
Steafán Hanvey, Bobbie Hanvey, *Reconstructions:
“The Troubles” in Photographs and Words*

Oliver O’Hanlon



Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/8699>
DOI : [10.4000/etudesirlandaises.8699](https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesirlandaises.8699)
ISSN : 2259-8863

Éditeur

Presses universitaires de Caen

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 31 décembre 2019
Pagination : 163-164
ISBN : 978-2-84133-964-8
ISSN : 0183-973X

Référence électronique

Oliver O’Hanlon, « Steafán Hanvey, Bobbie Hanvey, *Reconstructions: “The Troubles” in Photographs and Words* », *Études irlandaises* [En ligne], 44-2 | 2019, mis en ligne le 06 mai 2020, consulté le 24 septembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/etudesirlandaises/8699> ; DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/etudesirlandaises.8699>



Études irlandaises est mise à disposition selon les termes de la Licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d’Utilisation Commerciale - Partage dans les Mêmes Conditions 4.0 International.

Steafán Hanvey, Bobbie Hanvey, *Reconstructions: “The Troubles” in Photographs and Words*, Newbridge, Merrion Press, 2019, 155 p.

Bobbie Hanvey spent much of his working life photographing people and events in Northern Ireland. Many of his photographs appeared in local newspapers and books. He also produced two collections of his own photographs. This book is composed of photographs taken by Bobbie during the Troubles and prose poems written by his son, Steafán. The poems are the son's personal reaction to the photographs taken by the father. This is Steafán's first collection of poems.

The result is striking. The stark black and white images transport the reader back in time and one gets a sense of what life was like during the Troubles by the addition of the son's vivid recollections in the poems. Unlike earlier books of photographs depicting the period, such as Seán Hillen's *Melancholy Witness: Images of the Troubles* (Dublin, History Press Ireland, 2013), the poems that appear in this book offer an extra layer of meaning for readers who want to grasp the painful reality of what life was like for many people at the time. In total, the book contains just seventeen full-page black and white photographs. The subjects depicted vary from portraits of well-known faces, such as politician Ian Paisley and poets Michael Longley and Seamus Heaney, to the ordinary man or woman in the street, as well as scenes of utter devastation following an explosion or car bomb. The overriding theme of the majority of the photographs is political and there is little room for art or culture, save the photographs of the two poets already mentioned.

Steafán Hanvey says in the introduction, “the photos were part-inspiration, part-confirmation, in that I reacted to some and wrote some new poems, whereas others complemented pieces I'd written at earlier stages of my life” (p. 14). It is clear that some of the poems are direct reactions to the photographs, retelling a story or recounting a real-life event that happened to someone else. However, the poet also allows himself to use the photographs to tell his own story, such as the photograph showing Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) men sitting in a Land Rover that was taken at Halloween (p. 102). Here, the poet recounts his own experience one Halloween when he was nearly killed by an off-duty RUC man, who had mistaken the ten-year-old boy with a party-popper in his hand for an assassin with a gun.

The format of the book is as follows, each photograph is followed by a prose poem, which in turn is followed by a short description of the photograph and poem entitled “Behind the Lens and Between the Lines”. At first, it was not clear that the last part was entirely necessary. Shouldn't the photographs and poems speak for themselves? However, on occasion, the description and brief history can give the reader a greater understanding of the original photograph and accompanying poem. Take for example the now iconic photograph of Ian Paisley with arm outstretched standing in front of a statue of the Dublin-born Unionist leader, Edward Carson (p. 72). It was taken by Bobbie Hanvey in 1985 outside the Parliament building at Stormont, the then bastion of Unionism. Paisley was raised up to the height of the statue on a lift. It put Paisley on equal footing, in every respect, with Carson. In the description afterwards, we learn

that Paisley said it was his favourite photograph of himself. Steafán Hanvey's description of how the photograph was taken also highlights Paisley's capacity for wit, something which many would have doubted during the height of the Troubles, when he repeated his mantra of "No Surrender" and was referred to as "Dr. No" in the media for his fiery outbursts and intransigence on potential co-operation with Republicans.

While this book is ostensibly a personal reflection on a selection of photographs taken during the Troubles, it could also be described as an homage by Steafán to his father, whom he refers to as "my *fathographer*" (p. 15) in the introduction. Later on, he refers to his father affectionately as "my da: a memory-making middleman, assessor from The Ministry Of Lost Causes" (p. 26), and "my da, the master image builder" (p. 73). In the introduction, we learn a little of what prompted the book, but it would also have been nice to learn something about the selection process used to pick the photographs that appear in the book. What were the criteria and was there any subject matter that was deemed ineligible for whatever reason? Many of Bobbie Hanvey's photographs taken during the Troubles are now housed in an American university library. There are over 50,000 negatives in the Bobbie Hanvey Photographic Archives in the John J. Burns Library in Boston College. They span the period from the 1970s through to circa 2007. Given the perfect marriage of photograph and poem in this book and the sheer volume of images to pick from, it is clear that another book (or more) of photographs and poems is called for.

Oliver O'HANLON

John O'Keeffe, *The Masses of Seán and Peadar Ó Riada: Explorations in Vernacular Chant*, Cork, Cork University Press, 2017, 298 p. + audio CD.

Seán Ó Riada once expressed his strong attachment to his country, after a few months spent in Paris, stating that he would "rather be breaking stones in Ireland than be the richest man living in Europe". One of the main elements of this attachment was certainly his love of the Irish language: after his nomination at University College Cork in 1964, he decided to settle with his family in the Múscraí Gaeltacht area of Cúil Aodha (Coolea) in West Cork, where his mother originated. This is also where he composed his two masses and where his son Peadar grew up.

This book studies the two masses composed by Seán Ó Riada (1931-1971) as well as the mass composed by his son Peadar Ó Riada (born 1954) and was appropriately published fifty years after the Vatican II reforms on music, and in particular the *Musicam Sacram* of March 1967, which radically changed the way liturgical music could be composed for the Roman Catholic mass, by giving more freedom to composers on the language they could use for its celebration and consequently developing the participation of the congregation.