Society (2025) 62:750–755
https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-025-01137-1

COMMENTARY

A Look Back at *Modern Ireland 1600–1972* (1988)

Roy Foster[1]

Accepted: 15 August 2025 / Published online: 11 September 2025
© The Author(s) 2025

Keywords Irish history · Revisionism · British-Irish relations · Historiography

Welcome to a new series of commentaries in which leading scholars are invited to consider one of their seminal works. Our first instalment in the series features the reflections of the historian Roy Foster on his *Modern Ireland 1600–1972*, which was published in 1988 and became widely recognised as the best single-volume history of modern Ireland. Other major thinkers who will be contributing to the series in the near future include Quentin Skinner on his *Liberty before Liberalism* (1998) and Ruth Harris on her *The Man on Devil's Island: Alfred Dreyfus and the Affair that Divided France* (2010).

In 1982, I was a junior lecturer at Birkbeck College, University of London, in my early thirties, with a one-year-old child, a large mortgage on a house in Kentish Town, and two books to my name. The first, *Charles Stewart Parnell: the man and his family* (1976) was a slightly eccentric reconstruction of the personal and social milieu of Irish nationalism's most enigmatic leader. The second, *Lord Randolph Churchill: a political life* (1981) was a study of the meteoric crash-and-burn career of Winston's father. Lord Randolph had initially interested me as one of the few Victorian politicians to take a real and informed interest in Ireland; but the book ranged more widely, turning into a study of political opportunism, influenced by the current vogue for high-political history, and a deep immersion in the novels of Anthony Trollope.

Both projects, in their different ways, made me think hard about the relations between England and Ireland, and the way that the two countries provided a kind of foil for each other: a strange mixture of resentment and dependence. Some years later, I would choose as the subject for an inaugural lecture 'Marginal Men and Micks on the Make: the uses of Irish exile' looking at the way that some displaced English people 'found themselves' by adopting Ireland (Maud Gonne, Randolph Churchill, Trollope); while some equally opportunist Irish people used their nationality as a way of getting on in England (Shaw, Yeats). Back in the early 1980s, these preoccupations with malleable Irish identities and the complex history of British-Irish interactions prompted a feeling that I might try to fill the need for a comprehensive history of modern Ireland from a new angle.

F. S. L. Lyons[1] and Joseph Lee[2] had written striking treatments that covered the later nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, but general studies incorporating the earlier period were limited. Though T. W. Moody and R. D. Edwards had recently produced an up-to-date and quizzical textbook survey called *The Course of Irish History* (1967), the standard offerings were exercises in antique nationalism by J. K. Carty[3] and P. S. O'Hegarty[4]—the schoolbook story of a people coming out of bondage; or a more sceptical and elegant but highly compressed short survey by J. C. Beckett.[5] In both cases, there was little allowance (or room) to incorporate the new voices of my own generation which had begun to interrogate received versions of the history of Irish politics (Vincent Comerford, David Fitzpatrick, Tom Garvin, Theo Hoppen), economics (William Vaughan, Paul Bew, Samuel Clark, James Donnelly), society (Louis Cullen, Margaret Ward, Margaret MacCurtain), and armed struggle (Marianne Elliott, Charles Townshend). The early-modern period was similarly being reinterpreted by scholars like Toby Barnard, Nicholas Canny, Sean Connolly, and David Dickson. But such findings were as yet largely disseminated

✉ Roy Foster
roy.foster@hertford.ox.ac.uk

1 University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

[1] F. S. L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (1971).

[2] J. J. Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848–1918* (1973).

[3] J. K. Carty, *Ireland from Grattan's parliament to the great famine 1783–1850: a documentary record* (1949) and *Ireland from the great famine to the treaty 1851–1921: a documentary record* (1951).

[4] P. S. O'Hegarty, *A History of Ireland Under the Union 1801–1922* (1952).

[5] J. C Beckett, *A Short History of Ireland* (1966).

in monographs and academic articles; the appearance of the multi-volume *New History of Ireland* from Oxford University Press was proceeding at a pace so stately as to verge on the glacial. There seemed to be a strong case for spreading the word in an accessible single-volume history.

But there was a further dimension too. Birkbeck, where to my great good fortune I had landed in 1974, was a uniquely stimulating intellectual environment. My history colleagues included the pioneering economic historian Roderick Floud, the brilliant analyst of German politics and culture David Blackbourn, the pioneering seventeenth-century intellectual historian Michael Hunter, and above all the polymathic Eric Hobsbawm, then embarking on his great tetralogy of narrative histories, starting with *The Age of Revolution* (1962) and culminating in *The Age of Extremes* (1994). Hobsbawm had been one of the founders of the journal *Past and Present*, another eye-opening inspiration, whose editorial board I would join in 1989. Friends in Birkbeck's English Department, such as the Victorianists Andrew Sanders, Michael Slater, and Barbara Hardy, encouraged the forging of links between literary and historical analysis (together we initiated a pioneering interdisciplinary MA on Victorian Studies). Up to this, my intellectual formation had been dominated by Irish preoccupations, and the admirably demanding but rather Actonian atmosphere of the Trinity College history school under my mentor, the formidable T. W. Moody. At Birkbeck, where my principal duty was to teach 'British History since 1750', I was exposed to new kinds of national narrative that stretched far beyond Britain, in books such as E. P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), Eugene Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll: the world the slaves made* (1974), Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976), Barbara Taylor's *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (1983), and above all Theodore Zeldin's history of modern France between 1848 and 1945.[6]

Zeldin's two volumes brought me up short. How could a national history conceivably be organised under sub-titles such as 'Ambition, Love and Politics' and 'Intellect, Taste and Anxiety'? But it seemed to be possible. French history, schooled by the *Annalistes*, was able to conjure up the little lives and small events of a uniquely rich provincial culture, pattern them against the larger picture, and weave an intricate tapestry of a nation's self-realisation and beliefs. Could the same be done for Ireland?

As it would turn out, it couldn't. But the project of a one-volume history of Ireland since 1600, which my irrepressible agent Giles Gordon sold to Penguin in 1982, was heavily inflected by my ambition to re-cast the narrative of national history in a new way, building social, economic, and cultural history into the political fabric, and trying to query or reconsider the classic break-points of the accepted narrative, such as the Battle of the Boyne or the Act of Union. This meant foregrounding the continuities and compromises of everyday life as well as the dramatic set-pieces of invasions and rebellions. Some of these intentions survived; others had to be abandoned. I initially nurtured the idea of taking one family's history through the ages and periodically 'dropping in' on them, so to speak, at key points in the *longue durée* narrative to see how they were faring. It proved impossible to find enough detail for the kind of sample family I had in mind, but I still like the idea. I later discovered William Magan's *Ummamore: the story of an Irish family* (1984), tracing his clan's evolution from Gaelic lords to imperial servants and beyond, which might have made it possible.

At any rate, the inclusion of such structural flourishes had to be restricted, as the length of the book threatened to spin out of control; the contracted 100,000 word-length was clearly going to be doubled at the very least. The challenge was to maintain some kind of pace and readability. Short chapters with punchy titles were one strategy. Another was to keep personal and biographical details of the rich and multifarious cast of characters out of the main narrative, but to provide them in biographical footnotes on the page. A. J. P. Taylor had done something like this in his survey of English history, but the pen-portraits in *Modern Ireland* were far more detailed, suggestive, and entertaining. This was because I outsourced them to my top-flight doctoral student, Joseph Spence. Re-reading these capsule biographies today, I still find myself snorting with laughter or noting to my surprise that Joe had acutely anticipated much later interpretations of a romantic poet or a nationalist cleric. His lapidary summations amounted to genius, as in the last sentence of his entry on Oliver Cromwell: 'Trod on Irish soil for only nine months, but few men's footprints have been so deeply imprinted on Irish history and historiography.' At certain points, Joe's footnotes threatened to creep up the page and take over the text, rather in the manner of Flann O'Brien's *The Third Policeman*; here and elsewhere, I had to exercise a certain ruthlessness.

My original ambition to create an Irish version of Zeldin's *pointilliste* landscape was soon moderated; the sources for such an approach were simply not there. I did try to adhere to my original intention to convey the non-heroic, unspectacular dimensions of Irish life as well as the spectacular high points; as Lewis Namier put it, history envisioned as a ticking clock, rather than a seismograph. (Namier was indirectly invoked in a chapter on the eighteenth century, which was called 'The Structure of Politics'; less predictably, a chapter on independent Ireland after the revolution nodded to V. S. Naipaul and post-colonialism under the title 'In A Free State'.) Above all, it seemed of prime importance to combine a narrative of national history with periodic

[6] Theodor Zeldin, *France, 1848–1945: Vol. I—Ambition, Love and Politics* (1973) *Vol. II—Intellect, Taste and Anxiety* (1977).

reflections on recurrent themes. One particular instance was a digression on the mentality and culture often called 'Anglo-Irish', which was titled 'The Ascendancy Mind', and featured Swift, Yeats, neo-classical architecture and an attempt to diagnose multiple forms of ambivalence. It concluded: 'Yeats reinvented Georgian Ireland as "that one Irish century that escaped from darkness and confusion"; Elizabeth Bowen remarked, with equal inaccuracy, that, at the last resort the Ascendancy "lived at their own expense". In a very Anglo-Irish mode, this judgement reverses economic fact to express something not far from the psychological truth.'

The determination to allow space for reflections like these meant that the length of the manuscript expanded inexorably, and so did the time it took to finish the book. I had initially thought that I would complete it in three years, but the constant injections of new material, the wish to incorporate a good deal of quotations from original sources, the need for frequent trips to Ireland, the arrival of a second child, and the ramifications of my own developing career led to constant postponements in delivering the book. This was enabled by the fact that I was blessed in my commissioning editor, the legendary Peter Carson. Peter could be brusque, irascible even, and did not suffer fools gladly; a formidable intellectual, his own interests were principally Russian, and he produced important translations and editions of Tolstoy, Chekhov, and others. His mother was Russian (they spoke the language at home) but his father was Anglo-Irish, and from the outset, he grasped exactly what I wanted to do. Preternaturally quick on the uptake, you never had to tell Peter anything twice. Though a classicist by training, he had a true historian's instinct, and his support was unwavering. I remember him ringing me up, chortling inimitably, to express approval of my comparison of Daniel O'Connell's early nineteenth-century nationalist rhetoric to the florid excesses of the monumental silverware of the period. Peter and his colleague Georgina Morley gave me all the rope I needed and saw the point of the many structural quirks involved—Joe Spence's capsule biographies, two complex indexes, an opinionated biographical essay at the end, and a stunning dust-jacket illustration. This featured a little-known painting by Jack B. Yeats where two figures stride across a mythic Irish landscape, heads thrown back, beating a drum, and singing. It is called 'Left, Left…/We Left our Name/On the Road, on the Road/On the Famous Road, on the Famous Road,/On the Famous Road/Of Fame.'

I chose the picture, not only for its powerful visual impact, but also because the title said something (to me at least) about the illusions we sustain about what arbitrarily survives to make up the historical record. This was indicated in the one-page Preface, which I wrote when the text was completed, concluding:

> 'Much of Irish history as usually conceived concerns what did *not* happen: the theme of the missed chance, usually of reconciliation with, or complete separation from, England. Allied to this approach are the events that historians used to feel *ought* not to have happened and have therefore -in a sense- denied. "Placed between memory and hope, the race will never conquer what it desires, and will never discover what it regrets", wrote one of the romantic observers who have laid so many false trails for interpreters of Irish history. This book is an attempt to clarify some of the realities behind such supposed desires and regrets over the period since 1600.'

There was a certain amount of coat-trailing here, as also in the last paragraph of the last chapter, quizzically titled '"Modern" Ireland?'.

> 'The idea of a might-have-been secular nationalism is as much a red herring as the equally ahistorical concept of a platonic "unity" that Gaelic chiefs in the early modern period are sometimes traduced for never having attained. And this highlights a theme that is evident from the seventeenth century, and recurs in this book: the concept of being "more" or "less" Irish than one's neighbour; Irishness as a scale or spectrum rather than a simple national, or residential, qualification; at worst, Irishness as a matter of aggressively displayed credentials. Irishness in the long period since the completion of the Elizabethan conquest concerned a great deal more than the definition of Irishness against Britishness; this survey has attempted to indicate as much. But that sense of difference comes strongly through, though its expression was conditioned by altering circumstances, and adapted for different interest-groups, as the years passed. If the claims of cultural maturity and a new European identity advanced by the 1970s can be substantiated, it may be by the hope of a more relaxed and inclusive definition of Irishness, and a less constricted view of Irish history.'

I vividly remember writing that last sentence in my study in Kentish Town, re-reading it, and wondering whether it was wise to leave it as the closure of the book; but I am glad I did. The book's first chapter was a Macaulayan conspectus of Ireland in 1600, but this was preceded by a Prologue called 'Varieties of Irishness', exploring concepts and interpretations of identity; both texts were implicitly but decisively inflected by the long and violent inheritance of invasion and 'plantation' in Ireland, particularly in Ulster. While writing the book in the 1980s, I had become involved in organisations such as the British-Irish Association and the Ewart-Biggs Trust, which tried in their different ways to address the continuing nightmare in Northern Ireland,

through mediation, discussion, and reconciliation; the idea of a flexible definition of Irishness (and indeed Britishness) would eventually find expression in the nationality provisions of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. While aware of the dangers of 'present-minded' history-writing, I had also been much struck by F. S. L. Lyons's short but powerfully suggestive *Culture and Anarchy in Ireland 1890–1939* (1979), which projected the theme of adversarial cultures in Ireland from the revolutionary period forward to our own day. Past history seemed an essential route to understanding, if not resolving, our present discontents.

This was probably one reason why the book received the kind of attention it did when it appeared in the autumn of 1988, and aroused reactions far outside the groves of academe. Generous reviewers included not only colleagues in the historical profession but public figures such as Conor Cruise O'Brien, Antony Clare, and Robert Kee; it was shortlisted for literary prizes and featured in op-ed newspaper columns; sales over the next ten years rapidly went into six figures and continue to this day. It somehow struck the right moment—partly because the political compass was setting towards re-thinking attitudes in the Northern conflict and partly because the appetite in Ireland for querying the received versions of our history had finally reached a general public. Here as elsewhere, I was and remain acutely conscious of my debt to my fellow historians who had tilled the field before me.

The welcome extended to *Modern Ireland* was not universal. The book became identified with an approach to Irish history called in some quarters 'revisionism', which rapidly became shorthand for—so to speak—letting Britain 'off the hook' for its misgovernment of Ireland. In the last chapter of the book, I had written:

> 'Increasing cultural self-confidence did not mean the abandonment of nationalistic platitudes. In 1972 Conor Cruise O'Brien published *States of Ireland*, an account of his personal repudiation of nationalist myths; it did not enhance his political career. It is usual to emphasize the scholarly achievement of the *soi-disant* "revisionist" historians, who since the 1940s have been dispassionately re-evaluating the assumptions of the eight-hundred-years-of-struggle version of Irish history; certainly, by 1972 new textbooks were being used in schools and universities, and new questions being asked. But what might seem most striking is how little this affected the popular (and paradoxically Anglocentric) version of Irish history held by the public mind.'

Coat-trailing again, especially as nationalist circles tended to embrace this more unreconstructed view of things, notably in Irish America. Here, however, the response to *Modern Ireland* was helped by an unexpectedly laudatory lead review from Andrew Greeley in the *New York Times Book Review*, catching the US publishers, Viking Penguin, on the hop; believing the book too long and demanding for the general market, they had produced a miniscule print run, which sold out in a few days. I received some hostile audience reaction when I lectured in South Boston and Hartford, Connecticut, but the American response was generally good. Objections were raised in some quarters of the Irish diaspora in Britain, often from people who had not read the book, but had been told—for instance—that it 'never mentioned the Famine': referring to the horrific mass starvation and fever deaths when the potato crops failed from the mid-1840s. This could be easily disproved by the fact that an entire chapter was titled 'The Famine: Before and After'. Indeed, in the first printing I described the disaster as a 'holocaust', and was reproved by a fellow historian who pointed out that this could be taken to imply that I believed the Famine was—as claimed by some nationalist commentators—a deliberate act of genocide. The canard that the book ignored the Famine may have had something to do with the fact that I had pointed out that some long-term demographic and economic developments usually attributed to the Famine actually had their roots in the preceding period. This was one of the unintended consequences of my overall attempt to query some of the accepted 'turning-points' in Irish history.

Some reactions were peculiarly visceral. One morning I came into my college in Oxford (where I had moved to a new Chair of Irish History in 1991) to find the lodge roped off and the Thames Valley police waiting for me. The reason was a brown-paper parcel which had arrived addressed to me, helpfully labelled 'Anthrax'. The contents turned out to be talcum powder, and the sender had—even more helpfully—written a return address on the package, so all was well; but it gave pause for thought. Without always taking such dramatic form, hackles were raised at the barnstorming approach taken in *Modern Ireland* regarding some hallowed precincts of the traditional edifice of Irish history. Lawrence Stone, the great historian of early-modern Britain, wrote me an approving note: 'No heroes! Except possibly [Daniel] O'Connell?' This was characteristically perceptive, but not everyone welcomed this iconoclasm, modest as it was. Elsewhere, my remark that the revolutionary leader Patrick Pearse's sanctification of bloodshed in 1916 'might variously be interpreted as sinister gibberish, Swiftian irony, or rational reaction to the terms set by Ulster' did not go down well. And my desire to foreground the everyday life of the majority, as much as spectacular acts of resistance by a minority, led to the criticism that I had removed the 'trauma' from Irish history. One notable critic self-revealingly attacked my determination to refute the sacral view of Irish history, asserting that it should be preserved—'its wrongness notwithstanding'.

The reaction to *Modern Ireland* helped focus the controversies over the 'revisionist' direction of Irish

historiography, and the book was in some quarters identified as the *locus classicus* of this new approach. A few years later, a book of mine called *Paddy and Mr Punch: connections in English and Irish history* (1993) occasioned a long and brilliant essay on the revisionist impulse by the novelist Colm Tóibín, who had studied history at University College Dublin.[7] Called 'New Ways of Killing Your Father', Tóibín's analysis is characteristically subtle and probing, stressing the ambivalence and commitment felt by Irish people towards their history, the uneasy and dangerous sense of liberation that comes with repudiating ancestral pieties, and the dangers of over-simplification on both sides; it ends, soberly, with the sentence 'It will take time.'

This was no more than the truth. But by the time *Paddy and Mr Punch* was published, my attention had shifted from revisionist controversies to an absorbing new commitment which had emerged while I was still writing *Modern Ireland*. In 1983, my friend and mentor F. S. L. Lyons had died, prematurely and tragically, leaving his great project unwritten—the authorised biography of W. B. Yeats. In 1985, I agreed to take on the task, which would culminate in a two-volume biography, *The Apprentice Mage*, published in n1997, ad *The Arch-Poet* in 2003. Shortly before his death, Lyons had written to me: 'The literary-historical genre is infinitely beguiling and I can't ever imagine going back to straight political history again, especially Irish political history, which is (in fact) anything but straight.' The many years I would spend studying Yeats and his times led me to the same conclusion. But *Modern Ireland* still sustained a continued life. Penguin sometimes suggested that I produce an updated version, taking the story beyond 1972. But I had had very good reasons for choosing that date. In January 1972, Ireland signed the treaty of accession to the E.E.C. (later the E.U); in March, Edward Heath suspended the rule of the Stormont parliament and government in Northern Ireland; in December, the citizens of the Republic of Ireland voted by referendum to remove the 'special position' of the Roman Catholic church from the Constitution. These initiatives signalled the end of an era, in several ways, and lay behind the transformation of Ireland over the next decades.

In fact, that transformation was so dramatic that I felt it required not an addendum to *Modern Ireland*, but a book in itself. In 2007, I published (again with Penguin) a short book called *Luck and the Irish: a brief history of change 1970–2000*. It surveyed the years of secularisation, social change, immigration, political scandal, sexual liberation, and economic boom which altered Irish life almost beyond recognition in the closing years of the twentieth century. Though a very different kind of book, it might be seen as a coda to *Modern Ireland.* The tone is more frankly irreverent, as befits the material, but the governing impulse is not dissimilar.

This leaves unanswered the question of the aspects and interpretations of Ireland over the period since 1600 which I would change, or see differently, now. The chief lacuna in *Modern Ireland*, as I now see it, was the insufficient attention paid to women's history. In my bibliographical essay, I had pointed out that this vital subject was in its infancy; key works by historians such as Maria Luddy, Mary Daly, Senia Paseta, and Lindsey Earner-Byrne were yet to appear. But there were sources which could have been followed up, and I might have taken a wider conspectus altogether. This was one of the major impulses behind my subsequent book *Vivid Faces: the revolutionary generation in Ireland 1890–1923*, which appeared in 2014. It was based on a rich trawl of memoirs, letters, diaries, and journalism, much of it produced by women in the extraordinary period of radicalization from the early 1900s to the 1920s; the dust-jacket featured a striking photograph of women at a Republican funeral. The voices of people such as Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington, Rosamond Jacob, Muriel MacSwiney, and the formidable Ryan sisters of Tomcoole, County Wexford, came through loud and clear, all the more so because I felt they had been in accountably down-played in *Modern Ireland*. I had other self-criticisms too. I should have explored Irish-language sources more for the early-modern period, and given more space to Irish Jacobitism; here, again, a wave of subsequent scholarship revealed riches which I wish had been available to me in the 1980s.

There are also instances and issues where my interpretation and judgement would now differ from the way I thought in the 1980s. Back then, I thought that John Redmond's Home Rule party offered a viable way forward for an autonomous Ireland, at least until the outbreak of World War I. Home Rule was after all on the statute-book, though impeded by resistance in Ulster, and negotiations were under way to clear the impasse, postponed when the fatal shots rang out in Sarajevo. I now think that Irish opinion, especially among the young, was set hard in a more radical direction than a Home Rule future since the early 1900s; and it seems unconvincing to believe that Ulster Unionists would have compromised, supported as they were by so many reactionary elements in the British establishment (an unholy association originated by my old subject, Lord Randolph Churchill). Sad as it is, I now think the Redmondites were already headed for Trotsky's dust-heap of history before their leader split the nationalist Volunteer movement by his disastrous decision to offer unconditional support for the British war effort.

This change of mind here is reflected in the decision to write *Vivid Faces*, which is essentially a study on the growth of radicalism, psychological, as well as political. It is also a meditation on the ways in which a generation is 'made, not born'. When I tried to reconstruct the lives and thoughts of

[7] Colm Tóibín, 'New Ways of Killing Your Father', *London Revi*

the remarkable cohort of Irish people born around 1880, I kept thinking of my own generation, born in the late 1940s and reaching adulthood in the now-fabled radical 1960s. In a sense, I wrote *Modern Ireland* as a member of that particular cohort, heavily influenced by the currents of thought—and not just historiographical thought—which came to fruition in that era and afterwards. The way I constructed the book reflected this; it was very much of its time. Nearly forty years on, it is strange, though very gratifying, to find the book becoming itself a subject for historical research; earlier this year a brilliant student at Wesleyan University, James Fitzpatrick, won accolades for a thesis arguing that *Modern Ireland* re-shaped notions of identity by fundamentally altering the way Irish people thought about the past. I would hesitate to claim as much. But, coat-trailing notwithstanding, I still stand by the general thrust and emphasis of the narrative, and the expressed wish to project a more relaxed and inclusive approach to Irish identity. And in my more optimistic moments, I convince myself that this is coming to pass.

Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the article's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder. To view a copy of this licence, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Roy Foster is Emeritus Professor of Irish History at the University of Oxford. Among the most distinguished and prolific Irish historians of his generation, his major publications include *Modern Ireland: 1600–1972* (1988), the authorised two-volume biography of W. B. Yeats *The Apprentice Mage* (1997) and *The Arch-Poet* (2003), and *Vivid Faces: the revolutionary generation in Ireland 1890–1923* (2014). A Fellow of the British Academy, an Honorary Member of the Royal Irish Academy, and the holder of several honorary degrees, he received the Irish President's Distinguished Service Award in 2021 and a Lifetime Achievement Award from An Post Irish Book Awards in 2023.