

After Bloody Sunday: representation, ethics, justice, by Tom Herron and John Lynch, Cork, Cork University Press, 2007, 156 pp., €39.00 (hardback), ISBN 978 1 859184257

'In every sense, Bloody Sunday can be seen as a turning point', Tom Herron and John Lynch argue in the opening pages of this erudite study of works produced in the wake of the dramatic events of 30 January 1972. And with good reason: when British paratroopers killed thirteen unarmed civilians (and wounded a further fifteen, one of whom, John Johnston, was to die of his wounds the following June) in what is now generally agreed to be an unprovoked attack on the Rossville Street flats, they set the tone for some of the worst years of the Troubles and left a scar in the heart of Derry which has yet to heal fully. Published two years ago, evidently the authors expected the findings of the Saville Inquiry to be released by now, and their contribution to provide an alternative interpretation to the 'official narrative' of Bloody Sunday. Instead, the longest-running and costliest inquiry in British legal history goes on, with 2010 mooted as the latest (always) provisional date for its completion.

This book is not another rehashing of the events of the day or Lord Widgery's whitewashing report but instead is 'concerned primarily with the dissemination of Bloody Sunday as a particularly resonant and, indeed, iconic event'. To this end the authors concentrate on the diverse 'cultural negotiations' that have arisen as the events of that fateful day have demanded attention and remembrance over the last three and a half decades. The main chapters provide an engaging analysis of the various ways in which Bloody Sunday has been represented – in photography, film, theatre, poetry, television documentary, art installations, murals, commemorative events and legal discourse – each of which attempts, in different ways, to articulate the 'truth' of Bloody Sunday.

It is a theoretically robust work, with poststructuralist stalwarts Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari heavily drawn upon to develop a comprehensive analysis of everything from the circulation of images of those killed on Bloody Sunday to technologies used to elicit testimonies and reconstruct events during Mark Saville's Inquiry. The most successful of the book's six chapters are the four that combine representation and critique to draw out what the authors call 'the mechanisms of authenticity' utilised by different representations. The portrait photographs of the dead that have appeared in new media and commemorative efforts illustrate the continued resonance of Bloody Sunday as an 'iconic event'. Elsewhere, the section on Thomas Kinsella's ballad *Butcher's Dozen* – written only days after the publication of the Widgery report – shows how the poet's verse was both a plea for truth and justice and a critique of the British army as a colonial force.

Striking a balance between revealing how various claims to truth are made about such a momentous event and the reality (and brutality) of Bloody Sunday is a difficult trick to pull off – lean too heavy on French philosophy and you risk relegating the murder of innocents to just another competing 'discourse'; too light and the academic value of the work is fatally undermined. In the end Herron and Lynch succeed in maintaining the integrity of their project against either charge. The opening chapters provide important context: both in terms of historical background and an impassioned plea for an acceptance of the Saville Inquiry's report, 'the definitive version' of Bloody Sunday, so that this divided city can finally move on. While a concluding chapter tying the book together might have been helpful, perhaps in the circumstances the authors decided to leave the final word to Saville. What they have done is construct a well-sourced, clearly argued analysis of Bloody Sunday's continued legacy in books, on screen and even in the courtroom of the Saville Inquiry. Regardless of the inquiry's final findings this should be essential reading for anyone interested in Northern Ireland's fractious recent history, and the lasting power and significance of Bloody Sunday as we near its fortieth anniversary.

Peter Geoghegan

Writer and journalist

pkgeoghegan@gmail.com

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