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company: "to discuss openly matters sexual, and to attack the double standard of sexuality that was enshrined in the official treatment of prostitutes" (191).

While this study reveals many of the other causes championed by the Haslams, it is in connection with the suffrage struggle in Ireland that they are best-known. Turning to this subject, Quinlan corrects many popularly held assumptions about early feminist activism in Ireland, such as that the DWSA "preached to the converted" in one another's drawing rooms (125). She counters this by exploring the ground-breaking efforts of these early feminists to tackle the taboos against appearing and speaking in public, and on clearing spaces for women in the public sphere, thus rejecting the dominant Victorian ideology of the woman as belonging only to the private sphere. This is underlined in her later discussion of the 1907 Great Suffrage Demonstration in London when "the vast majority of women still felt that there was something very dreadful in walking in procession through the streets" (176) unlike Anna, whom she points out was well used to public performance by this stage.

Quinlan's analysis also tackles criticism of early feminist activism by later feminists (that is, addressing claims that it was an overly cautious, liberal movement). In addressing the two main Irish suffrage organisations at the turn of the century—the constitutional Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association (which had developed from the DWSA) and the more militant Irish Women's Franchise League (founded in 1908 by Hannah Sheehy Skeffington and Gretta Cousins) Quinlan dismantles the dissonances between early and later feminist methodologies, delineating the ways in which the activism and militancy of later groups built on the achievements of earlier liberal feminists such as Haslam. She points out, "The very impatience of these younger women with the methods of the older generation was an acknowledgement of how well that first wave of feminism had succeeded in its educative goal, at least where young, educated women were concerned" (110).

This study is multi-faceted. In narrating the life stories of the Haslams, Quinlan also addresses the early history of feminist activism in Ireland. She deals adeptly with its internal politics, links between different feminist groups, relationships between individual activists—such as Hannah Sheehy Skeffington and Anna Haslam—and with the internationalism of these early movements. In drawing together these various strands, Quinlan has crafted a text which is at once revealing, rigorous and compelling, and in so doing she has laid down essential groundwork for the interpolation of Irish feminist experiences and histories into mainstream Irish studies.

– Queen's University Belfast

Reply to Bruce Stewart, or, the Politics of Irish Criticism.

By Conor McCARTHY

Largely in spite of itself, Bruce Stewart's dyspeptic review of my *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture in Ireland 1969-1992* (Dublin: Four Courts, 2000) raises some points worthy of further discussion. I will seek to rebut some of his assertions, and then to move on to the wider, and ultimately more important, issues at stake.

On the basis of my allegedly "remorseless" use of the terms "imbrication" and "interpellation," Stewart accuses me of deploying a "post-structuralist Marxism [. . .] to combat the bourgeois discourse of collusion between writers and rulers." He reckons that his role, as reviewer, is to measure my account of the cultural history of the period "against what is felt and known about it by those who have lived there in the period in question." "[T]he account given here is barely recognizable," Stewart declares. "It seems that theory is to blame."

Stewart is working under the dubious and antiquated assumption that "theory" is something a critic can simply pick off the shelf, like another book, and opt to use or not, as she or he pleases. On the evidence of his review, Stewart appears to be an unreconstructed Leavisite, and so he presumes that he can practice a criticism unencumbered by theory. There is no need for any kind of "theory" of literature, as Leavis implied in his famous reply to Rene Wellek; only reading, readers, and dialogue between them. Reading has less to do with cognition than with feelings and hunches.

What is actually offered in this position is a form of conservative humanism, underpinned by an empiricist epistemology and an idealist conception of history. In this view of the world, history, and within that, culture, is seen as a series of unconnected appearances; to strive to make historical, economic or political connections between the objects of culture and the world outside them is to do violence to their free-standing integrity. Accordingly, Stewart displays the weakness of his position when he apparently considers that he has totalizing access to "what is felt and known about [the period in question in Ireland] by those who have lived there," *on the sole basis of his own empirical perceptions*, and without recourse to abstraction or conceptual thought. Not merely this, but he is prepared to base intellectual argument on such "evidence." Only such solipsism can explain why his "critique" of the book stresses his bizarre "defence" of T. K. Whitaker from my alleged "attempt to cast" him "as villain" of Irish modernization, and his similar "defence" of Colm Toibin from a charge I nowhere actually make. Stewart's "critique" is patently derivative of E. P. Thompson's 1978 attack on Louis Althusser's exorbitance of theory and his idea of history as a structural process without a subject. Yet in truth, the most evident "theoretical" influences on the book are the ideas of Edward Said and Hayden White. Neither of these writers can seriously be considered to be Marxists.

In Stewart's formulation, the account of recent Irish cultural history offered by the book is "unrecognizable." What he means is that it is unrecognizable from a viewpoint

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of alleged "commonsense." But this is precisely the point: theory is useless, and criticism is not itself if it is unwilling or unable to produce a certain *Verfremdungseffekt* in its re-narration of the materials of culture, so as to permit analysis. The alternative to this is to produce a discourse of merely descriptive, or at best functionalist, piety.

Stewart is critical of my call for a sociology of Irish intellectuals. One can productively and dialectically flip Stewart's cavalier and glib dismissal of what he terms the "reductive tool" of sociology, on its head, however. It is most certainly "reductive" to argue, as Stewart implicitly does, that the materials of culture exist in a vacuum, intellectually invertebrate and separated from all social and economic processes and the contingencies of everyday life. Further, certain literary forms, most obviously the novel, have been themselves, in many writers' hands, quasi-"sociological," as the least attention to the work of George Eliot, or Elizabeth Gaskell, or Zola, or Chekhov, or O'Faolain, demonstrates. Even Joyce considered himself, in writing *Dubliners*, to be contributing to the "moral history" of his country.

In my view, criticism is what Michel Foucault would have called a "discourse": a body of statements and practices governed by rules, some explicit and some implicit. Critics are empowered to regulate this discourse. This involves marking the *boundaries* of the field—the "literary"—and also of *what* can be said about the "literary," and *how* it can be said. Further, policing the discourse involves those who define and preserve it controlling *who* is selectively permitted to make statements that qualify as "criticism"—who, as it were, is to be admitted to the "republic of letters." Finally, the regulation of the discourse entails relationships between the literary-critical academy and the economic and political interests that rule the wider society beyond the university campus, whose ideological needs are served, and whose members are reproduced, by the elaboration and growth of the discourse.

Clearly, as far as Bruce Stewart is concerned, my book violates these boundaries or codes in a number of ways—in terms of the writers covered, in terms of the ideas used in discussing them, in terms of "straying" into the fiefdoms of other academic disciplinary discourses (such as sociology), in terms of ideology (a declared sympathy with the Left), and in terms of tone. Stewart tries to police my book, but only with the unintended irony of providing further evidence for my arguments about the politics of culture and intellectual debate in Ireland.

Stewart is irritated at the polemical and "political" character of *Modernisation, Crisis and Culture*, and thinks to counter those features of it. The problem with this attempt is that in so doing he has already conceded the field: at the most basic level, it is more than a little rich to accuse an author of *ad hominem* criticism, and then make political play on his name. For Stewart to criticize my work for its use of "theory" is already to advance some distance onto the terrain of "theory." So Stewart's "analysis" of this work is weak precisely because of its self-hobbling ordinance on theory. Theory, after all, is the self-consciousness of criticism—it is the metadiscourse that comes most powerfully into play when criticism is in crisis. That there has been a relationship between Irish criticism and a wider politics or crisis is something that critics as various as Declan Kiberd, John Wilson Foster, Seamus Deane, Edna Longley and W. J. McCormack have argued. Most often, the suggestion is that the crisis has been the Northern crisis—hence Deane's formulation that the crisis is "linguistic"; Foster's, that the "failure of Irish society is the failure of criticism"; Longley's, that "poetry and politics, like church and state, should be separated"; and, most recently and most audaciously, Kiberd's suggestion that the Belfast Agreement is a text in a tradition inaugurated by Charlotte Brooke.

What all of these authors, with their various inflections and sometimes opposed positions, are assuming is a fundamental relationship between critical authority and the state. All criticism, one could say, is "political," to the extent that it is saturated with the authority of the critic, and behind him or her, the authority of the discourse, of the classroom, of the university or other cultural institution, and, underpinning them all, the authority of the state. In a real though heavily mediated manner, the juridical guarantee provided by the state is what permits a professor to stand up in a lecture hall, or a critic to publish a book of her essays. It has therefore been inevitable that a crisis in the inter-state system between the United Kingdom and Ireland should, at times directly, influence cultural criticism.

If this is *not* the case, and criticism is autonomous, then critics need to demonstrate how such autonomy has been won, not merely assume it or assert it by *fiat*. Accordingly, a major task for criticism is to acknowledge the fact of this relationship with authority. Criticism can then begin considering how its relationship with authority saturates critical theory and practice, pedagogical activity, curricular design, institutional structures, and, ultimately, the widest configurations of humanistic education. Such a criticism, though it may be subject to the strictures of Bruce Stewart, will win the recognition of the most progressive minds in Irish Studies, and will be worth reading. Such a criticism is what Irish literary and cultural studies need now.

– Dublin City University

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