Anglo-Irish axis; it also referred to Europe as a wider concept, and even to the whole globe. So for example, when the bomb went off in Derry or Belfast, people would say in the 1970's, "Oh it's awful, we're caught in a religious war from the 17th century." Only in Ireland does the past linger so long. And Hume would say, "Well, maybe not. Maybe this is just like a bomb going off in Bologna in Italy, set off by the Red Brigades⁷ or some terrorist group." And terrorism is itself a problem of post-modernity. What was happening in Northern Ireland was not all that different from the issues raised elsewhere. This analysis became increasingly convincing. My analysis was multiculturalist. I reconfigure the Northern problem, not in terms of it being simply the legitimacy of the British presence in Ireland, but more specifically, that within the public space of Northern Ireland for the first fifty years of existence, no place was allowed to nationalists or Catholics. It was assumed that they could enact their rituals in private, but public space did not belong to them. That seems to me, in some way, like the problem in France today, where you have a public space that defines itself as secular and modern, and which tells Islamic people, "You can have your veil, but only in private enactment." In other words, you can reconfigure the Northern Ireland problem as a problem of multiculturalism, and then it looks much more modern and less shamefully trapped in the past. Hume was trying to promote these

⁶ The second leader of the SDLP (Social Democratic and Labor Party) in 1979-2001, John Hume (1937-) won the 1998 Nobel Prize for his effort to find a peaceful solution to conflicts in Northern Ireland.

⁷ Formed in 1970, the Red Brigades (*Brigate Rosse*) was an armed leftist group based in Bologna, Italy. It aspired to establish a revolutionary state through armed struggle and to separate Italy from the Western Alliance. In the name of this cause it kidnapped and murdered the Prime Minister of Italy in 1978. It is now dormant.

analyses. Part of the attempt of the Field Day pamphlets is to internationalize the question because they involve people like Fredric Jameson and Edward Said.⁸

But wouldn't that also be another problem instead of the solution? For the authors did not seem to address the Irish question directly. Instead, they somehow deviated to other issues that they were interested in.

It's a matter of opinion. I think they did internationalize it in terms of cultural analysis. For example, Said shows how the poetry of Yeats was part of the decolonizing project in this country, and that inspired writers like Neruda in Latin America, Darwish⁹ in the Palestinian case; and how *Things Fall Apart*, the great novel of modern Nigeria by Achebe, takes its title from one of Yeats's poems.¹⁰ It was very important to remind people that Irish nationalism was exemplary, and was in many ways an advanced postcolonial project ahead of many other peoples in the developing world, and looked to, for inspiration, by these peoples. In other words, it wasn't simply a repetition of the 17th or 18th century backward formation, but maybe the cutting-edge of the modern. In the same way, as Jameson's pamphlet argued among other things, that the fascination of Irish culture was that it was on the one hand European, but on the other postcolonial. This issue was raised in a novel like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*—"Can the native speak?"—or is it possible to articulate or even to understand the consciousness of a native in the colonial setting? This is an issue much more richly explored in a text, say, by someone like Joyce, where the city of Dublin is both a European capital and an oppressed colonial city. In a sense it spoke of a First-World and Third-World city at the same time. This is the central element of Jameson's argument in that pamphlet. Ireland is always in some sense double. It is post-imperial because lots of Irish people were involved in the imperial project on behalf of the British, but it's also postcolonial because so many Irish people were involved in resistance and in leading global resistance to the same project. Ireland is a sort of complex field where both of these

⁸ Seamus Deane, general editor of the Field Day pamphlets, in 1988 engaged Fredric Jameson, Edward Said, and Terry Eagleton for the fifth series of pamphlets. These three pamphlets (Jameson's *Modernism and Imperialism*, Said's *Yeats and Decolonization*, and Eagleton's *Nationalism: Irony and Commitment*) were published in book form as *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* by the University of Minnesota Press in 1990.

⁹ Mahmoud Darwish (1941[?]-) is a Palestinian poet recognized for his poetry expressing affection for a lost homeland. As such, he has become the main voice of the Palestinian struggle for independence.

¹⁰ W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming."

great movements historically played out in close proximity to one another. And they are complementary to each other in a way that they may not be in, say, an African novel in the English language. And this is what Luke Gibbon's famous sentence is about: "Ireland is a First World country, but with a Third World memory" (3). In a way, this is the notion in Jameson's pamphlet. So although it might be said that Said and Jameson dealt less with the detailed texture of Irish life or political debate—Edna Longley accused them of ignorance of the details (*Living Stream* 28-29)—it seems to me they got it right, in a wider sense, by producing a different paradigm. And they reminded the people in Ireland of how the whole national project was in fact a de-colonizing one. When Edna Longley says that a book like *Inventing Ireland* is only a nationalist statement rather than a postcolonial study, she's ignoring what is implicit in those pamphlets. Being one, it has to be the other. They are not distinct. Irish people's nationalist project was not an imperial project. They weren't trying to found colonies all over the world. They were trying to get their country back. And the project of resistance, which is what Said and Jameson are talking about, means that by being national, they are also being utterly international in effect. This is in fact what Marx said in the middle of the 19th century, that if Ireland were lost, the British Empire itself would actually crumble because Marx rightly predicted that countries all over the world would produce copycat insurrections against British rule.¹¹ This is what some of the critics of postcolonial analysis forget, that Ireland is not isolated, but is an important part of the wider world, and was looked to by the wider world for many years. What's fascinating about the period we are talking about is that all of this has been thrown into reverse, that Irish people suddenly rediscover all this but decide to learn from people like Said, Homi Bhabha, Ashis Nandy, Frantz Fanon and so on. They learn from the people who once learned from them. It's a kind of return of dialectic. That's really what has been going on since the 1980's. I would see Field Day as a movement in literary and cultural criticism equivalent to what happened in liberation theology where you got Irish people coming back from Latin America, Africa, with very new ideas about how to run parishes in more democratic ways within the Catholic church, ideas that they have picked up out in the missions in the so-called undeveloped world. But they bring these ideas back as radical, not just theory but practice to the country. I see Field Day as part of that formation. This is why *Dancing at Lughnasa* in a way became the consummation of Field Day, because it

¹¹ Marx suggests that Ireland was imperial England's weakest point: "Ireland lost, the British 'Empire' is gone . . ." (qtd. in Kiberd, *Inventing* 276).

has a priest who comes back from African missions and in a way enforces a kind of equation between Uganda and Donegal.¹²

Have you seen Friel's recent play, The Home Place? Would you say it pursues the theme of Dancing at Lughnasa?

The recent play is a study of late Victorian science linked with imperialism: if you could measure people's heads, you could tell all about their character, and thereby control them. In some ways, it's an updating of *Translations* about fifty years later: the idea that you can map the mindset of the local people in both cases is questioned by the natives. It seems to me, though, that the treatment of the Anglo-Irish in the recent play is very tender, warm, and positive, and that Friel increasingly has a lot of sympathy with the settler class in Ireland. And that the whole question of where their home place is—Is it in Kent? Is it in Ireland?—is treated with a lot of tact and sympathy. So there is a definite change in his attitude toward the settler population, which might be itself a result of the climate created by the peace process in the 1990's that led everyone to become more relaxed and consider more fully the self-image of those of whom they have been critical in the past. In the 1990's you also see Sinn Fein¹³ people beginning to turn on to the commemorations of the dead in World War I, even though their whole tradition had been against that, since they have regarded the real heroes in 1916 as the Republican insurgents who were unpaid volunteers, unlike the young Irish men who fought in the British army as paid soldiers. When we were growing up in this state, we were taught to commemorate the insurrectionists, but no mention was made of the people who fought in World War I. Yet by the mid-1990's Sinn Fein began to attend commemorative ceremonies, and to recognize that many of those people also felt in some way they were promoting the interest of Ireland, that in their own way they were patriots, too. This opening out to the other tradition is found in Friel's play as well.

¹² Despite Declan Kiberd's positive view of the play in terms of the Field Day project, Friel was generally regarded as making a gesture by giving the play to the Abbey Theatre rather than to Field Day.

¹³ Also known as the Provisional Sinn Fein, it is the only political party to have seats in the Parliaments of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Founded in 1970 to resume the Republican ideology of the original Sinn Fein, it is generally considered the political wing of the IRA.

Do you mean that the problem in Northern Ireland is improving?

That has been happening since the early 1990's in the sense that people who practiced postcolonial theory in English departments were accused of being IRA sympathizers, the literary wing of the IRA and so on. This wasn't true, of course. The IRA would tell you that there's nothing postcolonial about the situation in Northern Ireland. Any post-idea would be completely inappropriate in their opinion. They felt they were still caught in the colonial situation. So they were quite critical of elements in the Field Day pamphlets, the postcolonial project. And this is never mentioned, but it is very important: the people who prosecuted this project were accused of being IRA sympathizers, while at the same time the IRA had very little sympathy with their project.

Is it true that the IRA had tried to approach Field Day to advance its goal?

Yes, that's probably true. Brian Friel certainly was asked, when the particular set of pamphlets I contributed to was issued, why he wasn't taking a more active line as a writer, and producing something more directly engaged with the situation of Northern Ireland. He said, "Well, an artist must be free." Quite right, but the whole project of Field Day was to fix problems—a kind of future zone, where all the traditions could mix. Up to about 1994, the attitude of the middle-class in Dublin, people who ran the universities, was very hostile to postcolonialism. I taught a course on emergent literature with Emer Nolan,¹⁴ and in UCD, which included texts by people like Rushdie and Marquez alongside Brendan Behan and Flann O'Brien,¹⁵ and we were accused of being the literary wing of the IRA. We were finding an analogy between the Irish situation and the situation in India, or Latin America. Yet a year or two later, when *Inventing Ireland* was published, it was very warmly received in the newspapers generally, here in Dublin and internationally. I believe if it had been published three years earlier, it would have been attacked, pretty generally, in the same way that Edna Longley continues to attack it. But because the peace process had begun, people had become more relaxed and more willing to look objectively at what was being produced. Most of the so-called traditionalist writers, the ones who endlessly attack nationalism, had to write their

¹⁴ Emer Nolan (1966-) is Lecturer in English, National University of Ireland Maynooth, and the author of *James Joyce and Nationalism* (1995).

¹⁵ A pseudonym of Brian O'Nolan (1911-66), an Irish novelist whose works include *At Swim-Two-Birds* and *An Béal Bocht* (also available in English translation as *The Poor Mouth*).

essays in British papers, *London Reviews of Books*, and so on. But by then the Irish papers were open again to these arguments, although they'd been closed to them for years before that, as a result of the Hume-Adams dialogue.¹⁶ At that time a joker in Derry said to me that they were going to propose the Derry brigade of the IRA for the Nobel Peace Prize because they hadn't fired or shot in anger for over a year. This was before the peace was officially declared. There's a tremendous opening out to all these arguments from the mid-90's on. But I think that Field Day had created all those arguments in the previous 15 years, and they were there then to be discussed by the wider public once the relaxation began, and it has continued ever since. I wrote in the last page of *Irish Classics* that the Belfast Agreement¹⁷ contains itself quite a number of ideas that could be traceable back to some of the Field Day texts (Kiberd, *The Irish Classics* 625). One of my main objects in *Anglo-Irish Attitudes*, for example, was to show how Wilde and Shaw were Irish. When I was a student in the early 70's, they were not treated as Irish writers, even here in Ireland, in literary courses, and you know yourself in your part of the world that even now, most people would think of Wilde and Shaw as British or English. I wanted to show how they were involved in the Irish question, but their imaginations were very Irish in terms of the idea of opposite and doubles—the idea of English might seem the opposite of Irish but there were secret, undiscovered selves. This is the point of the Belfast Agreement, that you could be both English and Irish. Wilde had made such a point about a hundred years ago, and so did Shaw in *John Bull's Other Island*. It's very interesting to see how much of the Agreement of 1998 seemed in some way to reflect the debate generated mainly by Field Day. When history is written in a hundred years' time, people will realize that Field Day was not just an artistic coterie; it was very influential, even in the world of everyday politics. And in fact Paisley¹⁸ complained about the Agreement. He said it was poetic; it was slippery in its language; it was too literary.

¹⁶ Gerry Adams (1948-) is leader of the Provisional Sinn Fein. He met John Hume several times in 1993. These talks led to joint statements on possible ways to bring violence to an end.

¹⁷ Signed in Belfast on 10 April 1998 (Good Friday) by the British and Irish governments, this agreement was a major step in the Northern Ireland peace process. It was endorsed separately by voters in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, with the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) of Northern Ireland being the only major political party to oppose it.

¹⁸ Ian Paisley (1926-), leader of the DUP.

He also said that the 1998 Good Friday Agreement¹⁹ was dead and should be given a decent burial.

Yes, he said that last week, and he said that a thousand times.²⁰

You seem to be very optimistic about that Agreement.

Yes, obviously there is at this moment a problem, and there has been for years at least. But the problem as it appears now, to me, to you, or to any objective onlookers, would be that the extreme elements on both sides have won advances in elections, and it would be harder, therefore, in theory, for them to rule together. But look at local government, all things begin in local or regional movements. For a decade now Sinn Fein and the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) (Democratic Unionist Party) have shared power on all kinds of projects at the level of local government in Northern Ireland without any great trouble. On the ground that the Agreement is not in doubt and all kinds of community projects, including cultural projects, are being advanced even while Paisley makes his statement, even while Sinn Fein refuses to do this, that or the other. And my honest belief is that when Paisley passes on, the more realistic, younger leaders of the DUP will very quickly work things out with Sinn Fein. Robinson,²¹ the leader of the DUP, is a very efficient administrator, so are the Sinn Fein people. They are quite addicted to this kind of politics, and will return to it in the long run. So, I am not so despondent about the agreement. I would regard that agreement as having an international value, so that it could be studied by people in the Middle East, in South Africa, in other parts of the world, other trouble spots. And people might learn from it the notion of multiple identity, of identity being both negotiable and agnostic, and the idea of joint sovereignty and joint citizenship would be entertained. It's a model people will return to over time, though it would be difficult, of course.

¹⁹ Another name for the Belfast Agreement. See note 17.

²⁰ Paisley's constant complaint about the Agreement reflects the sentiments of the DUP, which was initially included in the negotiations, but withdrew in protest when Sinn Fein was allowed to participate after the IRA ceasefire in 1994.

²¹ Peter Robinson (1948-), deputy leader of the DUP behind Ian Paisley since 1980. He is regarded as the pragmatic wing of the DUP, as opposed to Paisley's fundamentalist base.

You are trying to reconfigure what Field Day was doing in the 80's. But I am not too sure if it was out of anxiety, because of the attacks on it, that Field Day sometimes adopted a certain vocabulary that invited attack. For example, Seamus Deane said that Field Day was trying to solve a colonial crisis (6), whereas you are trying to reconfigure the Field Day project as postcolonial. That is to say, one might become over-defensive when one is under attack, to the extent that one adopts idioms that sound misleading when we look back on them.

Yes, there were moments when under the ferocious attack he suffered, Seamus Deane made comments that might seem very rigid and even reactive. But I don't think they were ever representative of the wider project. In the end the basic ideas of the project go back to Friel; Deane has to admit this himself. The others have fallen away; in the meantime, Deane is left now with Stephen Rea, and people perhaps over-identify the project with what Deane wrote. But I would never have seen it in those terms. It seems to me much more international, much less to do with the Anglo-Irish axis even though I wrote my pamphlets about that, and it was an attempt to widen the definitions of the problem so that the problem was reconfigured. This was going on long before Field Day was founded in 1980. Seamus Heaney's poems in the 1970's were another major source for this inspiration. *North* is an attempt to analyze the Northern Ireland problem in a new cultural frame.²² Heaney is arguing that the death of ritual, after World War II, has led to a ritual of death. In other words, the fact that life is no longer believed to be sacred, that the world has become disenchanting after World War II, has meant that the kind of terrorism, which regards human lives as instrumental has begun to flourish. In other words, he doesn't just see it as a problem peculiar to Northern Ireland; he sees it in more theological terms because ritual has died, there would now be a ritual of death. And this is true in Bologna, in many cities of Europe, and in the wider world. And I think that is a brilliant analysis of the Northern conflict. That particular generation of young men could set off bombs to kill people, whereas Heaney's generation, the older one, who suffered the degradation, didn't do that. And the reason, Heaney is saying, is because they believed in God; they believed in ritual, in religion; this acted as a moral restraint. They didn't think it right to take human lives. But after World War II, after Dresden has been bombed and the Americans have set off their atomic bombs, and the Nazis have killed six million Jewish civilians, this notion of civilians as dispensable has taken over. As you see,

²² See Heaney.

again, this is a different way of configuring the problem. Heaney was attacked by Edna Longley and Ciarán Carson²³ for producing what they called the Golden Bough version of the problem of Northern Ireland,²⁴ making him anthropological. I think it is a very persuasive analysis. And Heaney is not writing as a practicing Catholic; Heaney has no religion he believes in himself. He is just making the point that a younger generation suddenly felt free to take lives and became non-religious; it would apply as easily to the Red Brigades in Northern Italy as it would to the IRA or the UDA²⁵ in Northern Ireland. And again this was an attempt to internationalize the problem in an imaginative context. So I think what Friel did when he set up this project in the 1980's was to gather together energies that had been circulating anyway in the great writing of the previous decade.

This raises another question: Why did you decide to write a pamphlet for Field Day?

I always believed in postcolonial criticism. I admired Daniel Corkery,²⁶ who wrote in the 1920's and 1930's; he is one of the first proto-postcolonial critics in Ireland. But that project he began was somehow stalled because Irish people in Dublin certainly forgot their history, and wanted to see themselves as modern consumers of democracy in the European Union, and abandon the colonial narrative. Because the North was in crisis, it was inevitable that those who wanted to react to it would come from there, and I was naturally responding to that. It would also be true that I was one of the Southerners who felt that too many people down here were trying to wish Northern Ireland away, to pretend that it didn't exist because the problem seemed insoluble. People got bored or frustrated by it. People living here in the Republic ceased to interest themselves in the troubles, trying to help formulate clearer versions of the problem and possible solutions. There's also a much more

²³ A poet and novelist born in Belfast in 1948.

²⁴ With specific reference to Seamus Heaney's "Kinship," where the poet finds "a turf spade" and quickly finds himself "facing a goddess," Ciarán Carson comments: "The two methods are not compatible. One gains its poetry by embodiment of a specific, personal situation; the other has degenerated into a messy historical and religious surmise—a kind of Golden Bough activity, in which the real differences between our society and that of Jutland in some vague past are glossed over for the sake of the parallels of ritual" (qtd. in Longley, "North" 81).

²⁵ Formed in 1971, the UDA (Ulster Defense Association) is a loyalist paramilitary group in Northern Ireland. Perceived by its supporters as a guardian of the unionist community against Irish Republican terrorism, it was nonetheless outlawed as a terrorist group by England.

²⁶ Daniel Corkery (1878-1964) was an Irish critic who had great influence on cultural policies in post-independence Ireland. His works include *The Hidden Ireland* (1924) and *Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature* (1931).

banal explanation which was never given but should be, and that is that Deane had asked Denis Donoghue²⁷ to write a pamphlet and for some reason it was a problem and it didn't go ahead. He turned to me and Richard Kearney,²⁸ who were young colleagues of his in UCD at the time, and asked if we might be able to produce something rather fast. And that was how I got involved but I was glad he asked because of the reason I've just given you. I don't think of this in nationalist terms because Richard Kearney even then was writing about postnationalism²⁹ and had been talking extensively to John Hume about it, and we were all trying to look ahead rather than look back. So we did have that in common, but to be honest there was a banal explanation: he needed a young fellow who could write fast.

But the idea of postcolonialism seems, on the one hand, to be an idea the Irish people were not ready for, but on the other hand, there seems to be a time lag in the sense that it is a problem, which Daniel Corkery might have talked about. I have been thinking about your audience, about what they might think of this. As an outsider, my confusion comes from the time lag regarding a problem that should have been addressed thirty, forty years ago.

This is because everything in a post-colony freezes, and the people who took over power here in Ireland in 1921 were what Marxists would call a comprador bourgeoisie.³⁰ They wanted to convince the people they just kicked out that they would do the same job just as well, or even better. So, they didn't do any of the radical things that the 1916-generation would have done; they didn't build the capital elsewhere. They kept the old colonial city as the capital. In an equivalent way in terms of culture and the literary syllabus, they didn't modernize the text taught to children at school. For example when I did my Leaving Certificate Exam at the end of secondary school in 1969 I read a lot of the same essays that my mother had read at secondary school forty years earlier, Quiller-Couch,³¹ Hazlitt,³²

²⁷ Denis Donoghue (1928-) became Henry James Professor of English and American Letters at New York University in 2005.

²⁸ Formerly co-editor of *The Crane Bag*, Richard Kearney is Professor of Philosophy at Boston College.

²⁹ See Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland*.

³⁰ A social class which owes its existence to imperialist capitalists, the comprador (native agents of imperialist concerns) bourgeoisie is what Mao Tse-tung called "the running dog of imperialism." See Mao.

³¹ Arthur Quiller-Couch (1863-1944) was a Cornish literary critic. His publications include *Oxford Book of English Verse 1250-1900* (1900), *Studies in Literature* (1918), *On the Art of Reading* (1920), and the *Oxford Book of English Prose* (1923).

Charles Lamb—the classic English canon set up in 1920 when the state began to be founded. This happened in Africa as well; in the former French colonies, the French texts remained the same twenty or thirty years after, even while the texts in Paris were being modernized. I had a cousin in London who was doing secondary school in English; he was able to read George Orwell, J. D. Salinger, Edna O'Brien³³ even, in their school courses. But I was reading the great nineteenth-century stylists. This was an example of how Corkery's challenge just wasn't answered. And of course the reason for that is the Irish language. It suited the people in the Department of Education in the young state to pretend that the Irish mindset and psychology was available only in their native language, and it was from their point of view better to present an archaic, antique version of English rather than presenting people like Edna O'Brien or Sean O'Casey or Beckett who were articulating the modern Irish consciousness in the English language. So the result was the last and most modern Irish writers I did **were** the early poems of Yeats, William Allingham,³⁴ **nineteenth-century** writing, but it stopped there, because it suited the ideologues to pretend that Irish writing in English wasn't really part of the national or decolonizing project. This was **a** tragedy because the argument might have been developed and perfected in the 1940's through 1960's but wasn't, and it comes sideways from the North in the 70's and 80's. It becomes rather complicated with the whole IRA question behind it, and the agenda of narrow-gauge nationalism rather than a true postcolonial opening-out. And that's why Edna Longley has been able to ask those questions, and why so many people were so worried for so long about it. It's more complicated than that. There was in some way a decolonizing project continuing more on the level of politics than culture. For example, Ireland in the 1950's and the early 1960's was regarded at the United Nations as exemplary. The countries in Africa, which had just achieved independence, looked to Ireland for guidance; they asked their diplomats to advise them. Ireland was praised for its non-allied position, halfway between the USSR and USA, and it was therefore more interesting to these emerging countries in Africa and Asia. What happened was the Americans got frightened; they thought this island could become a little Cuba on the edge of Europe. The visit of John F. Kennedy, the first Irish-American president—not that it was true, but that's what was thought—in 1963 was not just celebrating the fact that an Irish Catholic could become the president of the greatest country in the world; it was also an attempt to secure Ireland under the American wing in international

³² William Hazlitt (1778-1830), an English essayist and literary critic.

³³ Edna O'Brien (1930-), an Irish novelist and short story writer.

³⁴ William Allingham (1824 [?]-1889), an Irish man of letters and poet.

affairs, which it did successfully. And we ceased to be as free, as postcolonial, as non-allied afterwards. We had always formed relations with China in the United Nations in the 50's and the 60's despite the disapproval of the Americans, but by the end of the 60's we were very much reflecting the American view of things. So the wider imperium took over; we got rid of one, but by the end of the 60's the other was beginning to dictate the policy, and that also narrowed the focus. And then anti-colonial politics was less and less easy. You see this in the career of the leading intellectuals like Conor Cruise O'Brien,³⁵ who wrote the greatest postcolonial, anti-colonial books in the 50's and 60's. His excellent study of Albert Camus,³⁶ which came out in 1969, argued very passionately in favor of anti-imperial politics. And O'Brien had been kicked out of the Congo because he took an anti-imperial line as a UN representative in 1962. His essay on the 1916 rising in 1966 was an attempt to show its radical content,³⁷ which has been in some ways forgotten or silenced by subsequent analyses. But this man in the 70's became even more anti-nationalist than Edna Longley—a total reversal—and I think that is symptomatic of the problem the middle class in the South had had with these debates. Long before Edna Longley said it, he accused Field Day and people like Kearney of presenting old-style nationalism in what he called trendy Third World gear.³⁸ There is a wider backdrop to all this. It is true that in the early 1970's a lot of independent countries that were formerly colonies were beginning to rot, and some of them had terrible leaders; and what happened is that some of the western, liberal radicals suddenly began to repent of their support of the anti-imperial movement, and to say that maybe things were better when the colonialists held power, because you get the tremendous failure of nerve on the part of western liberals. Conor Cruise O'Brien was a representative example. And even revisionism, which was cast in Irish terms as an attack by the Irish people on nationalism, has an international backdrop. One could find a parallel, for instance, in the writing of V. S. Naipaul, who wrote a book called *India: A Wounded Civilization* arguing that the

³⁵ An Irish writer, politician and academic, Conor Cruise O'Brien (1917-) was appointed UN civilian representative in the Congo to implement the UN resolutions on the secession of Katanga in 1961. He resigned from this post and from the Civil Service in December of the same year. He was Ireland's Minister of Posts and Telegraphs in 1973-77.

³⁶ See O'Brien, *Camus*.

³⁷ O'Brien suggests that the Irish Rising might have heralded the collapse of the European ruling order if the Easter rebels had waited for two years (*Embers* 227).

³⁸ "Irish cultural nationalism, now lacking any linguistic coherence, is more markedly political than most. The politics, now defined as 'anti-colonial,' and now larded with Third-Worldly quotations from the school of Frantz Fanon, is really good old Catholic Irish nationalism, in trendy gear" (O'Brien, Rev. of *The Irish Mind* 1231).

underdevelopment of Indian economics is due to the underdevelopment of ego in Indian religious thought.³⁹ Naipaul, like O'Brien, writes very beautiful eighteenth-century prose; he is, in some ways, a seemingly very clear thinker, and has used the formation he got from British literature to create an awesome literary style of his own to say these things. O'Brien is a local example of a very international phenomenon. So is Field Day. What is fascinating is the way everything got internationalized again, but slowly, because the people here in the Republic definitely wanted to narrow things. When I was a boy in the 50's, when the Gaelic Football finals were broadcast on the radio, at half time of the game they broadcast to the global Irish, with greetings to our people in Seattle, in Fremantle⁴⁰ in Australia, and to our missionaries in Central Africa. You had this feeling that there was a global Irish identity as well as an island one. And that was lost after the mid-1960's, and it was very narrowed in the 70's and 80's as a result of the IRA bombing campaign, which made young people very suspicious of nationalism and reactive against it. The idea was they were not going to kill civilians in the name of 32 counties; it's not worth that kind of sacrifice. And a lot of young people like Sebastian Barry⁴¹ and Dermot Bolger⁴² reconfigured Ireland as 26 counties rather than 32,⁴³ much less than a global Ireland; you got the extreme narrowing, which was an ethical response to the suffering the IRA campaigns had unleashed. But at the same time a lot of people would say, "No, the answer is to widen things beyond the national" and the other response I think is correct.

This brings up the question surrounding the belated development of Irish studies because of missed opportunities. In his forward to What Ever You Say, Say Nothing: Why Seamus Heaney is No. 1, Desmond Fennell writes of the scarcity of extensive commentaries by Irish critics on Irish writers: "In Ireland we have the habit of leaving it to foreigners to write the book about our famous writers" (i). While Fennell's remark need not be taken literally, it might point to a symptom in the late development of Irish literary studies. To take an example, most of the pioneer Joyce studies were accomplished by non-Irish academics before Irish literary studies was institutionalized in Ireland in the 1960's. One question arises:

³⁹ V. S. Naipaul (1932-), a Trinidadian-born British novelist who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2001. *India: A Wounded Civilization* was published in 1977.

⁴⁰ A city located in southwestern Australia, on the Indian Ocean near Perth.

⁴¹ Born in Dublin in 1955, Sebastian Barry is an Irish playwright and novelist.

⁴² Dermot Bolger (1959-), an Irish playwright, novelist, and poet. His works often question the nationalist concept of Irishness in favor of a more plural society.

⁴³ That is, excluding the six counties, which constitute Northern Ireland.

why did the institutionalization of Irish literary studies lag far behind the nationalist ethos in the post-independence era to emerge at a time when the idea of a national literature was theoretically no longer an issue? Was this belatedness in any way related to what you called in 1979 “the quarantine” of Anglo-Irish writers and their Gaelic counterparts (Kiberd, “Writers” 341-52)? You seem to have a high regard for Daniel Corkery, naming him one of the proto-postcolonialists. But didn’t his view on Anglo-Irish literature also limit the opportunities that Irish studies might have had?

Oh yes, that’s true. Some of his statements were extraordinarily rigid and narrow, as are Deane’s. They are both fundamental, radical thinkers, and sometimes their insights are conditional on a certain narrowness. Corkery’s exclusion of what we would now call Anglo-Irish writers from the national canon is utterly regrettable, but I am not completely convinced he believed that himself because he was himself an English writer from the start; he didn’t write creatively in the Irish language, so in a way he was condemning himself in that chapter, but it’s also true that in his literary criticism of Gaelic texts he was constantly celebrating the confluence of English and Irish language traditions. In *The Hidden Ireland*, the book he wrote in English about Gaelic Munster, he talked about Ó Suilleabháin for instance, writing poems in English celebrating a British naval victory in the West Indies, at the same time as he wrote poems in Gaelic (184-221). So there is a kind of prescriptive rigidity about that opening chapter of the same book which is actually not characteristic of Corkery’s wider performance; his wider performance is very ecumenical, very open, and in fact he’s one of the very first critics to do what I thought to be wider and more extensive, something that combines English writing and Irish literature as part of the same *continuum*. He would be a model in this regard. That chapter is even racist in certain paragraphs, and I do not say that with any admiration, but I do think that at least he was asking the right questions, even if he got some of the wrong answers.

Yes, but I am not sure whether you want to attribute what you called the quarantine of Anglo-Irish literature and Gaelic writing to Corkery himself since he seemed to be very influential on the state policy at that time.

He was very influential, too influential in that regard. But that went back to Pearse⁴⁴ when one talks about the quarantine. Pearse said that you couldn't have an Irish national literature in English in 1899 when he was still a teenager. And that had a huge effect. This was Pearse's attack on Yeats when he set up the Literary Theatre.⁴⁵ Pearse said that you couldn't have a national theatre in the English language (qtd. in Moran 117), and that was of course wrong. But I think Corkery's rigidity would also be a result of initial disappointment with the failure of the language revival project; you have to see all these things in context. He would derive some of the ideas from Pearse, that you can really only have the Irish mindset in the Irish language, but he would also have been worried by the late 1920's about whether that project was going to blossom, and maybe this made him more dogmatic than he should have been. To me the ultimate mode of this is MacDonagh's *Literature in Ireland*,⁴⁶ which argues that there is already a confluence of the two traditions and that's OK. And that's what I think too. I tried to show in *Irish Classics* how writers as far back as Goldsmith⁴⁷ and Swift were drawing on Gaelic traditions even as they were writing in English. Corkery was at times over-rigid, but at the same time he asked the questions to which people like Lloyd⁴⁸ and Deane and Conor Cruise O'Brien finally had to return. So he deserves the credit for seeing that, and it was a tragedy that there weren't other intellectuals around to engage with him. You asked in your question why that happened. One of the reasons was that the small number of people who taught English at universities were so busy that they did not have time to write anything, and anyway the old tradition was that these people primarily taught their students; you didn't have to put things down in books. That's something that really came out in the 60's with Irish intellectuals. Yes you are right; there were missed opportunities. For instance, the major criticism of Irish literature in the 1940's, 50's and 60's was done by people like Richard Ellmann,⁴⁹ Hugh Kenner,⁵⁰ Ann Saddlemyer⁵¹ and so on, and

⁴⁴ Patrick Pearse (1879-1916), an Irish poet, teacher, and nationalist activist. He engineered the 1916 Easter Rising, and was executed along with fourteen other leaders on 3 May in the same year after the collapse of the Rising.

⁴⁵ See Lin, 202; and note 6.

⁴⁶ See MacDonagh.

⁴⁷ Oliver Goldsmith (1728-74), an Irish writer known for his pastoral poem "The Deserted Village" (1770) and his play *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773).

⁴⁸ David Lloyd (1955-), Professor of English at the University of California, Berkeley, is the author of *Nationalism and Minor Literature* (1987), *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment* (1993), and *Ireland After History* (1999).

⁴⁹ Richard Ellmann (1918-87) was a distinguished American literary critic and established biographer of James Joyce, W. B. Yeats, and Oscar Wilde.

to them we are hugely indebted; they were great people, great scholars, and they did fine work, but there is a sense in which they would have been assisted even more in that if there had been a chorus of Irish voices at the time. And to me it is a little bit strange that the Irish voices were quite so silent even if they were busy, because we are busy now in the English department, but we do write. There was a sort of aversion to critical ideas, which in some ways was perhaps connected with the Civil War⁵² because radical theorists were accused of causing the Civil War, which actually led to far more deaths than independence had caused.

This might also be what had happened to Field Day.

Yes, and therefore there was a distrust of theory, a resistance to theory as it is called in literary studies, as a result of the Civil War. For instance, I studied Irish as well as English in the 60's and 70's, and I found there was almost no interest in literary criticism within Celtic studies. Language analysis, yes, study of dialects, yes, but poems are interesting only when they break off for language analysis; no one ever read them in terms of ideology, cultural politics, whatever. Corkery lamented this in the opening chapter of *The Hidden Ireland*, about how undeveloped the native criticism was, but there was also a sentimental idea that criticism was the enemy of creative artists. My teachers said that Keats had been destroyed in England by criticism in *The Fortnightly Review*.⁵³ You were almost a traitor if you were a critic, which is also another reason that criticism didn't really develop. This is nonsense, for W. E. B. Du Bois, the great American writer of the African American tradition, said that a national literature has never fully matured until it has created its own criticism that explains and enables it,⁵⁴ and that is certainly so. There was a wider

⁵⁰ Hugh Kenner (1923-2003) was a Canadian scholar most noted for his research on literary modernism.

⁵¹ Ann Saddlemyer, Professor Emerita of Drama at the University of Toronto, is a prominent Canadian scholar of modern Irish literature. She edited works and letters by W. B. Yeats, J. M. Synge, and Lady Gregory, and wrote *Becoming George* (2002), a biography of Mrs. Yeats.

⁵² The Irish Civil War broke out in 1921-22 in a dispute over the Anglo-Irish Treaty signed by Michael Collins and the representative of the English government, which defined the territory of the new nation as 26 counties excluding Northern Ireland.

⁵³ A monthly periodical published by Chapman and Hall from 1865 to 1931, and then by Horace Marshall from 1931 to 1954, in London.

⁵⁴ "No authentic group literature can rise save at the demand and with the support of the group which is calling for self-expression. . . . The circulation of the *Crisis* went down, the contributions to the National Association [for the Advancement of Colored People] were curtailed and the new Negro literature was forced to place its dependence almost entirely upon a white audience and that audience had its own distinct patterns and preferences for Negro writing" (Du Bois 137).

failure in the universities. We didn't develop our sociology, economic theory. There was a general imitative attitude—when you did things, you just imitated what was done in the better British universities. Denis Donoghue would be an example of it. He wrote a book on Swift in 1969 or 1970,⁵⁵ which hardly referred to Swift's Irishness; it is as if Donoghue had been ventriloquizing a British voice as he wrote it. He is a major Irish critic, and yet even when he wrote about Swift, he didn't really deal with Ireland.

So the institutionalization of Irish studies might have to do with the kind of relaxation you mentioned earlier, because the question of Irish identity did not seem to create so much anxiety.

Yes, and it was also part of the youth movement of 1968 which demanded for university students a relevant syllabus. I was a teenager then. Bookshops in Dublin, in the late 1960's, created a special category of Irish writing on the shelves. If I went into a bookshop in 1964, looking for stories by Benedict Kiely,⁵⁶ they would be beside Thomas Kennelly⁵⁷ and William Kennedy,⁵⁸ the American writer. They were just part of a wider English literature, the modern novel. But if you went into a bookshop in 1969 there was a separate Irish section where Kiely would be beside Brendan Kennelly⁵⁹ and Thomas Kinsella.⁶⁰ And that was a huge cultural shift. That was the decade in which the chair that I hold was created at UCD, a separate chair for Anglo-Irish literature, the first one in any university. There was a rediscovery of these issues, created by international movements and also by the civil rights movement of the black people in America, which had a huge influence on Northern Ireland, the example of Martin Luther King inspiring John Hume. In some way the black radicals who thought that King was too moderate were equivalent to the IRA which emerged in the North of Ireland. The question of

William Edward Burghart Du Bois (1868-1963) was an African American civil rights activist, writer and scholar.

⁵⁵ See Donoghue.

⁵⁶ Born in 1919, Benedict Kiely is one of the few Irish writers to be elected a *Saoi* ("wise one"), an award for distinction in the arts.

⁵⁷ I have been unable to find information on a writer under this name, and believe that Kiberd might have confused it with Brendan Kennelly, whom he mentioned later.

⁵⁸ William Joseph Kennedy (1928-) is an American writer and journalist. His novel *Ironwood* (1983) was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1984.

⁵⁹ Currently teaching at Trinity College Dublin, Brendan Kennelly (1936-) is a popular Irish poet.

⁶⁰ Thomas Kinsella (1928-), an Irish poet, translator, and editor.

identity re-emerged with tremendous force, and people in the later 1960's began to reconfigure Irish writing as something that might help with the answers. And that's why even something as commercial as a bookshop has its own theorization of the field.

Is Irish Studies nowadays the kind of thing you have wanted, an integration of Gaelic literature and English writing?

No, not yet. You could do this in Liverpool or Coleraine in Northern Ireland, or Boston College in the United States, but it hasn't fully taken off here. One of the reasons is that people in the Irish language department are very worried that their discipline will be diluted, that people will not read the text in the original but read it in translations like people have been doing in courses on Classic Civilization. That's an understandable fear. And there is also the natural conservatism of the Irish academics; they want to defend their own turf; they don't want other people making incursions *onto* it. In one way it is admirable because they believe there is a particular discipline they profess that has its own history and they want to defend it, but in another way it's crazy because the most interesting research is always being done between disciplines. Field Day itself compelled people to address the interface between history and literature, how history writing is a form of literature, and how literature produces versions of history, etc. A multi- or inter-disciplinary approach is more helpful, but it has been ironically and paradoxically least possible to do that within the 26 counties. This is anomalous. Edward Said once said in *Orientalism* that Arabic studies is prosecuted everywhere except in Arab lands⁶¹—a similar situation.

That is true. I always felt excluded when I went on the webpage of the Gaelic Studies department because everything is in Gaelic, and I could not understand a word of it.

Yes, it is a worry. People are beginning to think in terms of undergraduate degrees, integrated course in Irish Studies. My university has just announced under the new

⁶¹ As for the triumph of "Orientalism," Said suggests that it is ". . . maintained . . . as much by Oriental consent as by direct and crude economic pressure from the United States. It is sobering to find, for instance, that while there are dozens of organizations in the United States for studying the Arab and Islamic Orient, there are none in the Orient itself for studying the United States. . . . Worse, there are scarcely any institutes of even modest stature in the Orient devoted to study of the Orient" (*Orientalism* 324).

president that they would move in that direction, and that is something to be welcomed. In fact, it should have happened in 1921. I wrote an essay in 1979 called “Writers in Quarantine.” That’s 26 years ago. Even then I thought of Joyce describing the Irish as the most belated race in Europe;⁶² even then I thought that argument was shamefully belated and so obvious that I found it embarrassing even making it, but it is still needed.

You have probably answered my next question, but I still need to double-check with you. A lot of energy was put into the Irish language problem from the first wave of Celtic Revival to the mid-twentieth century. It remained a central issue in the Field Day enterprise in the 1980’s: Friel’s Translations, and many of Seamus Deane’s and your essays dealt with this issue. In contrast to this zeal, socio-linguistic research in this area is notably scarce. Why?

This is a bad reason, but a good explanation: everyone on both sides of the argument was terrified at the thought of what objective research would reveal. The people who loved Irish—they gave their whole lives to it—were terrified that most of the community wouldn’t share that passion, and that they would produce statistics that had the effect of negating the whole official policy of promoting Irish as a compulsory subject in schools.

But the result was already there, and very obvious.

Yes. Let me make the other side of the argument. The people who hated it had just the same fear, which actually a lot of people would say they loved it, they wanted it, and it should be studied, even though they didn’t want to study it but it was generally a good thing. They didn’t want the figures to be produced either. As a result, no research was done until 1975, and then came this famous government survey—“The Public Attitude Concerning Irish”—which found in fact, and in keeping with the ambiguity I mentioned to you, that about 91% of the people thought it was essential to the Irish identity, but only about 23% thought it would survive 25 years later, in the year 2000, as a community language (*Report* 24). What people were saying was: “Yes, we think this is very important,” but “No, we don’t think we can actually revive it.”

⁶² Joyce suggested that Ireland would have to give the artist freedom and silence the priest if she was not to become “an afterthought of Europe” (qtd. in Gorman, 135).

But were the answers reliable?

I think so. The duplicity of the Irish mind is laid bare in these statistics. They had to be reliable because it is so shameful. The people were saying an incredible thing about themselves. They were saying they really believed in this, but they didn't believe they could do it. And this is why I see *Translations* as satirical about our aspirations when performed in Dublin. Five years after that survey is when Friel's play goes on. Irish people are sentimental about their attachment to the language, but it's like the saying of Augustine: "Make us chaste Lord, but not yet."⁶³ They are not willing to make the practical effort and sacrifice which learning a difficult language calls for. Increasingly they look to the pragmatic values of learning Spanish, Japanese or whatever in the global economy. Joe Lee says in *History of Ireland*—it's a very funny line—that "the movements of pigs were more studied by sociology than those of Irish speakers."⁶⁴ It's because of the fear that I am talking to you about—the fear of what the figures would show. I think the compulsory policy was wrong from the beginning. I don't believe that forcing people to learn Irish—because you thought that's a gift rather than trash—was a good idea.

But would there be an alternative to it?

Yes, if it is voluntary, if one student in five or six would study it, but they would study it at a much, much higher level, and that would be better in the end. The level announced in the second year in university is probably no higher than it was for me when I was at the age of 12 at school. So this is not success; this is failure by any standard. But again it's very interesting because of the way it connects to international issues. People in the United States want to change the syllabus, to have it include books by Alice Walker or Toni Morrison, and there are decent people who believe the society will be improved by a more open, multicultural syllabus. But the lesson of Ireland shows that unless the public wills that, you can think all

⁶³ "But I, miserable young man, supremely miserable even in the very outset of my youth, had entreated chastity of Thee, and said, 'Grant me chastity and contingency, but not yet.' For I was afraid lest Thou shouldst hear me soon, and soon deliver me from the disease of concupiscence, which I desired to have satisfied rather than extinguished." See St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, Book VIII, Chapter 17.

⁶⁴ Kiberd informed the author in his letter that he was referring to John Joseph Lee's *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (1989), but Lee suggests that Kiberd might be "intellectually transl[ing]" a sentence or a paragraph from his book. See Kiberd and Lee.

you want about a new syllabus, but it won't necessarily have a transformative effect on the society. So this is an example of how affirmative action doesn't always work, even though the people who propound a policy have high intentions. I was in South Africa in 1998, and I spoke at Durban University to Zulu⁶⁵ intellectuals who wanted to matriculate in their own language at the university. There were about a million speakers of that language in South Africa; it was quite a considerable minority language. I urged them to visit Ireland, and talk to people at the University of Galway, which was officially supposed to be Irish-speaking and teaching subjects in Irish, about the difficulty they had in getting texts of third-level chemistry or law in Irish, and how they had to use English in the end by default. And I warned them that they might make lots of the same mistakes we had made trying to promote Irish by affirmative action policies that backfired in the end. And they are coming over, people from the ANC,⁶⁶ to study this. This is an example of how the Irish, as Ellmann once said, were the first to walk in the dark down familiar roads,⁶⁷ and maybe South Africans could learn from some of the mistakes we made, even as we are in turn learning from the postcolonial theories of the outside world. It's very interesting that the problem raised by the language policy itself is reflected in so many other cultures.

The fear among intellectuals at that time brings to mind The Crane Bag. As we know, The Crane Bag began as a promising journal, but seemed to lose its grant from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in the later years of its operation. Why? And was it the fear you mentioned that made it decide to terminate publication in 1985? Was this decision related to and affected by Field Day in any way?

No. I used to joke that *The Crane Bag* was killed by the stork: Richard Kearney and his wife had a baby. There is always a banal explanation. And the banal explanation for the termination of *The Crane Bag* was that a lot of the young people who were the main movers behind this all had children at the same time—not Hederman, who was a priest, but certainly Richard Kearney.

I like that reason, but as an outsider when I read the postscript for the last issue of that journal, there seemed to be very high-flown reasons for this painful decision to

⁶⁵ Consisting of about 11 million people, the Zulu are the largest ethnic group in South Africa.

⁶⁶ African National Congress, an anti-apartheid movement which has now become the ruling political party in South Africa.

⁶⁷ See Ellmann.

end publication—the gap between its aspirations and its effects, and its refusal to be stereotyped, as Hederman put it (171-72). His despair, echoing Richard Kearney’s anxiety in an apology for the journal, in which he mapped its place in Irish cultural history along with other little magazines,⁶⁸ came as a surprise since controversy is inherent in language, the instrument essential to the very idea of “the fifth province” which The Crane Bag aspired to; its pluralist editorial policy suggests as much. Why, then, did they decide to give up a cause that was by necessity highly demanding?

They took themselves very seriously. If you look at the history of the intellectual scene, not just in Ireland but in the whole world, the very good journals always last for a very short time: there was a glorious flowering and then they were gone. And this is probably like that too. I know why you were asking me: you were wondering if there was tremendous pressure. If you asked Kearney he would probably tell you that he was hurt by what people said. You mentioned about the cut in the grant from the Council of Northern Ireland. The reason was that they interviewed Seamus Twomey, an IRA figure,⁶⁹ because they did not believe they should ban the IRA from the debate. But the Northern Irish Council took a different view, and I think that’s the reason the money was withdrawn.

But there was an article in the journal in the late 1970’s, which suggests that the Northern Irish Art Council didn’t care about that interview at all.

No. I think people changed, and that’s all because of Field Day of course: their pamphlets, and the controversy they produced. And you are right in saying that Field Day and *The Crane Bag* were somewhat identified. Their editorial boards never met or overlapped, but there were some people, like Kearney, myself, Deane and other UCD intellectuals, who were identified with both. But my own suspicion is that after the interview with Twomey, a lot of people in the South as well as in the North thought *The Crane Bag* was “soft on the IRA,” that they were really what Conor Cruise O’Brien accused Richard of, in *The Irish Mind*, putting nationalist thought into trendy third-world gear.⁷⁰ That was always an underlying fear, and it resurfaced when the grant was withdrawn. But I think it was in some way a mercy killing: they had said what they wanted to do; in many ways they had helped open

⁶⁸ See Kearney, “Between Politics and Literature.”

⁶⁹ See Lin, 216, note 35.

⁷⁰ See note 38.

up the debate. The worst thing a magazine can do is to repeat itself. Maybe in some ways it had a natural life. I remember seeing Kearney with all bags under his eyes because he did all the hack work on the magazine, laying it out, checking the print, clearing information, having all the dealings with printers, and worrying about the money afterwards, or trying to get the money back from the bookshops. It is a nightmare when you face these things. If you suddenly have two young children to cope with, you just can't do all that as well.

But as I read between the lines, Kearney seemed to be more persevering and optimistic about the whole project, whereas Mark Hederman seemed to give up because of despair.

I don't know Hederman much, though I admire his work. Hederman was perhaps depressed by the increasing materialism he saw all around him in the Republic of Ireland, and he had probably a very spiritual notion of what a magazine could achieve, and he still had his project but there were other ways of pursuing it after the mid-1980's—that would be my suspicion. The Pope came here in 1979, and my analysis of his visit was like J. F. K.'s visit in 1963. They were both presented officially as triumphs—the triumph of Irish America, the triumph of Catholicism. But the underlying condition in both cases was panic on the part of the people that brought them here. No such people had ever visited Ireland, and that was the problem. Kennedy was brought here, as I said to you, to secure Ireland for the American policy because of the independent line it was taking. The Pope was brought here because vocations were in decline since 1967, and the Catholic Church was already in crisis. By the mid-1980's you had all these dreadful pains like Anne Lovett's death in the grotto, the poor woman who gave birth to a child still in mid-teens.⁷¹ You had these tremendous scandals often involving an oppressive version of Catholicism. It must have been an oppressive time for an idealist priest, and I would suspect that Richard was starting to be a father thinking about the future, like any young parents do.

But then he went on to be the editor of The Irish Review,⁷² which was a surprise to me.

⁷¹ At the age of 15, Anne Lovett died after giving birth to a baby boy in a grotto in Granard, County Longford, on 31 January 1984.

⁷² See Lin, 217; and note 36.

Of course they had a different ideological background—they were much more revisionist than *The Crane Bag*—but at the same time they wanted to show some continuity. Richard was never really a nationalist even though Edna Longley and O’Brien would attack him sometimes, but they knew deep down that he wasn’t, that he was a European Irish intellectual who had a postnationalist agenda. *The Irish Review* wouldn’t have put Deane on the board; they certainly wouldn’t invite me. But I think Richard would be acceptable. *The Irish Review* was a much more narrow ideological project than *The Crane Bag*, which had genuine ideals, quite mad sometimes, but anyone who had something to say could get into it. *The Irish Review* was highly revisionist, and in one way it never achieved the same excitement because by the time it got going, revisionism itself was in retreat in the face of the peace process. So their ideology didn’t fully echo the mood of the time they found themselves in although it was interesting in a different way. The other new thing was the number of pamphlets produced by other groups than Field Day. That’s strange because pamphleteering was an eighteenth-century phenomenon, and suddenly in the late twentieth century it was reactivated in Ireland—the most belated race in Europe again. There is in Seamus Deane along with his radicalism tremendous archaic sympathy. And the ideology of anthology is also extremely old-fashioned. Said once said to me that anthologies were invented by imperialists because they didn’t want to know the whole of the culture, and they just wanted to select extracts. I did some of the sections that Deane asked me to, but I remember saying to him that he would be open to attack on that basis. His answer was if we got to make a ghetto of it we had better do it ourselves rather than someone else—in the nineteenth century they did create ghettos out of national literature by creating anthologies. In a way this is Deane’s argument in his preface. This is a very interesting counter-argument. Anyways the attack was on very different grounds. I was there the night when the whole project was created in Brian Friel’s house, and he took down *The Cabinet of Irish Literature* which was published in the 1890’s, a multi-volume anthology,⁷³ and said it’s now time for a new one of these. And I remember thinking, “Oh my God, we are here now celebrating things in the eighteenth century—pamphlets.” And here at four o’clock in the morning he had this idea of recreating the nineteenth-century form of anthology. It was also connected to the Frankfurt school—Deane was interested in Adorno—and those radical intellectuals in Central Europe who all had these kind of traditional, cultural, and formal commitments; they could combine commitments with high culture, with

⁷³ See Lin, 210; note 28.

radical politics. That's what Friel and Deane were up to, but there was something anachronistic about it.

That's true. And I have always been wondering about its practical values. Would you assign this anthology to your students for Irish literature courses, for instance?

You can't because of the high expense; it's a problem of expense rather than utility. In fact the books are incredibly useful, and I have been using it in every working day in my life since it was published. I read the introduction of a section, and am distracted by the sheer power of the prose. It's a fantastic pedagogical device, but the tragedy is most students can't get near it because it's behind the glass case in the library. But that wasn't the intention. I don't think Field Day wanted it to be in a glass case. They wanted it to be a huge critical success that was followed up by shorter paperback versions that would be produced by Norton in America—that would be the equivalent of Faber here—for student markets like the *Norton Anthology of English* or *Latin American Literature*. But the scale of the volume was so ferocious that it killed the project; it didn't quite destroy the credibility, but in the short term it made the publisher nervous. That's my interpretation. That's a tragedy because if Deane had done that in France at that time, he would have been decorated. In the same way the whole project of the anthology was destroyed. I think this is why he went to America;⁷⁴ he was extraordinarily hurt by all that. Richard went to America too, because of these attacks. But it's not so bad now; things are much more relaxed. They were victims of this earlier mindset, which was so allergic to nationalism because of the fear that they were for the IRA, which was nonsense. There has always been this fear. If you were writing a nationalist version of Irish history, you were creating insurrections in Northern Ireland. And they even said that the TV serials in 1966 on RTE Television⁷⁵ created the uprising in the North,⁷⁶ but they didn't because most nationalists didn't have TV sets so that they could see all these programs. The intellectuals have always been making up influence. They think people in the streets were reading these pamphlets with their daily bread; they are not.

⁷⁴ Seamus Deane was appointed Chair of the Keough Institute for Irish Studies by the University of Notre Dame in 1993 to help establish this institute, and has remained affiliated with it.

⁷⁵ Radio Telefís Éireann is the national, publicly funded broadcast service (1926-) of the Republic of Ireland.

⁷⁶ On 17 April 1966, the Easter Rising was commemorated in Belfast by large republican parades (and thus "the uprising in the North").

Yes, one critic has suggested that the Field Day pamphlets were not going to work because they were not read (Dandantus 368).

They didn't have influence that way, but they did have influence in the elite groups; they influenced the writers in Belfast, not the IRA.

*As I see it, your concerns as a literary critic and intellectual overlap significantly with those of Field Day. Even when Brian Friel might be making a judgment on the Field Day Theatre Company (FDTC) when he decided to give *Dancing at Lughnasa* to the Abbey Theatre in 1990 (Murray 85-86), your sympathy for the FDTC's cause was still palpable in your recent essay on the way it anticipates what Ireland was to become: "The play which most fully embodied the themes and projects of Field Day was presented at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. Field Day did not die, but its agendas were broadened until they filled a national canvas: and this also was prophetic of the ways in which the problem of Northern Ireland would once again be seriously reimagined by all the peoples of Ireland, north and south, at home and overseas" (Kiberd, "Dancing" 38). Still, there was a tone of nostalgia in this tribute when you said "Field Day did not die." Considering the fact that Field Day still operates under the same name that it had twenty-five years ago, and has moved its headquarters altogether to Dublin along with Seamus Deane, what is, or was, Field Day to you?*

It is now more a critical project involving Deane and the publication of Field Day monographs, and that's still hugely important because they are unfailingly high-quality contributions. But once *Dancing at Lughnasa* was put on at the Abbey in 1990, in one way, as I said in my essay, it was the consummation of the Field Day project because it has just gone not just national, but global because that play toured the world. There was at that moment a rediscovery of cultural self-confidence by the Irish people. The fact that Friel could formulate that problem so confidently suggests that it is the beginning of the solution. I said the same thing about another great writer, John McGahern,⁷⁷ about the growing confidence of this generation to achieve a clear formulation of the problem posed by the past generation, and by themselves now (Kiberd, *Inventing* 485, 496, 581). Friel and McGahern both appeared in the same year as the inauguration of Mary Robinson,⁷⁸ who became the

⁷⁷ John McGahern (1934-2006) is an Irish writer best known for his novel *Amongst Women* (1990), which won him two awards and a nomination for the Booker Prize.

⁷⁸ Mary Robinson (1944-) served as President of Ireland from 1990 to 1997.

first woman president of this country. The history of Ireland in the 90's is that of growing economic success as well as increasing intellectual toleration even in internal debates. So the need for Field Day was outlived, and maybe because the project had been much more successful than its sponsors realized. They still beat themselves up too much, and think of themselves as frustrated failures. To me it's a spectacular success. Yes, I am in some way nostalgic for that moment because it was challenging and at the same time it made some kind of difference. But in another way I feel that so many of the ideas were coded in the Belfast Agreement of 1998. That's one of the reasons Field Day is not around as a major movement. When the Irish state was set up in 1921 the Gaelic League⁷⁹ did not have quite so many members afterwards and wasn't so active, because in some sense they believed the main policy they had evolved had been implemented in the new state. And you could argue the same thing about Field Day. If the British and Irish governments as well as many politicians in the North abandoned their belief in the Belfast Agreement, then Field Day would have to come back again in some form.

This is what Seamus Deane believes.

He is right about that. But at the moment I don't think that Blair,⁸⁰ Ahern,⁸¹ Mark Durkan,⁸² and Peter Robinson really wanted that to happen. What's interesting is that culture is a much more central issue now than it was fifteen years ago. That's also the achievement of Field Day. They kept saying culture is more important than people realized. It's like what Edward Said has been saying to Palestinians, that you have fetishized arms, wars and soldiers, and you are neglecting the more important, cultural aspect of the struggle.⁸³ When history is written, people will realize that that's what Field Day was saying to the IRA: you have exalted the fight, and

⁷⁹ Founded in 1893 by Douglas Hyde, the Gaelic League aspired to revive the Irish language and sports. As such it became the leading organization to promote the Irish Revival.

⁸⁰ Tony Blair (1953-) was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and leader of the Labor Party from 1994 until the summer of 2006, at which time he let his friend Gordon Brown take over this position.

⁸¹ Commonly known as Bertie Ahern, Patrick Bartholomew Ahern (1951-) has been the eleventh *Taoiseach* (Prime Minister) of the Republic of Ireland since 1997, and is the leader of *Fianna Fáil*-Progressive Democrats coalition government.

⁸² Mark Henry Durkan (1960-) was the chairperson of the SDLP in 1990-1995, and a key member of the party's negotiating team in the run-up to the Good Friday Agreement. He served as the Deputy-First Minister in 2001, and was elected leader of the SDLP in the same year.

⁸³ Kiberd seems to be generalizing Said's pacifist, humanist position in the Palestinian Question. See, for instance, Said, *Politics* xv-xxix.

forgotten the thing fought for. If that happens, people like Heaney, Deane, Friel and their modern equivalents will gather together again to make contributions. So I do agree with him about that.*

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Introduced by Declan Kiberd. London: Methuen, 2002. Pp. 304. Heaney ("The Cure at Troy: Production Notes in No Particular Order," 171-80) and McGuinness (in Long's "The Sophoclean Killing Fields: An Interview with Frank McGuinness," 263-82) are particularly generous in describing how they handle the technical challenges of making ancient dramas, with their choruses and *dei ex machina* and ubiquitous mythological references, sensible and accessible to modern audiences. Declan Kiberd's *Inventing Ireland* only came to my attention a few years later, but it had a refreshing attitude: O'Brien was arguably the writer who made many of the subsequent advances in Irishwomen's writing possible. In a paragraph, O'Brien had been afforded her rightful place in literary criticism. When Kiberd's *Ulysses and Us* was published, I was at the top of the queue. It turned out to be another gem. Prompted by a chance sighting, I contacted him to propose an interview, but heard nothing back. Eight months later, an email arrived: "For a man who passed you by bike all those months ago on Bull Wall... I felt what I did in university every day should be comprehensible beyond the university walls. Declan Kiberd. *The Hill Bachelors* by William Trevor Viking, 245 pp, £15.99, October 2000, ISBN 0 670 89256 4. George Birmingham, a Church of Ireland clergyman and novelist, wrote in 1926 that the Irish conflict, whatever its roots, could now be reduced to a matter of style. The balancing of hope and frailty at the mid-point of the century is masterly: "The past receded a little with the day; time yet unspent was left to happen as fearfully as it would." On the surface it seems to revisit the old, familiar tale of slightly demented bachelors so tenderly told in "The Ballroom of Romance" in the collection of that name—a story of middle-aged men who are described as "boys" until the death of an ageing parent frees them for a late marriage.