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Herbert Remmel. Courtesy of Herbert Remmel

The "half-Irish"[1] Herbert Remmel (*1936)

Mervyn O'Driscoll

"I have a second home in which I'm deeply rooted."[2]

Herbert Remmel's childhood juxtaposed Hitler's Germany and de Valera's Ireland. Born in 1936 in Cologne, he experienced the war as a child. As a fortunate nine-year-old, he escaped the bombed out Rhineland by taking advantage of a humanitarian operation involving the Irish Red Cross and the Save the German Children Society (SGCS). He landed off the mail-boat from Liverpool at Dun Laoghaire in Dublin on 27 July 1946 as a member of the first group of approximately 80 children arriving under the scheme.

Remmel and his compatriots were initially provided for in reception centres at Castlebellingham, Co. Louth and Glencree in County Wicklow. In due course two Irish families fostered him. The first, the Cunninghams, lived in an archetypal working class terraced house in the suburb of Inchicore in Dublin. The family accommodated him for several months until the father was made unemployed in February 1947. The Cunninghams could not now afford to support him. Next Herbert was fostered by the Nally family of Ballinlough on a traditional small farm in remote County Mayo. The Nallys' lifestyle was a contrast to the Cunninghams'. The family was rooted in Mayo for generations. The farm was approximately 20 acres (c. 8 hectares). Herbert remained happily there until his repatriation to Cologne in February 1949 following the request of his parents.

Herbert's experiences with his two foster families instilled a deep and intimate appreciation of Ireland, its society, the Irish sense of place, the people's traditions, the Irish rural way of life and Irish nationalism. Though only in Ireland for less than three years, the interlude was indelibly imprinted on his psyche. His experience granted him rare insights into both his native fatherland, Germany, and his fostering motherland, Ireland. He formed an enduring sense of connection with Ireland regularly visiting members of his former foster families subsequently. It had a deep affect both on his German family and friends, and his Irish friends and "Irish family" as he termed

1 Herbert Remmel, *From Cologne to Ballinlough: A German and Irish Boyhood in World War II and Post War Years 1946-1949*. Millstreet: Aubane Historical Society, 2009, p. 122.

2 Ibid., pp. 161-162.

them.[3] He recorded that "[m]y nearly three years with the Irish were amongst the happiest and most interesting of my childhood. Down the years I have told stories about my Irish experiences to my children, family, and friends, and they started pressurising me to set down my 'Irish biography' in sequence."[4]

Herbert Remmel did just that in 2006 when he published his memoir *Operation Shamrock*.[5] It was privately published in Germany for an intimate readership of family and friends, but he felt impelled to translate his memoir (and extend it) to quench the entreaties of his "Irish friends".[6] The extended Irish edition *From Cologne to Ballinlough* appeared in 2009.[7] A case of effective double cultural translation occurred as the target audience for the first edition was a German familial audience intrigued by his encounter with Irish life and culture in the 1940s. The second (or Irish) edition's target audience, according to Remmel, were Irish acquaintances who wanted a record of life on a traditional Irish small family farm in the 1940s, a lifestyle that has now disappeared with modernisation, but also desired to have Remmel's external perspectives on it. The Irish edition according to Remmel included 'a few more recollections', additional footnotes and some Cologne dialect ('Koelsch Platt') words. Remmel included the words in dialect to illustrate how 'very different' it was to standard German.[8]

Remmel's memoir included an (re)construction of his childhood in Germany (which was lacking in the German edition) as an entrée to his account of escaping war-ravaged Germany to rural Ireland. Its first pages depicting his early life in Germany offer a poignant contrast to his later Irish boyhood. This informed his Irish readers about his previous life in Germany in a personal and humanistic fashion. In passing he addressed momentous topics such as life under a dictatorship, war and foreign occupation. He revealed how children lived in these circumstances; they simply got on with life, as children do. In this part of the book he informed his Irish readership about many themes relating to Nazi Germany that they may have never reflected on. However, the main part of the book was primarily devoted to offering an unadorned, heartwarming and sympathetic account of the Ireland he personally experienced from 1946 to 1949. He captured many positive qualities of rustic life and the

3 Ibid., p. 81.

4 Ibid., p. 5.

5 Herbert Remmel, *Operation Shamrock: eine deutsch-irische Nachkriegs-Kindheit*. Herbert Remmel, 2006.

6 Remmel, *From Cologne*, p. 5.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

characteristics of farming folk that had appealed to his German family and friends in his oral recollections to them over the decades.

Herbert's transcultural life challenged nation-centric narratives and identities. At a minimum his memoir offered the opportunity to share his childhood memories. And to a great degree the contrasts and cultural differences between the German worlds of Herbert Remmel and his Irish ones were substantial. It also signified how several German children who were fostered under Operation Shamrock established a dual German-Irish identity that diffused to wider family and friendship circles.

So who was Herbert Remmel and how did he end up in Ireland? Herbert came from a Cologne "poor folks' estate" called Neurath in the Höhenhaus suburb. Remmel's family lived in the comparatively spacious new socialised housing development close to the countryside and away from the dark streets of the city.[9] He was of solid German working class stock which had a strong tradition of radical left-wing activism. Herbert's forebears were casual or day labourers, factory workers and coalminers. Lacking education or means everyone in this working class milieu was more or less equal. (This assisted in his later easy immersions in plebeian Dublin and pastoral Mayo; a similar ethos prevailed there.) The paternal line from Cologne had a record of anti-militarism and anti-Nazism. His grandfather "Opa" Johann conjured up a "lurid boil" using a "nicotine concoction" to secure his release from the army in the 1890s. As a member of the Social Democrats he gained an education through the party's Worker Education Associations. "Opa" remained in the Social Democrats until the party voted for war in 1914. Considering this a gross betrayal of socialist internationalism and pacifism, "Opa" left the party.[10]

His father, Christian, maintained "Opa"'s tradition of socialism and internationalism. But he went further, becoming a member of the KPD. When the Nazis rose to power in 1933 he was dismissed from his job as a deliveryman on political grounds, but he fortunately secured another. The Neurath Estate had earned the moniker "Red District" or even "Little Moscow"; it was home to many Social Democrats and Communists, the arch opponents of the Nazi Party. The local Nazis raided the district soon after Adolf Hitler became Chancellor in 1933. They dragged away known leftists for interrogation, incarceration and torture; and some never returned. Herbert's father, Christian, escaped the attentions of the Nazis at this point.[11]

9 Ibid., pp. 8-11.

10 Ibid., p. 14.

11 This account is derived from ibid., pp. 13-16.

Christian toiled underground with the suppressed KPD, assisting party members on the run from the Gestapo. He aided his brother Willi to escape to Holland in 1935. Thence Willi proceeded to Spain in 1936 to volunteer with the International Brigades in the defence of the Spanish Republic. He fought against General Franco's insurgency which was aided by Nazi Germany, most notably in the form of the Condor Legion. Following his capture in 1939 Willi was incarcerated in a succession of infamous concentration camps including Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, and Mauthausen. He was eventually liberated by the Red Army.[12]

During the Second World War Christian was engaged in a KPD (Communist) resistance group. It secreted away not only KPD comrades from the Gestapo, but also deserters, escaped prisoners-of-war and forced labour escapees. According to Herbert, this advanced into a clandestine popular front and armed resistance aiming to neutralise Nazi Party command in Cologne. (This appears to have been the local branch of the National Committee for a Free Germany that originated in July 1943).[13] Its objective was to ease the peaceful surrender of the city to the Allies and to minimise destruction. Christian and about 100 co-conspirators were arrested by the Gestapo on 26 November 1944 and a collective death sentence was passed on the Klettenberg "ring". However, the prison authorities delayed or retarded the executions as the Allies approached. The Americans liberated him from Butzbach prison in April 1945 and treated him until mid-June for dysentery, typhus and wounds. Even then he was a "bag of bones".[14]

Considering this family background, it was not surprising that Herbert, the other Remmel children and the children of the Neurath district, imbibed critical attitudes towards the Nazi regime. They celebrated the exploits of Edelweiss Pirates or the comparable "Navajo" youth gang of Cologne in singsongs and games.[15] The pirates were a loose countercultural movement defying Nazi and Hitler Youth regimentation of boys, and they graduated to acts of violence and resistance against the regime.[16] In November 1944, the Ge-

12 Ibid., p. 14.

13 Ibid., p. 58; NSDOK, NS-Dokumentationszentrum der Stadt Köln, http://www.museenkoeln.de/ns-dokumentationszentrum/default.aspx?s=783 (accessed 18 December 2013); Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Labour in Germany under the Third Reich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 368.

14 Remmel, *From Cologne*, p. 58.

15 Detlev Peukert, Youth in the Third Reich. In: Richard Bessel (ed.), *Life in the Third Reich*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, pp. 25-40; here pp. 25, 30.

16 Gerhard Rempel, *Hitler's Children: the Hitler Youth and SS*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989, p. 91; Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany:*

stapo summarily publicly hanged Edelweiss Pirates in Cologne for collaborating with "racially inferior" Slav forced labourers.[17]

Thus Herbert's short Rhenish upbringing was the antithesis of any depiction of the German nation as monolithic, quiescent and intoxicated by Nazism, or one that simply complied with the oppressive dictatorship. His family did not fit into lazy stereotypes of Nazi Germany that many Irish readers may hold. Nonetheless, like other Germans Herbert and his family could not escape the war. Cologne was devastated by the Allied air bombing campaign. Following the first heavy air-raid on Cologne in May 1942 Herbert and his older brother, Hans, were despatched to relatives living in the outskirts of Hindenburg in Upper Silesia, on the then border with Poland.[18] But his father became convinced by July 1943 that Germany was losing the war against the Soviet Union so the boys were called back to Cologne.[19] The family evacuated to Zschornewitz in Lower Saxony (now Saxony-Anhalt) in late 1944 following the transformation of the right bank of the Rhine into a defensive zone against the Americans' advance into the Ardennes.[20] Zschornewitz was captured by Americans in April 1945.[21] Following their withdrawal, which left the village to the Red Army,[22] the family walked the 500 km back to Cologne.[23]

After the war life in Neurath was chaotic before some sort of order was established in the British zone. Herbert's father recuperated; but his health and strength remained poor; and he had no job.[24] In view of the collapse of food distribution networks, hunger preoccupied the Remmels as much as the general German population. Aid began to arrive but it proved insufficient, and the severe winter of 1945 lead to plundering of not alone food but also coal. Then news of Operation Shamrock, the Irish scheme to foster deserving German children for approximately three years, filtered through. As a pedigreed anti-Nazi Christian Remmel was in a position to get Herbert included.[25] Her-

Conformity, Opposition, and Racism in Everyday Life. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987; Michael H. Kater, *Hitler Youth*. Boston: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 136-340.

17 Remmel, *From Cologne*, p. 35; Kater, *Hitler Youth*, pp. 138, 159.

18 Remmel, *From Cologne*, p. 23.

19 Ibid., p. 27.

20 Ibid., pp. 37-38.

21 Ibid., p. 42.

22 Ibid., p. 47.

23 Ibid., pp. 50, 54.

24 Ibid., pp. 60-62.

25 Ibid., p. 62.

bert's aspiration was to live in the countryside;[26] as a child on the Neurath Estate he enjoyed the adjoining woods and farmland.[27] Ireland held out that prospect of fulfilling his desire.

Operation Shamrock fitted within Ireland's "quite liberal" post-war policy of admitting refugee children.[28] It reflected Irish assistance to the war-shattered continent. According to the Committee of the International Red Cross in Geneva in 1947, "[t]he Irish people raised a sum of £12m for the victims of the Second World War which was the equivalent to £4 per head of the population of the country. That was the largest single donation from any country for any post-war relief", and it represented the largest contribution per capita of any donating nationality.[29] Like other neutrals, Ireland quickly included war-torn Germany within the remit of its humanitarianism. Initially, the neutrals had to compensate for the lack of generosity in other quarters.[30]

Shamrock's impetus came from the Save the German Children Society (SGCS). In October 1945 its founder, the paediatrician Kathleen Murphy, summed up the society's aim as "to save as many German children as pos-

26 Ibid., p. 97.

27 Ibid., p. 17.

28 Dermot Keogh, *Jews in Twentieth-Century Ireland: Refugees, Anti-Semitism and the Holocaust*. Cork: Cork University Press, 1998, p. 210.

29 'How Germany is indebted to us', Letter by Pat Nolan. *Irish Independent*, 17 February 2013.

30 An expansive literature exists which analyses post-World War Two humanitarianism generally (targeted primarily at Europe and Asia). For an introduction into research on the belated and defective Allied humanitarian response to the German subsistence crisis, including forced expulsions from the East and the refugee crisis see: Robert A. Pollard, *Economic Security and the Origins of the Cold War, 1945-1950*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985, pp. 82-106; John Farquharson, "Emotional but Influential": Victor Gollancz, Richard Stokes and the British Zone of Germany, 1945-9. In: *Journal of Contemporary History* 22/3 (July 1987), pp. 501-519; David W. Ellwood, *Rebuilding Europe: Western Europe, America, and Postwar Reconstruction.* London: Longman, 1992, pp. 50-57; Atina Grossmann, Grams, Calories, and Food: Languages of Victimization, Entitlement, and Human Rights in Occupied Germany, 1945-1949. In: *Central European History* 44/1 (2011), pp. 118-148; Ben Shepherd, *The Long Road Home: The Aftermath of the Second World War*. New York: Knopf, 2011, pp. 120-137, 248-255; R.M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2012. For the Irish relief response to German needs in a European context see: Cathy Molohan, *Germany and Ireland 1945-1955: Two Nations' Friendship*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1999, pp. 29-66; Mervyn O'Driscoll, "Die Stunde Null": Appraising Irish Relief to Post-war Germany. In: Claire O'Reilly and Veronica O'Regan (eds.), *Ireland and the Irish in Germany: Reception and Perception*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2014, pp. 63-84.

sible from death by starvation".[31] However, the intemperate anti-British utterances of some members at its inaugural meeting in October 1945 seriously undermined these intentions. Their extreme and crude Anglophobic genus of Irish nationalism alienated the Irish and British authorities and the Irish Red Cross took over the programme. The Irish Red Cross told the *Irish Independent* in 1946: "Our aim is to get as many children as we can out of Germany, with the appalling housing and food conditions there.[32]

The goal was to foster approximately 1000 traumatised, malnourished and deserving children from Germany, France and Austria. Predominantly Catholic children were catered for reflecting the predominant religious make-up of the Irish population and the religious affiliations of most of the host families.[33] Many who eventually benefited from the programme originated from Catholic families in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia in the British occupied zone. Irish society was generally exercised at the Nazi regime's treatment of the Catholic Church and its systematic abuse of its Concordat with the Pope during the 1930s.[34] From an Irish standpoint, the North Rhine-Westphalia region comprised politically deserving fellow Catholics. They were understood to be far less supportive of Nazism and as such were viewed as particularly worthy.[35]

Herbert's inclusion in Operation Shamrock was a result of his possession of a Catholic baptismal certificate.[36] Prevailing Catholic Irish mores might have been offended if it became known that Herbert was the son of an atheist

31 Molohan, *Germany and Ireland*, p. 45.

32 'Post-war relief'. *Irish Independent*, 22 July 1949, p. 8; 'Homes in Eire for German Children'. *Irish Independent*, 28 August 1946, p. 46.

33 See Molohan, *Germany*, pp. 44-61. For 'Operation Shamrock' a recent TV documentary provides background and personal testimony from some of those who came to Ireland as German refugee children under the auspices of Operation Shamrock. Go to: http://vimeo.com/68386165 (accessed 20 December 2013). A comparably well-researched German language documentary that traced approximately 250 former children from Germany and France was produced by SchmidtFilm in 2002. See: http://www.schmidt-film.com/Irische_Orangen_Irish_Oranges.html (accessed 20 December 2013).

34 Mervyn O'Driscoll, *Ireland, Germany and the Nazis: Politics and Diplomacy, 1919-1939*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004, pp. 161, 255, 263; Mervyn O'Driscoll, Inter-war Irish-German Diplomacy: Continuity, Ambiguity and Appeasement in Irish Foreign Policy. In: Michael Kennedy and Joseph Morrison Skelly (eds.), *Irish Foreign Policy 1919-1966: From Independence to Internationalism*. Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000, pp. 87-89.

35 'British Colonel's Moving Plea – Plight of Cologne's Population'. *Irish Independent*, 3 September 1949, p. 2.

36 Remmel, *From Cologne*, p. 65.

and a "Red" to boot. The anti-communist feeling of the highly confessional Irish has been a matter for much historical comment. Herbert's baptism had occurred without the explicit permission of his father. His family was non-religious and the children were not baptised. It was probably his Catholic Aunty Barbara (his mother's sister) who contrived to baptise him and his brother at Hindenburg, Upper Silesia, when they were moved there to save them from the Allied blitz of Cologne. The justification was that she had no money for Christmas presents for her nephews, but the Catholic community was giving presents to all the parish children. A bargain was struck: Herbert and Hans would receive Christmas presents first and they would be baptised a month later (25 January 1943). Herbert was six years and four months old when he was baptised.[37] His grounding in Catholicism was primitive at best and it was not followed up with instruction or practice when the Remmel boys were recalled to Cologne shortly afterwards. Nonetheless the baptism granted Herbert the necessary entry ticket to Ireland in 1946.

Herbert saw his prospective Irish expedition as full of possibilities. Although he had no knowledge of Ireland, he initiated and persisted with his intention to go to Ireland in 1946 despite his mother's protestations. Indicative of the general ignorance of Ireland was the jibe of his classmates when he announced his intention to go to Ireland: "He wants to go to Irrland, to visit the erratic". This was a pun on the pronunciation of Ireland as *Irrland* in German, and *Irrer* signified an insane person. However, for Herbert life was hungry and dull in Cologne, his mother and father were both unwell. Ireland promised to fulfil his yearning to live on a farm and the memoir gives little or no sense of uprootedness when he left Cologne for Ireland.[38]

As part of the first contingent of German children on Operation Shamrock, he travelled from Cologne to Ireland via France and England in July 1946. His first impressions of Ireland were positive. On disembarking in Dun Laoighaire Ireland appeared to be a land of plenty and warm welcomes. He and the other German children were hugged and petted. Food was abundant. There was chocolate. As Remmel records, "we feel like Gods in France […] in Ireland […] now I'm a great German boy".[39] He got his first ride in a car and ate traditional apple pie: "I can still taste that".[40] The children were the centre of attention – exotic individuals in a former wartime neutral where the natural frame of reference was Britain and America. Herbert and his German

37 Ibid., p. 23-24.

38 Ibid., p. 62.

39 Ibid., p. 71.

40 Ibid., p. 75.

friends were "open-mouthed" in wonderment when they were driven through the main street in Dublin, O'Connell Street, on 27 July 1946. Dublin was untouched by war, a bustling city, a "paradise" in contrast to decimated Cologne.[41]

The children were finally accommodated in an isolated and improvised former army barracks at Glencree in the Wicklow Mountains. This reception centre later provided the location for a central German war cemetery after 1960 for the remains of all servicemen who had drowned in Irish waters or crashed on Irish soil during the Second World War.[42] In 1974 the ex-barracks was transformed into the site of the Centre for Peace and Reconciliation to promote peace and understanding in Northern Ireland and abroad.[43] It could hardly have been anticipated in 1946 that the site would later obtain such German-Irish significance.

Herbert's desire for a rural life was not immediately satisfied. To his disappointment Remmel was fostered by an urban family from the Inchicore district of Dublin, the Cunninghams. They lived in a small two-storey terrace house with rooms that were even smaller than what he was accustomed to in Cologne during normal times. He spent a few months with the Cunninghams; but the time proved to be an instructive one. Immersed in a foreign monolingual environment, he quickly acquired the English language. He absorbed a lot more too including Irish nationalist history from Mr Cunningham, who had allegedly participated in the Easter 1916 Rising against British rule and was evidently a follower of Eamon de Valera and Fianna Fáil. This can be deduced from this devotion to the reading of the *Irish Press*, the organ of the de Valera family.[44] Mr Cunningham educated Herbert about the history of Ireland and taught him Irish patriotic songs.[45] But following Mr Cunningham's loss of employment, Herbert had to return to Glencree and await re-

41 Ibid., p. 72.

42 Molohan, *Germany and Ireland*, pp. 36-38.

43 Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation, http://www.glencree.ie/site/who_we_are.htm (accessed 9 January 2014).

44 Remmel, *From Cologne*, pp. 81-82. For the *Irish Press*, the Irish national newspaper as an organ of the Fianna Fáil party which dominated Irish politics after 1932, and its ownership and control by the party's leader Eamon de Valera and his family, see Mark O'Brien, *De Valera, Fianna Fáil and the Irish Press: Truth in the News?* Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2001; Tim Pat Coogan, *De Valera: Long Fellow, Long Shadow*. London: Hutchinson, 1993, pp. 151, 158, 408, 417-421, 429-432, 442-445, 674-678; Earl of Longford and T.P. O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera*. London: Hutchinson, 1970, pp. 168, 177, 207, 217-219, 269-271, 377-378, 436, 451-452.

45 Remmel, *From Cologne*, p. 89.

allocation. This time he realized his ambition of living on a farm, when the Nally family of Co. Mayo chose him.

A substantial proportion of his memoir (c. 40 per cent) is devoted to describing in affectionate detail the manifold aspects of his rural experiences in Ballinlough. Daily life, farm errands and agricultural tasks are explained. Photographs of traditional agricultural implements (horse-drawn harrows, turf spades, mowing machines, hay knives) and activities (horse ploughing, cutting turf, saving hay) dot the memoir. These are accompanied by detailed descriptions of the rhythms and rituals of farm life. The text is peppered with a wry commentary that displays irony and reflection. In terms of spreading manure with a dung-fork, Remmel puns: "It was practically a tradition that youngsters got stuck in, spreading the muck with the fork – and it was certainly not held in bad odour as child labour."[46] In toto, Remmel betrays keen insights on what was to all intents and purposes subsistence farming. All the family worked to produce the food and fuel the household needed. The family depended on the sale of a few cattle to generate the annual income for other necessities to sustain life. The ebb and flow of life and work on these small Irish farms had only changed marginally since the nineteenth century and animal fairs, or fair days, were the critical commercial and social events in the calendar.

Remmel conjures up a strong sense of rural community and neighbours working together to provide horses, agricultural equipment and labour as needed in an unspoken cooperative pact. There is a strong sense of insulation from domestic political or international matters. Only once does he mention Irish political affairs. Of course, this partially reflects the perceptions of a child who was not fully privy to adult concerns, interests or perceptions. But it is not without basis as a reflection of the typical worldview from a small Irish farm at the time. Interactions with the outside world were severely constrained by a lack of necessity, money, transport, telecommunications or even regular access to newspapers or other reading materials. Remmel relished the inclusion and simplicity of this apparently immutable Irish country life. He revelled in the lifestyle, its family-centred nature, the sense of community and equality, and the unspoiled environment. To a significant degree it was what contemporary commentators conjure as the ideal of traditional, predominantly organic and sustainable, farming. This small farm model on the western seaboard only receded dramatically with the Common Agricultural Policy on Irish entry to the European Economic Community (EEC) after 1973. Remmel recollects that there was only one chemical ever used on the Nally farm – the

46 Ibid., p. 113.

preventive spray against potato blight. This unique inclusion of modern methods is poignant as the Great Irish Famine was caused by potato blight a century earlier (1845-1848). Indeed Herbert documents the centrality of potatoes ("the holy potato") as an Irish staple in the 1940s.[47]

Life was simple and local as Remmel clarifies from personal experience. A tractor with a threshing machine first appeared in the locality during Remmel's second year at Ballinlough. That was an event of major excitement.[48] Tar roads were a rarity.[49] Donkey and carts were a common mode of transport.[50] Herbert also records how the local general store was like a Reuters news agency.[51] The manner in which he records his experience of the communal atmosphere of 'saving turf' in the bogs during spring and summer is illuminating. Neighbouring families engaged in "back-breaking" work, the children played together, and their parents gossiped and socialised. Herbert writes that on such days "I'd lie in the middle of these Irish, racy of the soil, belonged with them, am accepted, feel at home: convince myself that I'm at least half-Irish. I could purr with well-being."[52]

This was despite the lack of any luxuries. Even the basic amenities of modern life that he had grown accustomed to in Germany were absent. There was no electricity, running water or toilet. Water was drawn from a spring-well. Remmel had to "toughen up", a typical rural Irish idiom.[53] His entire text is punctuated with Irish expressions, sentence patterns or favourite word choices, for example, 'yarn' (tall tale),[54] "nuneen" (nun),[55] "palaver" (extended confused discussion),[56] "spuds" (potatoes),[57] and "shitty".[58] Notwithstanding Herbert's sense of belonging and his evident acceptance by his foster families and the local communities, the reception of Remmel as a German by the Irish and English he encountered is more multifaceted than it might at first appear.

47 See ibid., pp. 116-117 for his discussion of Irish potato growing and consumption.
48 Ibid., p. 127.
49 Ibid., p. 133.
50 Ibid., p. 75.
51 Ibid., p. 130.
52 Ibid., p. 122.
53 Ibid., p. 98.
54 Ibid., p. 141.
55 Ibid., p. 73.
56 Ibid., p. 155.
57 Ibid., p. 116.
58 Ibid., p. 158.

His passage through England to Ireland in 1946 set the scene. On landing in England, an immigration official misheard his name as Rommel. This provoked a temporary venomous "paroxysm" on the part of the man who evidently drew a connection between Herbert Remmel and the "Desert Fox", Field Marshal Erwin Rommel. Rommel's *Afrikakorps* was the nemesis of British forces in the North African campaign after 1941. In London, Herbert and his friends fell momentarily into the mode of German-British hostility: with the words "Bomben auf Engelland", they threw a melon off a bridge on to a passing train. In general though he was struck with how friendly the English he met were and he recalls his mystification at his positive reception.[59]

In Ireland he found that one or two of the anti-British jokes that he acquired during the war provoked considerable amusement when he told them to Irish adults.[60] This reflected the oppositional construction of Irish national identity against Britain. On being made available for fostering, Herbert did not fit into the common Irish idealised perception of the German physical type: blond and blue eyed. Lacking these desirable colours he was among the last of the German children to be fostered.[61] It would seem, therefore, that racial profiling or racism affected the choices of intending Irish foster parents. Irish attitudes to Germans defy easy generalisation. On one hand, some of Ballinlough's denizens might claim that Irish people had refuelled German U-boats off the west coast (an impossibility since submarine fuel was not available in Ireland) in an effort to build a rapport,[62] and other Irish would laugh at his anti-British jokes, but it was not so simple.

He encountered several instances of anti-German sentiment in Inchicore. He notes that some of his school classmates there were unhappy at his presence. Several had relatives who had fought with the Allies during the war. This reflected the large numbers of Irish who had joined the British and American armed forces.[63] Perhaps some of his classmates were influenced by

59 Ibid., pp. 68-69.

60 For example ibid., p. 80.

61 Ibid., p. 81.

62 Ibid., p. 122.

63 Irish volunteering to fight in the British armed forces during the Second World War was once a neglected topic in Irish historiography, but in recent years work has progressed strongly to reconcile this deficit. The result is that there is a developing literature on Irish people in the service of Allied forces during the Second World War. Richard Doherty in particular has published prolifically on the subject. Some of the notable publications include: Richard Doherty, *Irish Generals: Irish Generals in the British Army in the 2nd World War*. Belfast: Appletree, 1993; Brian Girvin and Geoffrey Roberts, The Forgotten Volunteers of World War II. In: *History Ireland* 6/1 (1998), pp. 46-51; Richard Doherty, *Irish Men and Women in the Second World War*.

British and American war propaganda films? As a result he and the other German boys who attended the school had to defend themselves in fist fights provoked by some Irish children's antipathy towards Germany and its association with Nazism. But these conflicts gradually receded.[64]

When he moved to Ballinlough, he was quickly absorbed into the community. Indeed his foreign and German origin was an advantage in a world where only a few families owned a "wireless" (radio),[65] or had regular ready access to newspapers or the means to purchase them. He was a source of information about the world beyond Mayo, as most of this farming community had not ever ventured far from their homesteads except to buy and sell at fairs and local towns. There was an appetite for news and trustworthy information about the outside world. Distant neighbours quizzed him about the war and life in Nazi Germany when they had a chance.[66] Whenever he visited the mill in the town of Balla, he was feted. The Deutz diesel motor of the mill had been manufactured in Cologne and his grandfather Johann had once worked there. Herbert had to retell his stock of stories about the Deutz Motor factory whenever he visited the mill.[67] He noted the Irish love of story-telling and the high social value placed on the art of conversation. He tried to emulate it.[68]

Herbert's encounters with and initiation into Irish Catholic practices are also worth considering. They confirm perceptions about the centrality of Catholicism in mid-twentieth-century Ireland. His first brush with Catholicism had, as we have seen, ended with his baptism in Hindenburg. It was a different matter in Ireland. When he arrived at Liverpool Docks in July 1946 destined for Ireland, nuns took charge of the final leg of the voyage of the children. On landing in Dun Laoghaire a young couple gave him chocolate and "a Rosary Beads with green glass pearls".[69] Herbert began to appreciate the depth of Irish religious feeling when he came to live with his first foster family, the Cunninghams. He attended, as was the norm, a Catholic primary school "Our Lady of Lourdes". He noticed the daily rituals including the re-

Dublin: Four Courts, 1999; Richard Doherty, *Irish Volunteers in the Second World War*. Dublin: Four Courts, 2002; Steven O'Connor, *Irish Officers in the British Armed Forces, 1922-45*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; Aidan McElwaine, The Oral History of the Volunteers. In: Brian Girvin and Geoffrey Roberts (eds.), *Ireland and the Second World War*. Dublin: Four Courts, 2000, pp. 107-120.

64 Remmel, *From Cologne*, p. 83.

65 Ibid., p. 121.

66 Ibid., p. 122.

67 Ibid., p. 132.

68 Ibid., pp. 122-123, 133.

69 Ibid., p. 70.

peated signing of the cross every time people passed a church or a cemetery, and the devotional ringing of the Angelus throughout the country. In a comical scene Herbert reveals how "Granny" Cunningham was aghast to discover that he was totally ignorant of Catholic practices. On probing she discovered that he had never made his first communion even though he was over ten years old. By way of explanation, and in a move that played to Irish nationalist feeling, he blamed the English for destroying "all the German factories producing hosts". This gap was promptly rectified by the Cunninghams and the parish priest.[70]

With his second foster family at Ballinlough, the Catholicization process continued. The parish priest would frequent the school regularly to instruct and test the pupils, including Herbert, on the catechism. He became an apprentice altar boy because holding the position of altar boy was a mark of status.[71] Religious significance was also vested in the landscape. The Irish Catholic faith was ubiquitous. The Nally homestead and farm at Ballinlough had a view of Croagh Patrick on a summer's day. Remmel narrates: "our house in Ballinlough occupied a privileged position, one that would be the envy of 95 per cent of the Catholic Irish […] Croagh Patrick […] is Ireland's Holy Mountain, on which St. Patrick is said to have spent several weeks". The patron saint of Ireland was reputed, according to popular lore, to have banished all the snakes from Ireland from atop Croagh Patrick.[72] The contrast between Nazi Germany and his home in the heavily left-leaning Neurath Estate was marked.

Remmel's idiomatic and entertaining memoir reveals that he was accepted by his foster families and treated as an equal and ordinary family member, like a son in fact. He refers to Granny Nally as "my Irish granny" who was kind and tender.[73] Her remaining son on the farm, the 23 or 24 year old Eugene, transformed into his "big brother". They became inseparable and were termed the "United Irishmen" in jest on occasion.[74] It illustrates though

70 Ibid., p. 85.

71 Ibid., pp. 109-110.

72 Ibid., p. 147.

73 Ibid., p. 44.

74 Ibid., p. 97. The Society of the United Irishmen was a radical club established in 1791 in Belfast and Dublin that grew progressively revolutionary and clandestine in the face of oppression. In 1794 it became a sworn underground society whose objective was the establishment of an Irish republic. It drew its inspiration from radical ideas emerging from the American and French Revolutions and it wanted a democratic Irish republic encouraging its leaders to seek military assistance from revolutionary France and later Napoleon. A United Irishmen uprising with French intervention was subdued with uncontrolled savagery in 1798 and most of its key leaders, no-

how the immigrant had assimilated. He had learned the English language and become attuned to the cultural nuances. In time his accent changed. He generated considerable amusement when he arrived at the Dublin Red Cross offices in July 1949. Scheduled for return to Cologne, the Irish staff of the Red Cross discovered that he possessed a heavy Mayo accent.[75] He had immersed in society and become Irish.

To what extent the passage of time and selective memory have granted his reminiscences a more sanguine hue is difficult to determine. These are standard issues with all memoirs composed at a remove from the events they recollect. But undoubtedly his Irish interlude was a formative and positive adventure from his perspective and he had been a willing immigrant in Ireland. His maintenance of links with his childhood Irish friends and foster families over the decades is a testament to that; Remmel's encounter with Ireland was a joyful and enriching one.

To an extent Remmel's autobiographical efforts fit into the genre of German Hibernophile literature established so impressively by Heinrich Böll's *Irisches Tagebuch* (1957).[76] It is perhaps accidental that Böll and Remmel's books are centred in the same poor rural county on the western seaboard of Ireland, County Mayo. They both betray a sense of wonderment at the quality of unassuming Irish rural lives, the sense of community and the landscape. In Remmel's case, however, there is less of a critical sense as his

tably Theobald Wolfe Tone, were killed or executed. The movement was finally extirpated in 1803. See Marianne Elliott, *Wolfe Tone: Prophet of Irish Independence*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1989; Paul Weber, *On the Road to Rebellion: The United Irishmen and Hamburg 1796-1803*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1997; Nancy Curtin, *The United Irishmen: Popular Politics in Ulster and Dublin, 1791-1798*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

75 Remmel, *From Cologne*, p. 161.

76 The *Tagebuch* launched a surge of German fascination with Ireland after its publication in 1957. See Cecile Cazort Zorach, Two Faces of Erin: The Dual Journey in Heinrich Böll's *Irisches Tagebuch*. In: *Germanic Review* 1 (1978), pp. 124-131; Gisela Holfter, *Heinrich Böll and Ireland*. Foreword by Hugo Hamilton. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011; Gisela Holfter, *Erlebnis Irland, Deutsche Reiseberichte über Ireland im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1996; Gisela Holfter, From Bestseller to Failure? Heinrich Böll's *Irisches Tagebuch* (Irish Journal) to *Irland und seine Kinder* (Children of Eire). In: Christiane Schönfeld and Hermann Rasche (eds.), *Processes of Transposition: German Literature and Film* (Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Neueren Germanistik, 63). Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007, pp. 207-221; Eoin Bourke, Romantisierende Irlandbücher versteckte Deutschlandbücher? Das Irlandbild in der neueren deutschen Reiseliteratur. In: Wulf Segebrecht et al. (eds.), *Europa in den europäischen Literaturen der Gegenwart.* Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 2003, pp. 187-199; here p. 188; Gisela Holfter, On the Influences of Heinrich Böll. In: *Munitir Acla* 8 (1997), pp. 29-32.

recollections self-consciously endeavour to "retain the child's view of events".[77] In contrast to the later Nobel Laureate Böll, Remmel's book is a very personal and familial enterprise: it is published and translated for a unique and small German-Irish community of families and friends. It partially corresponds to a genre of homespun literature that is popular among Irish readers from a rural background and nostalgically recollects a traditional and plain rural lifestyle. Many older rural Irish dwellers would probably recognise Remmel's account of life in the 1940s and 1950s as authentic. Herbert's memories of community, family, school, and frugality would resonate deeply with those of rural origin. They reflect the realities of small family farm living before the arrival of large scale technology and commercial agriculture. But whether all would recall that pre-modern lifestyle so uncritically is doubtful as the life was hard and sparse.

Remmel's contribution possesses resonances with the work of Alice Taylor and her major Irish bestseller from 1988, *To School through the Fields*, as well as her subsequent published recollections.[78] They too fondly recall a rural childhood before modernisation and mechanisation began in earnest from the 1960s in the West of Ireland. But *From Cologne to Ballinlough* is distinctive in that it involves a non-Irish author and this grants the account a comparative, external and transcultural dimension. Furthermore, Remmel's work so carefully documents farm practices and machinery that it blends unpretentious memoir with an almanac of traditional Irish farming practices. It also fits within an emerging genre of literature by former German children who were assisted by Operation Shamrock and who retrospectively interrogate the impacts of their Irish experiences on their identity and memories.[79] His work is a noteworthy work of double cultural translation informing both his Irish and German readers about his life in both countries.

The memoir's publication in English by the Aubane Historical Society of Millstreet, Co. Cork, is worth mentioning for several reasons. Aubane performed an important service in bringing Remmel's work to an Irish audience. In doing so, they allowed Remmel to expand the first German edition to provide additional background on his life in both Nazi Germany and early post-war Germany, a topic of interest to an Irish audience. Aubane published the memoir because the Society valued its account of 1940s rural Ireland as a tool in a major Irish historical debate. The foreword to *From Cologne to Ballinlough* was by Jack Lane, a leading member of the Society. Lane promoted

77 Remmel, *From Cologne*, p. 5.

78 Alice Taylor, *To School through the Fields*. Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1988.

79 Klaus Kramer, *A Unique Love Affair with Ireland*. Drogheda: Choice, 2009.

Remmel's work as a remedy to the "current literary mindset". He contended that the book was a remedy for the "dire" "'squinting windows' theme" of the "literati" "and more usually descriptions of various forms of awfulness for mind and body and hints of even more."[80]

Lane provided no specifics as to who the 'literati' were. But he appeared to suggest that there was a dominant stream of Irish intellectual and indeed public discourse that was unfairly critical of Irish rural society during the 1940s and the 1950s. Many scholars have suggested Ireland has entered a post-nationalist era; and some are critical of traditional nationalist accounts of Irish history, politics and society for focusing excessively on Anglo-Irish antagonisms and not adopting a sufficiently critical eye when assessing independent Ireland. They believe this Anglo-Irish lens that dominates nationalist accounts is a limiting binary perspective that is neither accurate nor useful.[81] In recent years there has been a growing historical, intellectual and media focus on the social question (the failure of independent Ireland to provide a reasonable livelihood and respect for all of its offspring regardless of class, gender etc.), which had previously been politically subordinated to the national question (attainment of full national sovereignty and the end to partition). The 1940s and 1950s are frequently characterised by scholars as a period of mass rural emigration, authoritarianism, restrictiveness, inertia, deprivation, ignorance, economic failure, lack of opportunities, stagnation under a political gerontocracy, clericalism, uncritical confessionalism, oppressive social conformity and so on.[82]

In contrast Remmel's memoir offers an individual and sympathetic interpretation of rural Ireland that elevates its humanity, sense of community, ecology, sense of place and moral economy. It appreciates and exults in the pre-modern way of life of the small Irish family farm. This supports Lane's

80 Lane, 'Foreword'. In: Remmel, *From Cologne*, p. 3.

81 Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Culture, Philosophy*. London: Routledge, 1997.

82 Such themes dominate practically all histories that devote space to the 1940s and 1950s. Illustrative samples include: J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989; K. Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland since 1800: Conflict and Conformity*. London: Longman, 1989; Brian Girvin, *From Union to Union: Nationalism, Democracy and Religion in Ireland – Act of Union to EU*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2002; Tim Pat Coogan, *Ireland in the Twentieth Century*. London: Hutchinson, 2003; Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900-2000*. London: Profile, 2004; Dermot Keogh, *Twentieth-Century Ireland: Revolution and State Building*. Revised ed. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005; Alvin Jackson, *Ireland 1798-1998: War, Peace and Beyond*. 2nd ed. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

contention that the rural west of Ireland in the late 1940s was not the dystopia that many 'literati' have depicted. For Lane, Remmel's memoir offers an authentic external frame of reference from an innocent non-Irish child who had survived dictatorship and wartime destruction.

In general, Aubane Historical Society is a prolific local historical society that defends nationalist readings of Irish history, most notably in controversies surrounding aspects of the conduct of the Irish War of Independence (1919-1921) and its aftermath, the Irish Civil War (1922-1923).[83] The society, or a number of its officers and members, contends that some professional historians are 'revisionist'. By this Aubane suggests they engage in the deconstruction of nationalist accounts and/or lack empathy for Irish natives who were subjected to historical injustices.[84] They accuse 'revisionist' historians of relativizing Irish history, denigrating the achievement of independence and conveniently neglecting the crimes of the British conquest of Ireland.

Roy Foster (R.F. Foster), Professor of Irish History, University of Oxford has attracted the particular attention of Aubane; there is a widespread view that he represents the most revisionist historian of modern Ireland. He specialises in literary and cultural history and has gained many honours. Perhaps not unrelated to Aubane's decision to publish Remmel's childhood memoir was the fact that Jack Lane, Brendan Clifford and other members of the society were particularly displeased at Foster's *The Irish Story*.[85] As part of this 2001 work Foster critically examined Irish childhood biographies; he argued that many were retrospective, idealized and romanticised personal histories of Irish rural upbringing. He ventured to allude that in some cases they were re-imaginings, at least to a degree.[86] Indeed Alice Taylor earned Foster's

83 Philip O'Connor, *Coolacrease: The True Story of the Pearson Executions – An Incident in the Irish War of Independence*. Millstreet: Aubane Historical Society, 2008; Owen Sheridan, *Propaganda as Anti-History: Peter Hart's 'The IRA and its Enemies' Examined*. Millstreet: Aubane Historical Society, 2008; Brian P. Murphy and Niall Meehan, *A Tenth Anniversary Critique of Peter Hart's The IRA and its Enemies (1998)*. Millstreet: Aubane Historical Society, 2008.

84 Aubane History Society, *Aubane Versus Oxford: A Response to Professor Roy Foster and Bernard O'Donoghue*. Millstreet: Aubane Historical Society, 2002; Jack Lane, *An Answer to Revisionists: Éamon Ó Cuív and others launch Seán Moylan's Memoir*. Millstreet: Aubane Historical Society, 2004; Brendan Clifford and Julianne Herlihy, *Envoi: Taking Leave of Roy Foster*. Millstreet: Aubane Historical Society, 2006.

85 R.F. Foster, *The Irish Story: Telling Tales and Making it Up in Ireland*. London: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 2001.

86 Ibid., p. 167.

negative consideration for living in 'a parallel universe',[87] and allegedly conjuring a bucolic utopia in rural West Cork.

Although Lane never directly named Foster in his foreword to *From Cologne to Ballinlough*, there is a sense that he aspired to authenticating and corroborating such affirming Irish personal histories of rural life as those of Alice Taylor. It was also a handy tool in Aubane's wider offensive against Foster and historical revisionism generally. Lane pronounced that Remmel's memoir revealed an incisive and instinctive understanding of the realities of Irish life and history. He draws on a passage by Remmel (page 144) to prove his point: Herbert's Irish "Granny" (grandmother) wore black like "older ladies" in Ireland even though it was not "peasant-wear" because "[t]he British had seen to that in their colonial days. They would only tolerate the existence of poor tenants, not peasants and property rights."[88] Lane drew on this passage by Remmel to underline that the traditional Gaelic clans were conquered and dispossessed by the English crown to create the Irish landlord-tenant system in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Accordingly, Lane proceeded in the introduction to explain that Irish rural society had not evolved in line with West European norms via feudalism, an organic landlord/vassal relationship and a peasant life. Instead a deeply conflictual and humiliating tenant-landlord relationship dominated Ireland until the late nineteenth century. Then political and land agitation finally enabled the tenants to purchase the estates of the landlords in a series of Land Acts. This act of dismantling the landlord system was reluctantly regularised by a British state that now wished to appease Irish rural anger and bitterness. By alluding to the troubled and complex 'Land Question' that dominated modern Ireland, Lane implied that the 'literati' should not neglect this distressed history or the pernicious effects and memories of the early modern dispossession on Irish society. Their critiques and identification of negative aspects of Irish rural society, or the failings of the independent Irish state to provide for its population particularly in overpopulated western coastal counties such as Co. Mayo in the mid-twentieth century, were thus overdone from Lane's perspective. The people that Remmel lived among in the Co. Mayo had long ago been alienated from the land, and only relatively recently reacquired ownership of that lost inheritance he implies. Lane co-opted Remmel to rebut the literati's disapproval of rural Ireland and its society as backward, oppressive and miserable. Lane's foreword was a cultural translation of

87 Ibid., p. 168.

88 Remmel, *From Cologne*, pp. 3-4.

Remmel's work and he enlisted it for inclusion in the Aubane anti-revisionist canon.

Regardless of whether the balance of historical evidence and argument supports the contentions of either Lane and Aubane on one hand, or the 'literati'/'revisionists'/'postnationalists' on the other, Remmel's work is filled with cultural insights for the vigilant German or Irish reader. Even the factors impelling a poor rural family, the Nallys of Ballinlough, to foster Herbert in the first place are instructive. It was a familiar story of the erosion of Irish rural life – emigration. Granny Nally had had a large family of 13 children. All but two of them (Mae and Eugene) had left home when Herbert arrived. Most had emigrated to America to seek employment.[89] Mae was about to emigrate to the US following in the footsteps of her siblings. As Herbert recalls: "In Ireland of those days there were only three alternatives: remain a spinster, marry a farmer, or emigrate." There was no education or training available and few jobs in the Irish cities.[90] The Nallys decided that they would foster a young German boy before Mae left. He would assist Granny Nally and Eugene with the farm. So there was utility mixed with altruism in the fostering of young Herbert. As Herbert himself hints the Nallys had meagre resources but they were happy. They lived in a small straw-roofed Irish cottage in "sparse circumstances".[91] All their neighbours were in a similar condition. It was normal. The Nallys ensured that he was well provided for and integrated fully into the family. The central underlying theme of his memoir is that despite the absence of material wealth the quality of Irish life was priceless.

However, it is difficult not to acknowledge the tragedy too. The Nally family did not survive in Ballinlough for very much longer. In the 1950s, after Herbert had returned to Cologne, "Granny Nally" died and Eugene followed Mae to America. There he "pined" for life on the farm.[92]

One cannot escape the conclusion that Herbert experienced a dying way of life in rural Ireland. It held out the prospect of limited or no opportunities in terms of economic recompense or even marriage. The urban centres of Ireland, the UK and America proved either necessary or impossibly attractive for many young Irish rural dwellers. Herbert's memoir is a snapshot of a rural Ireland that was in the process of slow disintegration and it represents a celebration of some of the virtues of a lost way of life. It is bittersweet and Rem-

89 Ibid., p. 97.

90 Ibid., p. 148.

91 Ibid., p. 149.

92 Ibid., p. 168.

mel is fully aware of the paradox unlike Lane. It can be noted in several passages of the autobiography. The contradictory quality of his Irish stopover is best encapsulated in Herbert's self-portrayal as a 12-year-old standing on the stern of the steamer looking at the retreating landmass of Ireland on the return journey to Cologne in 1949:

> How poor the country was, with thousands of young people leaving their homeland every year, how spartan and hard the life of the people. Yet what a wealth of human values was native to this nation of the Irish. What exuberant cordiality did I experience, what open-heartedness and attachment, what overwhelming hospitality haven't these Irish afforded and not just to me.[93]

93 Ibid., pp. 161-162.