

assertively addressing the social conditions of the majority of his congregants. In this respect, he came closer as his life went on to sharing a position with Sterling Berry, Bishop of Killaloe and Clonfert.

Fitzpatrick's study is exhaustive, sympathetic without ever losing objectivity, persuasive in its central thesis, and almost touching in the grace and honesty with which it addresses the illness of MacNeice's first wife, his arrangements for her care in Dublin and his consequent loneliness in Carrickfergus, and his relationship with his second wife.

'*Solitary and wild*' suffers a little from not offering a deeper understanding of MacNeice's theology, both because most of his private papers were lost and also because it falls outside the remit of the book. Fitzpatrick clearly demolishes the canard that MacNeice was a home ruler, even as he demonstrates that he was a relatively apolitical unionist, a man who worked with Orange lodges when that helped his Christian purpose, just as he once served as vice-president of the Carrickfergus Rugby Union club while apparently remaining blissfully ignorant of the rules of the game.

In the end, the most important concept as it applies to MacNeice is perhaps the one least addressed outside of the title, the problem that increasingly vexed that man born on Omev who ended his life as a committed advocate of what would become the World Council of Churches, the nature of the 'salvation' of Ireland. That is a study that, if ever written, will owe an enormous debt to this fine work.

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ALICE MILLIGAN AND THE IRISH CULTURAL REVIVAL. By Catherine Morris. Pp 342. Dublin: Four Courts Press. 2012. €49.50.

When noticed by historians, Alice Milligan (1866–1953) has generally been coupled with her close collaborator Anna Johnston and identified as the editor and leading contributor to the *Northern Patriot* (1895) and *Shan Van Vocht* (1896–8). Toting an affective mix of balladry, poetry, stories, history and political polemic, these boldly-set marginal Belfast monthlies helped articulate the republican dimension to the centenary celebrations of the 1798 United Irish rebellion. By situating her *fin de siècle* activism in the context of her long life, Catherine Morris highlights how Milligan's contribution to the history of Irish republicanism was considerably greater than this narrow window onto her activities suggests. Moreover, as an Irish Protestant Ulsterwoman, her pathway from the Belfast Naturalist Field Club in the 1880s, through the Gaelic League and Irish Woman's Association at the turn of the century, and then into work for, first, the Irish National Aid and Volunteer Dependants' Fund, and then the Ulster Anti-Partition Council in the 1930s certainly marks an interesting biographical trajectory.

Still, Morris's thematic treatment of Milligan's activities upholds the assumption that the decade or so around 1900 constituted the most significant period of her life. If Milligan's conversion to nationalism remains elusive – Morris suggests that her 'self-becoming' was evident in early prose showing 'her own political unconscious ... already in rebellion' (p. 106) – it is clear that the Parnell split affected her deeply; it is also made clear through her public and private writings from the late 1880s through to the mid-1890s that she had developed an acute sense that Ireland 'was a place in which nobody is quite at home' (p. 138). Flowing from her distinctly Ulster perspective on this problem was Milligan's belief that if the heroic history of the United Irishmen and the early ecumenism of the Gaelic League were made to cohere into a single ideological form, Ireland's fractured society would have the necessary foundations on which to build a new unity. Many revivalists shared this hope, but Morris leaves the reader in little doubt that few sustained so energetic or creative a response.

With the passing of the journalistic initiative to Arthur Griffith and his wider-ranging and – crucially – Dublin-based *United Irishman*, Milligan kept busy as a playwright and organiser, travelling the rural north delivering Gaelic League lectures and helping amateur theatre groups stage plays. Later recollections by her contemporaries attest to her flair for set and costume design and the influence of her published advice on how theatre companies with limited means could achieve a dramatic and authentic Gaelic atmosphere. Amateur theatre, this analysis suggests, formed part of an emergent democratic, non-elitist politics – with feminist undertones – that valorised local agency and made manifest the self-help ethos of early twentieth-century radical nationalism.

Morris argues that Milligan's most significant contribution was her development of republican *tableaux vivant*, 'a hybrid theatre and pictorial art' which helped redefine and reclaim Irish public space (p. 252). *Tableaux* allowed Milligan to circumvent the difficulty she and many advanced nationalists faced when trying to learn the Irish language: her play scripts were often headed with the generally unfulfilled instruction 'to be translated into Irish', a nice counterpoint to newspaper reports of the period that ended coverage of advanced nationalist meetings with the phrase 'and William Rooney spoke in Irish'. If, as Morris argues, *tableaux vivant* were 'a symbol of the national body awaiting speech', she equally suggests this speechlessness allowed people – often women – of different cultural and political backgrounds to work together on their production (p. 265). 'Silence', Morris argues, 'represented a halfway house, a space, a means of crossing borders and transgressing barriers erected by years of colonial occupation' (p. 265).

Morris's writing is filled with formulations like this, sometimes illuminating, sometimes a little obscure, and sometimes extended at the expense of more systematic readings of Milligan's published writings or the gathering of more detailed evidence for the scope of her activism. Milligan's 'Notes from the north' (published in the *Irish Weekly Independent*), for instance, are little cited despite being described as the 'only information' we have of the activities of the Irish Women's Association and the McCracken Literary Society. In a similar way, the treatment of the politics of the 1890s could have been surer-footed had Morris engaged with the recent historical literature: references made to the 'Irish National Federal League' surely conflate the names of distinct anti-Parnellite and Parnellite organisations. Milligan's significance is sometimes over-stated too. Can she have been 'at the forefront of [the centenary] movement years before it even began to take shape' (p. 185)?

Categorical claims made without reference to any primary or secondary text can be troubling: the idea that gender was the 'most revolutionary site of commemoration in 1898' is compelling (p. 208) and perhaps women 'were the most dispossessed in colonial history' but on what basis can it be claimed 'they were therefore most receptive to hearing and remembering and relating the voices of those similarly dispossessed' (p. 214)? Rarely is an opportunity missed to describe some aspect of Ireland's circumstances as 'colonial' – or, indeed, Britain's Irish opponents as democratic or feminist. This repetitive adjectival gesturing patronises the reader, flattens explanation and runs the danger of diminishing Milligan's specificity, rendering her less immediate to her time. It also fails to recognise the subtlety of some of the evidence. For example, the *Northern Patriot*'s claim, quoted by Morris, that the north was treated by the south as though it was an 'alien-colonised district of Ireland' reflected the distinction nineteenth-century nationalists drew between colonisation and the imperial despotism they suffered (p. 162).

Nonetheless, the pencilled queries that come to crowd its margins indicate that this book is an important and stimulating exercise in historical recovery. Milligan's miserable old age, during which her activism competed for her energy with her duties as a carer, threw into sharp relief the especial challenges she faced throughout her life as an activist woman. These later years could not provide the moments of elation she often felt as a youth and an illuminating passage tells of her first visit to nationalist Dublin. There she found, not Joycean stasis but liberty, freedom and speech. She found more of the same in the home rule press, her entrée into an exciting and unfamiliar world. Mid-twentieth-

century Ireland was not short of disappointed middle-aged and elderly republicans but, as a Protestant republican Ulsterwoman determined to continue the struggle in her home province, Milligan's status as one worsted in the game was all the more poignant.

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RUGBY IN MUNSTER. A SOCIAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY. By Liam O'Callaghan. Pp viii, 300. Cork: Cork University Press. 2011. €39.

Myths are a prominent feature in the self-image of modern sporting organisations. The creation myth of rugby football imagines that the sport was invented by a schoolboy, William Webb Ellis, during a football match played in Rugby School in the English midlands, one afternoon in 1823. As legend has it, Ellis caught the ball and ran through a crowd of players dodging their tackles. This was the first time the ball had been carried during football at Rugby School and, though against the rules, the players were so taken with the move that they immediately accepted it into their game. Carrying the ball radically altered the nature of the game to the point where, in effect, a new game was invented. Belief in this myth is the sporting equivalent of considering the earth to be flat, yet Rugby World Cup competitors still play for the William Webb Ellis Cup.

Determined not to be outflanked on the invention stakes, the Irish, too, have laid claim to a hand in the birth of rugby. Edmund Van Esbeck's official history of rugby in Ireland recorded the belief that Webb Ellis was a son of Tipperary, born in the county when his father, a British army officer, was stationed there in the year of William's birth. In a sense, the idea that rugby was invented by a Munster-man would have fitted rather snugly into the modern mythologising of Munster rugby. In its masterful marketing strategy of the professional era, Munster rugby has used history and heritage to position itself as a unique phenomenon, where people and province are bound together with passion and purpose, all the while emphasising 'community solidarity and humble social roots'. Liam O'Callaghan's excellent book – the first book to be written on rugby by an Irish historian – lays waste to much of this mythology. It is a deconstruction which is accomplished without fuss. O'Callaghan calmly asserts: 'The widely held twenty-first century view of the Munster rugby "tradition" is at odds with the findings of this book.' He concludes that the 'mythical components' of the modern tradition have produced a simplistic narrative designed to suit the needs of the present rather than any plausible historical truth.

The history of Munster rugby produced by O'Callaghan is much more complex – a 'richly multi-coloured tapestry' – and much more interesting. It documents a province where the suburban nature of rugby in Cork was markedly different in style and substance to that of inner-city Limerick. And both were different again from the rugby experience of provincial towns. It is this idea of what it was like to be involved in rugby in Munster since the game was established in the province in the 1870s which sits at the heart of this book. The diversity of experience which emerges is convincing in its range and detail. For some, rugby was a game to be played at school or college, for others it was for identifying with those of a similar profession and background, and for still more it was an expression of community pride. Vital to the history of rugby in Munster was its relationship with the Gaelic Athletic Association (G.A.A.). The image painted of rugby by its G.A.A. opponents as a 'foreign game' played by men of doubtful national character was a crude slur. While it is true that the alumni of certain British public schools and of Trinity College were instrumental in the initial spread of rugby across Munster, this was no imperial game, even if some did seek to wrap it in the ideology of muscular Christianity. By the end of the nineteenth century many of those who filled the expanding clubs of the province were nationalists and the idea that they were identifying with the British Empire by dint of the