

Catholicism, while in the references to the payments for altar breads we can trace a movement from individual enterprise ('Woman who makes altar bread', 1821) to a business centred on religious orders (in this case the Poor Clares) a century later.

Though overt references to broad political developments are infrequent, it is possible through the account book entries to see how closely the Cork friars interacted with the secular world. The friars were supplied with (or at least periodically purchased) the main newspapers of the day (*Freeman's Journal*, *Cork Examiner* and *Cork Daily Herald*) and while (unsurprisingly) they do not appear to have subscribed to the Protestant *Cork Constitution*, they had no problem in inserting advertisements therein. The friary, like other property holders, paid poor rates, water rates and city rates into the twentieth century, and in the early nineteenth century were also liable for minister's money (the urban equivalent of tithe) – a matter of some obvious resentment on the part of the account keeper who in 1779 recorded – 'I paid 5 shillings to a Devil of a Minister.'

This twin project of print book and database is, as we have come to expect from the Irish Manuscripts Commission, a major contribution to historical research. It is a truly exciting work – and I use that term advisedly – since it opens up windows into areas that call for further exploration: the relations between religious orders and local populations in Ireland since the late eighteenth century; the importance of devotional Catholicism as a spur to economic enterprise; and the changing material conditions within male religious communities over a 150-year period. Hopefully, this is just the first of a series of such projects.

MAURA CRONIN

*History Department, Mary Immaculate College Limerick*

ORDINARY IRISH LIFE: MUSIC, SPORT AND CULTURE. Edited by Méabh Ní Fhuartháin and David M. Doyle. Pp x, 222. Dublin: Irish Academic Press. 2013. €58.50 hardback; €22.45 paperback.

This collection of nine essays, edited under the auspices of the Centre for Irish Studies at N.U.I. Galway, seeks to broaden further the remit of Irish Studies by arguing for the place of sport, music and culture as central planks in that arena. Chapters 2, 3, 6 and 8 deal with music, chapters 4 and 7 with sport, while chapters 5, 9 and 10 range from explorations of 'corner boys', to radio talk shows, to Irish migrant workers in Cuba respectively. While the majority of the essays are concerned with twentieth-century Ireland, the volume as a whole ranges from the late eighteenth century up to the present time. Some essays deal with specific centres (Belfast, Dublin, Lahinch, Miltown Malbay, Cuba, Massachusetts) while others are not geographically specific (corner boys were found in most Irish towns, radio talk shows tend to transcend the regional, while the peripatetic showbands were a national phenomenon). A casual glance at the chapter headings suggests that a broad purview and a broad definition of culture are at hand. But what about the 'ordinary'? What does that mean for Irish Studies in general and for this volume in particular?

One could argue that a book that goes by the title *Ordinary Irish life* might not need a definition of something so seemingly obvious as the 'ordinary'. The Preface (curiously placed as Chapter 1) states that 'This collection offers new insights into the process of being Irish and its quotidian manifestations' (p. 2). If all the chapters were rooted in everyday ordinary life, then that casual statement of intent might give the reader no reason to pause, but many of the chapters deal with the 'ordinary' in an indirect way only. When the editors directed the reader to recent relevant literature (p. 2), I regretted not having their own understanding laid bare in the Preface. While this does not take from the contribution of the individual chapters to the field of Irish Studies, it does cast a shadow over the book itself.

It is clear, from a sociological point of view at least, that scholars have to be careful about what they might regard as ordinary. The words of two sociologists should set the compass reading for any exploration of this topic: 'in order to describe just what constitutes the ordinary, the ordinary itself is theorized. In this respect, the ordinary is as much a philosophical invention as is the extraordinary' (J. F. Gubrium & J.A. Holstein, 'Individual agency, the ordinary and postmodern life', in *Sociological Quarterly*, xxxvi, no. 3 (Summer 1995), pp 555–70 at p. 556.) Only two of the chapters in this volume make explicit the power of the ordinary as an interpretative category, namely Leo Keohane's and Finola Doyle O'Neill's. It is with Keohane's excellent chapter, 'Corner boys in small town Ireland, 1922–1970', that 'ordinary Irish life' comes into focus most clearly. It is perhaps not surprising that the wonderful image on the book's cover relates to this chapter. (Sadly, it is the only image in the entire book.) Keohane's statement that his chapter 'is a discourse on the manifestation of corner boys in Ireland and as such is concerned with what the corner boys represented rather than any indisputable analysis of what they were composed' (p. 69) makes it clear that the 'ordinary' should be carefully constructed so as to liberate its hermeneutic power. Similarly, Doyle O'Neill's 'Life on air: talk radio and popular culture in Ireland' demonstrates that the 'ordinary' can sometimes act as a radical agent and not just an inanity: 'The Gay Byrne Show aired at a time in Ireland's cultural history when simply airing social and personal relationship problems was in itself a socially revolutionary activity' (pp 143–4).

The title of Guy Beiner's chapter, 'Recycling Irish popular culture', gives no clue as to its main concern, which is an encyclopaedic chronicle of the sources of the enduring ballad 'The night before Larry was stretched'. As Beiner states, the ballad itself is a literary artefact that exists at some remove from the 'ordinary' life which it represents. Rebecca S. Miller's chapter gives a fascinating and chilling insight into the showband era from the perspective of its female performers, and in so doing it discloses something extraordinary in Irish life: the title of the chapter says as much 'We were so different!'. Moreover, Miller illustrates the almost feudal attitude to women that was once a normal part of the music business in Ireland, and the reader will be alarmed at her (casual) reference to the sexual assaults that many of the female performers endured in the dance halls and backstage (p. 34).

Margaret Brehony's detailed chapter on the dismal fate of the migrant railroad workers in 1830s Cuba supplies much archival context for an understanding of the day-to-day experience of the Irish workers/para-slaves who toiled alongside those from Africa and the Canary Islands. Lauren Weintraub Stoebel's chapter on Irish traditional music in Dublin, has, like Keohane's, strong theoretical underpinnings that move the discussion of the ordinary beyond the merely descriptive. Verena Commins's essay on the Willie Clancy Summer School provides another strong contribution, and is an interesting counterpart to Stoebel's. However, I wonder how we can reconcile Commins's statement that 'Privileging "the local" is a constitutive feature of the Willie Clancy Week and an alternative to the nationalising narratives attributed to Comhaltas' (p. 126) with Stoebel's more nuanced finding that 'many, if not most [Comhaltas] members think of themselves first and foremost as members of their local branch' (p. 92).

Both of the chapters dealing with sport, while rich in detail and narrative flow, seem at the furthest remove from the touchstone of the 'ordinary'. Jim Shanahan's fascinating chapter, 'Séan Burke, Lion of Lahinch: an I.R.A. man at the Walker Cup', is essentially about Burke's extraordinary presence at the 1932 Walker Cup, and, indeed in Ireland's golfing community at the time. Vic Rigby and Liam O'Callaghan show how music, sport and politics can coincide/collide at particular defining moments, in this case at the 1954 Irish rugby international in Belfast.

It is clear from this volume alone, that the lens of the 'ordinary' is a useful one for Irish Studies in its scrutiny of what it means to be Irish in Ireland and abroad. While Irish Studies seeks new objects of study and new methodologies, and while the prospect of mining 'ordinary Irish life' for new insights is exciting indeed, it needs to be done with

careful attention to the various terms and conditions that must be applied. Finally, I must mention that the Index falls short of normal formatting conventions.

MICHAEL MURPHY

*Department of Music, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick*

WELLINGTON: THE PATH TO VICTORY, 1769–1814. By Rory Muir. Pp xvi, 728. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 2013. £30.

This study, the first volume of a planned two-volume biography of the duke of Wellington, attempts to rescue its subject from being perceived as both ‘a cold haughty aristocrat’ and a semi-comic figure of fun, famous for a few pithy quotations, more than his achievements on the battlefield. In a little over 700 pages Muir charts the story of his subject through the first forty-five years of his life, and although some time is spent on his career as an M.P. in the Irish parliament, and later as chief secretary for Ireland, it is clear that Muir, like Wellington himself, is happiest when dealing with matters military. The rise of Arthur Wellesley [formerly Wesley: his elder brother changed the family name to the more archaic form in 1789], from his birth in Ireland in 1769, through to his creation as the duke of Wellington in 1814, was not an easy one. He spent eight years in India, seven while his elder brother was governor-general there, and returned home with a mixed reputation despite having won numerous victories. Many felt, as the king observed, that ‘military reputation was easily acquired in India’. Briefly chief secretary for Ireland (1807–9), he was a distracted figure, and took leave so that he could fight abroad. In 1808 he went from hero to villain, and was booed and hissed upon his return to Britain from Portugal, following the disastrous Convention of Cintra which allowed the French to evacuate despite a defeat, and this threatened to destroy his growing reputation. He survived, partly because of his political connections, partly because the blame lay elsewhere, but for a time he was viewed as a coward and a disgrace.

Muir delights in discrediting the most famous lines attributed to Wellington. Perhaps the most famous is the comment about being born in a stable (not attributed here to Daniel O’Connell, who popularised it as a joke in 1843), as well as the famous ‘publish and be damned’ retort when approached by a blackmailer about some exposures in his private life. The private life of Wellington is explored here, from the son he fathered in Dublin as a young man and on whose behalf he later applied for official patronage, to the memoirs of Harriette Wilson, published in 1824 but referencing an earlier affair, which was the source of the blackmail attempt. Wilson’s account, wildly inaccurate as it was, did much to contribute to the public image of Wellington the politician in the 1820s, with the descriptions of him as a ‘modern Bluebeard’, who looked ‘like a rat-catcher’.

Muir is at his best in the military chapters, charting the meticulous planning that went into making the Peninsular Campaign a success. There Wellington fought more than a dozen battles, without a single defeat, establishing his reputation as a self-confident, aggressive fighter who was capable of taking the war to the French. Despite his later reputation for coldness, Wellington could be emotional on the battlefield, especially when counting the cost afterwards. At the siege of Badajoz he ordered a successful assault knowing that the ‘butcher’s bill’, slang for the list of casualties, would be high, and would include the most gallant and daring officers. When an officer reported news of the victory he found Wellington in tears, and Wellington later confirmed that he ‘could not help crying. I bit my lips, did everything I could to stop myself for I was ashamed’. As the officer recorded, ‘military reputation is not to be purchased without blood, and ambition has nothing to do with humanity’.

That said, Muir does not shy away from Wellington’s failings as a leader. He could be a bully, frequently lashing out at his officers, and often showed ingratitude to those who