

## Representations of Bloody Sunday

TOM HERRON

AND JOHN LYNCH

*After Bloody Sunday: Representation,  
Ethics, Justice*  
Cork University Press, 2007

Reviewed by  
LACHLAN WHALEN

IN THE INTRODUCTION TO *After Bloody Sunday* Tom Herron and John Lynch begin by asking "Why another book on Bloody Sunday?" As they themselves remind the reader, the story of the brutal massacre of peaceful protestors on 30 January 1972 has been retold in any number of excellent books, including some written or collected by participants in the march, such as Don Mullan and Eamonn McCann. Similarly, the authors are understandably loath to privilege one atrocity over others in the tragic contemporary history of Northern Ireland: the IRA's Remembrance Day bombing of 1987 and the Loyalist bombings in Monaghan and Dublin are but two other examples that remind us that no group has a monopoly on inflicting or experiencing suffering. Nonetheless, Herron and Lynch contend that Bloody Sunday distinguishes itself from other butchery not only because it was the worst mass killing done by the state in Northern Irish history, but also because the subsequent Widgery Report found that nothing illegal—or even wrong—was done by the British Army on the day. As Eamonn McCann insists, "in every other atrocity with which Bloody Sunday has regularly been compared or likened, the victims are acknowledged, more or less universally, as having been wrongly done to death and the perpetrators damned as wrongdoers" (6). As such, Herron and Lynch maintain, Bloody Sunday inflicted a "double injury-of a failure of justice compounded by the epistemological violence of Widgery's findings" (6), and this double injury not only exponentially increased recruitment of Republican paramilitaries, but also on a discursive level created patterns that would govern nearly all subsequent representations of the atrocity.

While the authors provide a fair amount of historical context in the first chapter, it is on the discursive re-embodiment of 30 January 1972 that *After Bloody Sunday* centers: the book does not seek to retell the events of the day, but rather to examine other retellings in a variety of media, including film, drama, poetry, juridical procedure, and visual art. As Herron and Lynch explain,

In this book we are concerned primarily with the dissemination of Bloody Sunday as a particularly resonant, and indeed, iconic event. We are concerned with how Bloody Sunday is narrativised, and with how many representations attempt to establish a particularly persuasive version of the events of that day. We are concerned with their claims and their mechanisms for producing "authenticity" and, therefore veridicity. (3)

Such analyses are crucial in violent and politically-charged settings like Northern Ireland, where in fact there may be life-and-death consequences to such production of veridicity. One of the book's greatest strengths is the diversity of the

representations that it examines, not just in terms of their modes of representation, but also in that Herron and Lynch turn their critical eyes on nationalist, British, and (nominally) unaligned versions with equal verve. However, I confess that on first reading the passage above, I feared the possibility of a poststructuralist cop-out in the face of one of the most savage injustices in Irish history. Some such archaeologies of knowledge end in a paralyzing relativism and/or an uncritical fetishization of indeterminacy, which is hardly a position of strength from which one might contest a document like the Widgery Report that has the full weight of Britain's judicial, political, and military might behind it. While I agree that we must contest grand narratives, reductive binaries, and monoliths of all sorts, we must be careful that our well-intentioned resistance to illusory fixity and closure does not mutate into a wholesale denial of meaning, for if such is the case we unintentionally perpetuate exactly the sort of epistemological violence about which Herron and Lynch write. Unless applied with care, such a critical paradigm could transform the testimony of victims seeking justice into merely a competing version of events, a version of events easily countered by the propaganda machine of the state whose miscarriage of justice must be granted equal validity under the flawed terms of analysis.

It was with great relief that I found my initial fears to be unfounded with regard to *After Bloody Sunday's* exploration of Bloody Sunday's re-presentation. Herron and Lynch generally engage in the sort of explication practiced by the best exponents of post-structuralism and deconstruction, recognizing as Foucault argues (but as some of his heirs forget) that while power relationships are inescapable and knowledge is fabricated, this does not mean that we must consign ourselves to an impotent relativism or that resistance is impossible; in fact, we might develop a counterdiscourse against injustice. The book presents the Widgery Report as a document in need of contestation, while simultaneously casting a careful analytical eye on the alternative constructs of Bloody Sunday set in opposition to state discourse.

*After Bloody Sunday* is at its most forceful and convincing when it interrogates artistic representations of the massacre. A fine example of this is found in the book's fifth chapter, an outstanding analysis of Thomas Kinsella's *Butcher's Dozen*. Herron and Lynch imbed a close reading of the poem within a larger historical context, concurrently pointing out the manner in which Kinsella invokes the events and victims of Bloody Sunday in a fashion reminiscent of channeling, Kinsella's fevered composition becoming a sort of poetic séance. The chapter makes a compelling argument for approaching *Butcher's Dozen* not only with the "public/political" tradition of Auden, Yeats, and Shelley in mind, but also with an awareness of the *aisling* tradition and in particular Merriman's parody of the tradition in *Cúirt an Mheán Oiche/ The Midnight Court*; simultaneously, Herron and Lynch persuasively defend Kinsella's poem from the critics who unfairly dismissed it as mere propaganda. As one might expect, Derrida's commentary on ghosts is woven throughout the book, and *Spectres of Marx* makes its

presence felt in productive ways in this chapter. Here and elsewhere there is judicious use of theory, with enough included to illuminate important concepts without becoming too arcane for the general, interdisciplinary audience for whom this book is intended.

*After Bloody Sunday's* second chapter, "Faces of the Dead," is another standout, one that begins its analysis of the rhetoric of Bloody Sunday with an exploration of the manner in which photographic images of Bloody Sunday's victims have been used not just as pictures through which Derry might mourn and remember, but also as metonymic representations of nationalists and as icons to inspire activism in the Six Counties and beyond. Herron and Lynch deftly negotiate the complex history of these portraits, tracing the discursive ramifications of their initial cropping (which violently severs the images from what was in each case a pleasant context in the original photograph), their "grid-locking" as illustrations accompanying newspaper accounts of the massacre, and their mobilization as counterdiscourse and protest, particularly after the Widgery Report which was published a little less than three months after Bloody Sunday. As the book affirms, one of the most powerful functions of these portraits is their ability to contest the state discourse that sought to efface nationalist protest and to reduce peaceful demonstrators to a criminal crowd—a crowd whose individual members have been recast as faceless terrorists in the British government's official account of the day. The authors observe that "It is not at all surprising, therefore, that the concentration upon the faces of the victims of Bloody Sunday has been so key to all subsequent commemorations and campaigns" (36).

Indeed, to use *After Bloody Sunday's* terminology, these spectral images actively mobilize the dead during marches, perhaps most dramatically in Derry's twenty-fifth anniversary commemoration of Bloody Sunday, which marked the first appearance of fourteen huge banners, each bearing an image of one of the victims' faces, each banner so large that it required two marchers to hold it aloft. As a participant in that march, I recall being overwhelmed as I rounded a bend along the route and all fourteen faces became visible on the hill overlooking Free Derry Corner, their black and white images floating in ghostly contrast to the mottled green and yellow of the hill, the dazzling brightness of the sun, and the deep blue of an unusually fine February day's sky. Herron and Lynch describe well the sense that my comrades and I had at that moment of a linkage between the march in which we were participating, the first march on 30 January 1972, and all of the demonstrations in-between. There unquestionably was "the sense of two (or many) crowds composed of both the living and the dead operating synchronically" (43). Despite the massive presence of the Security Forces and their armored vehicles ringing the march's route in steel, at the twenty-fifth anniversary march there was a palpable sense of active "motion towards the future, towards tangible and definable outcomes," a desire for progress that *After Bloody Sunday* contrasts with the animus of Orange parades and their "backward-looking celebrations of victory, [which seem] all the more hysterical because they promote the preservation and continuation of an increasingly threatened

supremacy" (46).

Unfortunately, *After Bloody Sunday* stumbles when it leaves behind cinematic, literary, and visual representations of Bloody Sunday to address an arguably more crucial realm: that of actual judicial procedure. The third chapter, "Virtual Justice: Saville and the Technologies of Truth," retreats somewhat from the healthy skepticism found elsewhere in the book. While again castigating the Widgery Report for being the whitewash that it was, the authors rather prematurely set it up as a potential foil to the Saville Inquiry, an investigation begun in 1998 at the behest of Prime Minister Tony Blair to reevaluate in an official capacity the events of Bloody Sunday. To their credit, Herron and Lynch cite the reservations of Bernadette McAliskey (née Devlin), one of the speakers and organizers of the 1972 march, quoting her testimony to Saville that such an investigation "should be somewhere else where the accused is not running the party"; nonetheless, *After Bloody Sunday* concludes that "It may just be the case that the framework itself is now different" (49). As evidence, Herron and Lynch explore the manner in which the Saville Inquiry has used information technology to make visible its proceedings, unlike the Widgery Report whose evidence and machinations were made public only after the fact (and at a cost of £150 per copy). Saville utilized high-tech devices like TrialPro Evidence Display System to "enable all participants in the inquiry to see the identical information at the same time" whether in the courtroom or in "satellite" locations" across the city, as well as LiveNote Real-Time Transcription "so that statements and misunderstanding could be clarified within seconds"; such gadgetry also permitted the Inquiry's website "to carry verbatim transcripts of every moment of the proceedings" (59). Even more dramatic was Saville's reliance upon "virtual reality" in the form of a three-dimensional computer-generated model of Derry's Bogside as it appeared in 1972, a helpful innovation given the massive change that the area has seen in the last few decades. All of this technology "was used variously to record, to amplify, to disseminate, to confirm, to remind, and to make visible that which is presumed to be primary: the speaking subject" (50-51).

Yet, as Herron and Lynch remind the reader in this chapter, "Naïve belief in the impartiality of technology should be rejected in favor of a rather more vigorous awareness of the long history of miscarriages of justice founded upon the so-called application of science enacted by individual agents grounded in a legal discourse" (63). Or, one should add, the total lack of application of science in the form of missing forensic evidence. Rather inexplicably, it is literally only one and a half pages before the book ends that *After Bloody Sunday* addresses one of the major controversies of the Saville Inquiry: the storm over what has been done with the weapons used by the British Army in the shootings of 30 January 1972. The British Ministry of Defense (MoD) claimed that twenty-four of the twenty-nine rifles carried by the Parachute Regiment on Bloody Sunday were destroyed, a claim that recently has come into dispute. More worrying still, subsequent to the Saville Inquiry's request for the remaining rifles, two of the five surviving

weapons were destroyed. John Kelly insists that this was no coincidence, claiming that one of the two rifles was known to have been used by (as Saville terms him) "Soldier F" to kill his brother, Michael Kelly, the other rifle in question used by "Soldier G" to kill Gerard Donaghy. *After Bloody Sunday* devotes only one sentence to this crucial issue, and does so in the context of its discussion of dramatic narratives of Bloody Sunday by playwrights like Brian Friel and Frank McGuinness, not in the chapter actually devoted to the Saville Inquiry.

"Virtual Justice: Saville and the Technologies of Truth" focuses its analysis largely on issues of memory and technology, claiming that "The memory work that sustains the demand [for responsibility] is one that is never complete and justice can never be ultimately achieved...As Ricoeur observes, amnesty cannot be based on amnesia, and we are only at the beginning of implementing a culture of just memory" (64). True in many senses, yet a near-exclusive focus on the vagaries of memory seem rather less central to the point when one is faced with what many see as a concerted effort on the part of the MoD to pervert the course of justice through the deliberate destruction of physical evidence.

The points that Herron and Lynch make about the plasticity of memory are indeed

important, but more attention might have been paid in the chapter to the manner in which the MoD attempted in Saville to eradicate memory, though hopefully less successfully than in Widgery (as of this writing, Saville has yet to report its findings). For instance, in 2003 the MoD insisted on vetting the questions put to agents of the Crown: the "categories of information" that the MoD demanded not to disclose included, among others, "the organization, chain of command, method of operation, capabilities, training, equipment and techniques of the special units of the armed forces...the identity and location of the premises of special units of the armed forces" and "any other information which might be useful to terrorist organizations or detrimental to national security." As the lawyers for the Bloody Sunday victims' families argued, these "categories of information" are so broad that the MoD could object to almost any question asked during the course of Saville's investigation.

Another dramatic moment from the Saville Inquiry goes unmentioned in *After Bloody Sunday* as well, and it is one that further casts doubt on Herron and Lynch's hope that "the framework itself is now different": the 2005 imprisonment of Derry Republican John Kelly, the brother of Bloody Sunday victim Michael, mentioned above.

Because he refused to give testimony to Saville, Kelly was sentenced to three months imprisonment for contempt. The ultimate, yet not unexpected irony is that a Derry Republican, a victim's relative, may prove to be the only person to receive a prison sentence as a direct result of Saville's investigation of the murders of fourteen innocent civilians by the British Army.

Yet even with these criticisms I do not wish to be too hard on *After Bloody Sunday*, for its analysis is otherwise thorough and incisive, and the book is indeed timely. Arguably the most crucial point made in the course of the book is not a new one, but one that transcends national boundaries, and one that every generation seems in need of re-learning. Herron and Lynch insist that

The Widgery Report revealed how, given appropriate levels of support from a docile opposition and given insufficient investigative will from an obedient media, a powerful discursivity could operate and gain the upper hand, notwithstanding the fact that its interpretation of the evidence presented to the tribunal of inquiry was so grotesque. (5-6)

Does this not mirror the atmosphere in the United States in the run-up to the war in Iraq, from Congress's cowardly relinquishment of its power to declare war, to the deliberate

inclusion of flawed intelligence in presentations to the United Nations and in the 2003 State of the Union Address, to-with the noble exception of a few ignored voices—the apparent wholesale abandonment of fact-checking and investigative journalism by news outlets in the States? While the recent Supreme Court decision reaffirming the right of habeas corpus for detainees at Guantanamo Bay is a positive sign, the same forces—discursive and otherwise—arrayed against internationally-agreed upon standards of human rights and judicial procedure in Northern Ireland in the 1970s remain arrayed against them in the United States in the Bush era. Are there terrorists interned in Guantanamo Bay today? Very likely, yes. Are there also innocent victims of circumstances among the prisoners as well? Almost certainly. Yet, we will never have even a remote chance of knowing the innocent from the guilty unless the United States learns from the injustice of the Widgery Report, an injustice that Herron and Lynch accurately note, "had operated through the formalized procedures of the judicial system and its functionaries, who are well versed in the obfuscatory tactics of legal procedure, and which could make the emergence of clear and unambiguous truths seem, at times, distant" (49). •

—University of South Florida- St. Petersburg

## Becoming Irish in Detroit City

NEAL SHINE

*Life with Mae*

A Detroit Family Memoir

Wayne State University Press, 2007, \$24.95

Reviewed by

LAWRENCE J. MCCAFFREY

BORN IN 1909, a native of Carrick-on-Shannon, County Leitrim, Mary Ellen (Mae) Conlon was a servant in the town's upper-class homes; her father operated a Guinness distribution depot. Wanting more in life, she departed at eighteen for the United States, first working as a domestic in Duluth, Minnesota before moving to Detroit, still a servant. In 1929, she married Kerryman Patrick Joseph Shine (1890-1969). Knowing an elder brother, John, would inherit the family farm, in 1910 he left Ireland with Mike, another sibling. At first they labored in a Pittsburgh steel mill but in 1914 they moved to Detroit, becoming street-car conductors, a common occupation for Irish male immigrants in urban America. During World War I, Patrick, with pride and patriotism, served in the United States army.

Mae and Patrick, loyal Catholics, Irish nationalists, Americans, and Democrats, raised three sons, Neal (the memoir's author), James, and Bill. Through the years they moved from uncomfortable apartments, often in bleak if fun-filled neighborhoods, to their own house just over the Gross Point border. Mae and Patrick were attentive parents who insisted their sons get good educations. They responded by earning college degrees. Like many other Irish-American families, Mae, as mother, was more involved in their sons' lives than Patrick. He worked hard at his job but was proud of his sons and their accomplishments. Patrick took them on long Sunday walks where he set them a good example by his generosity to those seeking

his help, telling the three boys that in ways we are all poor and needy. He also instructed them on the virtues of honesty and hard work by his conduct as well as his words. Patrick lived by the rules of his job and his country. For example, street-car personnel were supposed to live in the city so for years he slept alone in a back bedroom that was over the Gross Point border into Detroit.

In contrast to Patrick who lived by rules, Mae frequently broke or evaded them, inventing her own. She considered sales taxes government oppression and did everything she could to avoid paying them. During World War II, she smuggled Ketchup in from nearby Canada and probably beer and exchanged them in Detroit for sugar. Later, she smuggled cigarettes and cigars into Ireland, asking priests to help her baggage, knowing customs would never ask a Catholic cleric to open suitcases. When purchasing groceries or clothes, Mae always negotiated and usually got the price she wanted. She once took a worn-out pair of Neal's pants to the store they originally came from and after much haggling received a repayment. She then took the old garment home and patched it up. Mae physically blocked men attempting to repossess Shine furniture, finally using her children to warm their hearts and change their minds. Grocers and department store managers hated her appearance in their places of business. While active in parish affairs, a member of many of its women's organizations, she didn't hesitate to critique the pastor's sermons, frequently unfavorably. Traveling on public transportation and in other fee situations, Mae lied about her children's ages to seek reduced fares. Neal complained his stoop resulted from his mother insisting he bend over to disguise his age. Although she had been a domestic servant, Mae was not a meticulous house keeper. When she had worked for Jewish Americans, she cooked

what she wanted to cook, ignoring her employers' dietary laws.

Carrying Irish parenting values across the Atlantic, Mae Shine was a sharp disciplinarian. Her sons often received not too hard slaps on the head for unperformed or badly performed tasks, and often for things they didn't do. When insisting on their innocence, she would reply that they deserved it for deeds escaping her attention. Mae was also a bit of a puritan, always keeping up on her son's romances, hoping to make sure they were chaste. She was much more tolerant in regard to her grandchildren. Although Mae left a servant's existence in Ireland to improve her situation in America, she maintained an Irish class-consciousness, informing Neal and his brothers there were set places that people fit into. When they economically and socially advanced in Detroit, she constantly warned them against getting too big for their britches. Mae often visited England to see her sisters and parents who had moved there. She liked the English but was contemptuous of their monarchy as a waste of taxpayer's money. Mae told that to Lord Snowden when he was a guest of Neal's. For all of her respect for class structure, Mae was a true Democrat, supporting the dignity and rights of African-Americans when other Detroiters feared their expanding population. She also hated bullying and repeatedly told her sons never to pick on anyone physically, economically, or in intellectually weaker.

Her sons teased as well as loved and respected their mother. Policeman Bill pretended to arrest her in public places. Mae showed up to watch games her sons played. She was quite a sports fan herself, with affection for the Detroit Tigers baseball team, but her deepest passion was the ice-hockey Red Wings. She bought season tickets to their games. Feisty, forget-about the rules Mae would become a never to forget figure in

Shine family memories and stories. When she died in 1987, Neal and his brothers buried some of her ashes near Patrick's grave. Eventually they took the rest back to Carrick-on-Shannon and distributed them on the river's shore.

In addition to discussing his Detroit family history, Neal discusses places his parents came from. In Leitrim, he enjoyed his mother's family and the town, but found her father cold and aloof, a puritan, and an over-zealous Catholic, still insisting that everyone be home by 7 p.m. for the family rosary. He found his father's Kerry a warm place where he felt at ease and familiar. His views on Ireland are romantic but perceptive. However he dates Catholic Emancipation quite a ways before Daniel O'Connell achieved it in 1828.

While still a University of Detroit undergraduate student Neal Shine (1930-1997) launched his journalism career as a copy-write boy at the *Detroit Free Press*. Time in the army interrupted his mobility but in time he advanced to reporter, city editor, managing editor, senior-managing editor. In 1995 he retired as publisher. From such a distinguished, highly lauded journalist readers will expect an interesting, well-written book, and that it is! Shine was a great story teller as well as prose expert. His great tribute to his mother and also his father appeared the same year of his death. It is a deeply affectionate, respectful, humorous, and lovely memorial as well as a family memoir.

In *The Irish on the Urban Frontier: Detroit 1850-1890* (1976), JoEllen McNergney Vinyard, employs Detroit as evidence that Midwest Irish-Americans achieved acceptability and respectability at a quicker pace than those in the East, especially New England. Detroit's Shine family supports her thesis, but Irish-Americans and other readers throughout the country will enjoy this wonderful book. •

—Loyola University of Chicago

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