

COMMENT & LETTERS

Spring Has Arrived... And So Have The Festivals!

When Irish, sun-starved prisoners of our northern climate, where rain is so frequent a visitor we get used to walking around half-wet all the time, react to the appearance of old Sol in the sky with something approaching religious rapture. And coinciding with the departure of the bad weather and the arrival of the finer variety are the first pack of festivals. We've just finished with an enormously successful Pan-Celtic Festival that filled our streets and shops and pubs with happy Celts of all descriptions. With a programme packed with music and song and dance and general jollification, Galway rang to the sounds of Welsh, Irish, Scots Gaelic, Breton, Cornish and Manx.

Coming up over the next few weeks are more festivals. The A.T. Cross Cuirt International Festival of Literature begins next week and promises to be one of the most enjoyable of the year. Starting from very small beginnings, Cuirt has over the years grown into an important gathering of writers not only from Ireland but all over the world. This year Cuirt welcomes no less a person than Derek Walcott, last year's Nobel Prize Winner for Literature and widely regarded as one of the very finest poets now writing. It is a tribute to Mike Diskin and the Cuirt organisers that they have been able to attract literary figures of international stature to Galway.

The weekend afterwards - May Bank Holiday weekend - sees two festivals competing for the limelight. Galway City will play host to what could become another of our annual gatherings, the Budweiser Rhythm, Roots and Country Festival, which will showcase the talents of a host of brilliant musicians and singers like Mary Black and Sharon Shannon and Martina McBride, but also international stars like Townes Van Zandt and Greg Trooper and Guy Clark. Meanwhile, down in Kinvara, Fleadh na gCuach, brain-child of Tony Moylan, one of the architects of the well-established Summer festival of Criunniu na mBad, will see the seaside town turn into a traditional music Mecca, with top-class musicians making their way from all over Ireland to share the unique atmosphere of the town celebrated by native son, Francis Fahy, author of the real version of "Galway Bay".

These different festivals are important for a number of reasons. For one thing, they are social gatherings that bring people together in circumstances where the key motive is to have a good time. And secondly, they make a very important contribution to the local economy at the same time. Spring has (we hope!) at last arrived, and with it the festivals that allow us the chance to let our hair down and forget the cold, wet, windy months of winter that have held us captive for far too long.

Video Nasties

Earlier this week the British Parliament agreed an amendment to the Criminal Justice and Public Order Bill tabled by Mr. David Alton M.P. While few would disagree over the need to exercise responsibility with regard to the kind of material available to children and young people, the whole affair raises some important questions that will surely have their repercussions in Ireland.

First of all, there is the timing of Mr. Alton's amendment and its motivation, which can be traced directly to the remarks made by the judge summing up in the trail of the boys sentenced for the horrific murder of little Jamie Bulger. The judge, discussing what could have led two teenage boys engage in such a terrible act, referred to the possible effect of a video called "Child's Play III", which had been seen by the boys. This unleashed a bout of soul-searching that led to the conclusion that video "nasties" like this were a contributing factor in crimes of violence. Secondly, there is the question of how to assess which videos should be prohibited as potentially dangerous on these grounds.

The fact is, there is no consensus among experts (and who, after all, qualifies as an "expert"?) that there is a direct link between films/videos and violent crimes, and much evidence that the criteria used to draw this conclusion are basically subjective. "One man's (or child's) meat is another's poison". Is not the casual violence of a James Bond film just as potentially influential as that depicted in "Nightmare on Elm Street", given the enormous complexity of human nature? And how do you assess which films/videos fall into the banned category? We know of one adult who had nightmares for years after watching Disney's "Peter Pan". And Denis Nilsen, the convicted English serial killer, apparently loved watching "The Sound of Music". Are we not getting into very murky waters here?

Finally, is such a law enforceable? Just as home tapping, despite a vigorous campaign, complete with threats of legal penalties, is now an accepted fact of life, efforts to keep banned videos out of the hands of the public is almost inevitably doomed to failure. Censorship of this sort, backed by Government, is ill-advised. The appreciation of values belongs to the home, the school and, where applicable, the churches. Video nasties, like it or not, are part of the wider realm of "information", and attempts to ban information, as countless examples demonstrate, simply don't work.



COLLEGE DISCIPLINE

IN THIS week in 1868 the Town Improvement Commissioners of Galway received an answer from Sir Thomas Larcom to a letter of protest which they had written some time before.

The topic was the fact that the President of Queen's College did not reside regularly in the city. The chairman of the commissioners, Thomas M. Persse, was very irate and said the Professor Edward Berwick "received £800 a year for residing in Dublin and scarcely ever comes down to the college." He Persse, was acquainted with the college and with the professors "who were all men of talent and education and very much respected about Galway". But, he went on, they could not be expected to act without their superior. He described the non-residence of Dr. Berwick as truly monstrous.

The reply of Sir. Thomas Larcom to the Town Boards protest was considered unsatisfactory. As under-secretary to the government in Dublin it was considered that he would take some action. Instead he accepted the President's explanation. He wrote on behalf of the Lord Lieutenant that "as the President has stated that his absences during the last few years were caused by ill-health, his Excellency does not see any reason for making a change in the present arrangement."

This reply was considered most unsatisfactory and the Board decided to send copies of the correspondence to the Galway members of parliament. It certainly was true that at that time the local newspaper gave considerable attention to the affairs of the college and of its clubs and societies.

It is not clear what sparked off the criticism of Dr. Berwick's absences but it may have arisen to some extent over some excessive exuberance by a few college students a month or so earlier. As a result they appeared before the Galway Petty Sessions with Pierce Joyce in the chair. Patrick Mulcahy, Redmond O'Halloran, Adam Nichol, Thomas Mitchell and Edward Flynn were prosecuted by Father Daly for breaking windows in his house. The result was they were jailed for one month. They had been caught in the act by a member of the town watch. Perhaps it was felt that if Berwick resided in Galway discipline among College students might be better.

Thomas P.O'Neill

Remembering Fr. Griffin

Dear Editor,

I am very interested in the forthcoming book on the life and times of the late Father Micheal Griffin R.I.P.

I remember being told by my family that a man driving a horse and sidecar called at the Presbytery, Montpelier Terrace and asked for Father Meehan in Irish, to come on a sick call. Fr. Meehan was not at home, the man was told Father Griffin was available. Father Griffin dressed and went with him on the sidecar.

Some time later it was learned that Father Griffin was shot by the Black and Tans in Lenaboy Castle and dragged up on the back of a Black and Tan lorry up a part of Taylors Hill on their way to Barna. On the Black and Tan's arrival at Barna village the lorries turned right and went up that road. The nearby neighbours heard the noise of the lorries

and saw their headlights coming towards them. When the Tans had left the spot and all was quiet the neighbours went to the spot where the Tans had been and there they discovered Father Griffin's remains in a shallow grave, with a corner of his coat sticking through the surface clay. Underneath his finger nails was full of clay, indicating that he was buried alive.

Father Griffin's remains were removed to St. Joseph's Church where they lay in State. People from all over the country came to pay their respects. His funeral cortege drove through the City with crowds of people lining the side walks - the City was in shock and in mourning.

Yours sincerely,
Dr. Evelyn Tully
Galway.



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The Challenge of Evangelical Christianity

Dear Editor,

In the aftermath of reading the Advertiser feature on the testimonies of the Galway Christian Fellowship in the issue of 7/4/94, I ask myself the question: why are our shepherds so silent?

Is it a concern to priests, bishops and members of the hierarchy if some of their flock have cast aside their childhood faith and now follow a different version of the Good News? Do we really need the spiritual benefits of the Mass and all the sacraments, or do we believe, as the writer of this article claims, that the Bible is "the basis of all knowledge of God"? Isn't it possible for me to hold prayer meetings in my own house, fill my listeners with my own set of beliefs, watch my gathering grow and start up a new Church to farther my own version of the Christian faith?

There is no doubt that these evangelical churches answer a real need in pinpointing the emptiness of the human heart where there is a denial of God and most acutely as an attraction to the young person battling in the challenges of relationships and the difficulties of life. These churches claim to have the answer or answers to most problems.

In the flip of a coin I can decide to follow Christ. But that doesn't give me the power to transcend all the problems I have to face in the future. There is no magic formula where I can bypass the difficult situa-

tions on my journey. Remember the words of Christ: "It is a long hard road that leads to life and not many find it."

To conclude, I challenge the many Catholics who have "shed" their own faith and gone off to follow a different version with the following: did you search for the fulfillment you were seeking within Catholicism prior to your decision to leave? Would you be willing to invest the same energy and zeal in attending classes in Catholic Theology that you now devote solely to scripture? If someone ridicules your new faith, how do you respond? In your spiritual journey, have you "arrived" at your destination, or are you still on the move? Why are our shepherds so silent?

Name and Address with Editor

This Week.....

Rocking Around The Clock

Dear Editor,

It's been 17 years since I've had a letter printed in your good-for-nothing paper! Ha! Ha!

On a serious note: In 1968, on the crest of a so-called Rock 'n Roll Revival, Bill Haley and the Comets were in Seapoint, the Everly Brothers were in Talk of the Town a week and a half later. And forty years ago, April 12th, 1954, "Rock Around The Clock" was released.

Happy 40th Birthday, Rock 'n Roll!

Paul Walsh

Editor's Note: Writing of birthdays, the Galway Advertiser celebrates its 24th Anniversary on April 16th, 1994.

