Robert Tracy *The Unappeasable Host.* Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 1998. 280 pp.

Robert Tracy's new collection of essays consists mainly of conference papers from the 1980s and early 1990s. Tracy generously acknowledges work by other scholars in the field, including those from non-English speaking countries. He sets out to discuss a largely neglected aspect of Irish literature, namely the identity of Anglo-Irish, "hyphenated," writers as part of a minority under threat, unacceptable as a ruling class both by the English and by the Irish Catholic "unhyphenated" majority. The essays in this volume cover a long period in history - from the end of the eighteenth century to the twentieth century - and deal with writers from Maria Edgeworth to Elizabeth Bowen. The contributions vary in length between eight and nineteen pages; Edgeworth is prominently featured in two articles, while Bowen and Joyce are discussed in three essays; Yeats is the centre of attention in four contributions; the Banim brothers, Roger O´Connor, Sheridan Le Fanu and Synge each mainly feature in one essay.

A critical problem with this book is that the articles were written during an extensive timespan; the earliest piece is from 1962, the most recent contribution dates from 1995. The articles have not been updated and do not include comments on more recent critical work. Insufficient editing of the material for this volume is particularly evident in the essays on Yeats. There is, for example, unnecessary repetition of factual detail. A small, yet irritating, error is that Yeats´s Nobel Prize for literature is dated to 1924, when in fact he was awarded the prize in 1923 (117). But these essays also present more fundamental problems.

The inclusion of a diverse collection of essays, dealing with various aspects of individual writers makes the volume lose sight of the pronounced theme of the book, which Tracy states is to explore the search by Anglo-Irish writers, during the last two centuries, "to discover what role their class was to play" (introd. 8). He also proclaims that the "unappeasable host" in the title refers to the Catholic Irish, by which Tracy confirms his basic assumption that they had no sense of reverence towards their "Anglo-Irish masters," who, in turn, are said to have had an elitist attitude towards the Catholic Irish (introd. 2). This conclusion is a simplification, as there are writers on both sides of the Irish religious/cultural divide who demonstrate diverging attitudes from this generalisation. For example, Louis MacNeice in his poem "Carrickfergus" expresses a deeply felt alienation from the Catholic poor as the isolated son of the local Rector. Sean O'Faolain writes, in his autobiography *Vive Moi!*, about his parents´ allegiance to the British Empire and his own indignation against his fellow-Irish disgracing themselves before the English. Furthermore, if *Waiting for Godot* is yet another example of "literature of interrogation" (introd. 8) it is not, as Tracy suggests in the introduction, only a work which scrutinises the role of Anglo-Irish rule in Ireland, but a play which explores hegemonic power in general, consequently the play alludes not only to Protestant power over the Irish Catholics, but also points to oppression of the whole Irish population by the hegemonic Catholic church in Ireland. So, the relationship between the Anglo-Irish and the Catholic Irish is not as clear-cut as Tracy´s introduction suggests.

The essays, however, no doubt draw on an impressive range of primary sources. Tracy often conveys a picture of Anglo-Irish authors writing out their personal strain, sometimes directly linked to their position as landowners. For example, he succinctly discusses Maria Edgeworth as a rare female Anglo-Irish voice, who, through the narrative of Thady Quirk in *Castle Rackrent*, predicts the fall of the Anglo-Irish through their own neglect. The ambivalence of Yeats as Anglo-Irish and/or Irish is impressively balanced in the article "Long Division in the Long Schoolroom" as a synthesis of poetics and politics in Yeats´s agenda, to bridge the division between the two groups and his own relationship to them.

But Tracy´s analysis of Yeats also presents problems. The poem by Yeats from which Tracy´s book takes its title, is included in the collection *The Wind Among the Reeds*(1899), a collection steeped in archaic romanticism, in the mood of the Gaelic Revival; no poem is strongly political with reference to the Anglo-Irish as Tracy claims. Instead, the poems emphasise the glorification and romanticisation of Gaelic mythology as pure romanticism. Tracy´s view that Yeats considered the Anglo-Irish as nationalist "other" is not convincing. Yeats´s reproach of the "the Irish upper classes" in *Explorations* does not target the Anglo-Irish; Yeats himself remains an Anglo-Irish "other." His scorn against Constance Markievicz practical nationalism, demonstrated in "Easter 1916," is a case in point. The young Constance Yeats had known in Sligo had fallen off the pedestal, where Yeats gladly put women as romantic icons, not least signified by Maude Gonne´s appearance as the Irish nationalist female emblem in Yeats´s play *Cathleen Ni Houlihan*, in 1902.

The essay "Merging into Art: *The Death of Cuchulain* and the death of Yeats" presents the weakest argument in the book. Tracy argues that Yeats had an "eagerness to be a man of [political] action" (120), and in death turn into a "hero" of the same stature as Cuchulain, by merging heroism with poetry in death (135). His argument is loaded with nationalistic emotion and suggests that Yeats wanted to be up on the barricades, when instead his aspiration was for a mythological and idealised heroism. His nationalism was, as Roy Foster repeatedly emphasises based on intellectual and cultural considerations (R. F. Foster *Yeats: A Life*, 1997).

Tracy´s articles on Yeats leave a large potential for elaboration of the aspect of elitist nationalism and his aversion to

the restrictive non-intellectual forces he saw developing in post-independence Ireland. Only marginally does Tracy recognise that Yeats´s aspiration in general and for the Irish Literary Movement in particular, "was not political" but a "poet´s task" to enhance the "glorious past" of a free Ireland in the making (138). This is a very important part of the argument, which unfortunately is lost in Tracy´s discourse. At least two of the essays on Yeats in the present volume could have been merged into one, in order to bring out this tension in Yeats´s writing, instead, we are deprived of a discussion about his trauma between two, if not three, cultures, Anglo-Irish, Irish and English.

Tracy also discusses Joyce as primarily a political animal. Despite detailed references to language in Joyce´s fiction in the article called "Mr Joker and Dr. Hyde," where, of course, Joyce is Mr Joker, Tracy does not bring out the universal Joker in Joyce, instead he becomes a useful tool in Tracy´s own submerged nationalist agenda. For example, Tracy points out, that for Joyce "world revolution was word revolution" (183), but without recognising that these remarks actually confirm Joyce´s prime concern with intellectual and aesthetic values. Joyce mainly cared for his own intellectual freedom, any nationalist pretext was secondary. However, Tracy's essay on *Finnegans Wake* shows that Joyce intellectualises Irish history, connecting it to ancient history, in order to underline the universality of the Irish, as part of that intellectual heritage.

The last three essays in the book deal with Elizabeth Bowen and the Anglo-Irish Big House in her fiction. In the essay "The Burning Roof and Tower" Tracy quotes Sean O´Faolain, feeling like an intruder at Bowen´s big house, Bowen´s Court, to show the alienation of, what Tracy in his introduction calls the "unhyphenated," Irish towards their previous rulers (206). O´Faolain is an unfortunate example for Tracy´s argument as he was an ambiguous person politically: he favoured English and Anglo-Irish cultural sophistication while rejecting the English political colonisation of Ireland. Several stories in his first collection of short stories, *Midsummer Night Madness* (1932), conveys support for Anglo-Irish and English individuals rather than the unsophisticated IRA fighters. There are also examples of Protestant writers who falsify Tracy´s picture of the rulers of the Big House. Hubert Butler has in numerous articles highlighted important Protestant contributions to the general development of Irish society. O´Faolain and Butler exemplify that division between the affluent Irish Protestants and the Catholic Irish is not as clear-cut as Tracy´s essays about Bowen suggest.

There is no concluding discussion in the volume to tie up loose ends presented in the introduction; so, the reader is left asking who exactly is the "unappeasable host" that Tracy set out in the introduction to portray. As the book stands, Tracy is himself the "unappeasable host" of this academic buffet, requiring several sittings in order to be easily digestible.

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