

Europe 2014

I. Ireland

Friday May 30

My journey to Boston to catch an Aer Lingus flight to Shannon on Sunday was postponed owing to a general feeling of exhaustion, accompanied by drowsiness, gastric upsets, indigestion, insomnia and so forth. For two months prior to a planned 10 week sojourn in Europe, last from 8 to 10 weeks, I'd worked steadily to complete as many projects as I could.

No one accuses me of avoiding work, but since there is never any materialization of material benefits, people say, "What's the point, Roy?"

The point, as gangster/crooner Frank Sinatra proclaimed: "I did it my way!" Or the battle cry of Gilgamesh, who sallies forth to "set up the names in the land of the living"!

There were the usual preparations and delays, the visit to the eye doctor, 3 apartment inspections (in one week! (government subsidized housing)), extensive renovations of the building itself, (Liberty Commons).

The resultant of these vectorial forces was that, in the process of working to free myself to enjoy my travels, I'd become too worn-out to do any traveling! It all caught up with me 10 days or so before setting out for what bid fair to be (and what did in fact turn out to be), a thoroughly fulfilling jaunt through Ireland, England, Belgium and France.

Boston, May 29-31



There isn't much to report about my 2 nights at the Boston Youth Hostel (now relocated on Stuart Street, a block away from Boston Common, in the heart of Chinatown, and a short walk to the South Station train and bus terminals.) The one noteworthy event was the min-emergency caused by the unannounced strike of the crews in Ireland, of Aer Lingus. The strike, which shut down flights all over the world, began on Friday, May 30th and lasted 24 hours.

I'd found out about it from a brief article on the inside pages of the Boston Globe. The information it provided was a bit confusing in that one couldn't tell when the strike had begun. My flight on an Aer Lingus plane was scheduled for 7:30 PM on Sunday, June 1; there was, of course, a chance that the strike could be held over beyond that time.

After a few futile attempts at getting the information I needed from travel agents in Cambridge and Boston, I hopped onto a Silver Line bus at South Station and went out to Logan Airport. Partway to Logan the

bus switches from electric power to diesel, inviting the invention of fatuous mental calculations concerning the relative environmental damage of each energy source!

Aer Lingus is located in Terminal E. The section set aside for check-in and boarding arrangements was completely deserted. I found an airline attendant who walked with me to the neon bulletin boards, which indicated that there were no cancellations on Aer Lingus flights. Satisfied, I boarded the next Silver Line back to South Station, the Youth Hostel, and a mediocre meal in a neighboring Chinese/Vietnamese restaurant.

Ireland, June 1-10

The elderly couple on the seats adjacent to mine on the Aer Lingus flight were more boring than is customary, so there is no incentive to say anything about them. However, one of the airlines stewardesses was unusually charming and warm, (and spoke to me gently with one of those poignant Irish accents!)



The plane landed around 6:15 AM, Western European Time, at Shannon Airport. The routine for taking the buses to other places in Ireland is very confusing, and I was unhappy to see that nothing has changed since first coming there in 2008. To get a bus ticket one must use a vending machine located in an out-of-the-way place in the terminal. If you're coming there for the first time, someone has to direct you to where it is. The instructions for using the machine are not at all clear; usually one has to find someone to explain how to do so.

It is wise to have something like 100 or more euros in one's wallet before starting out. Normally the euro is 4/3rds of a dollar, about \$1.33. American Express at Logan Airport trades at \$1.55! The rate on the plane was \$1.40. At the Galway branch of the Bank of Ireland the next day, I exchanged \$100 at \$1.38 to the dollar. Large amounts of money can be lost by not waiting to find the best rate available in whatever situation one is in.

The woman at the information booth at Shannon, an extremely friendly woman, as people tend to be in Ireland, put me in touch with John Behan, my host in Galway for a week. He arranged to meet me at 9:50, when the bus was scheduled to pull in after a 2 hour journey. In fact the bus arrived at the Galway train and bus station on Eyre Square at 9:35 AM. This was no great matter, save that I'd already discovered that the weather was bitterly wet and cold. Even in Ireland this is a bit unusual for the first week of June. The inside of the decaying train station was no warmer than the outside, so I sat down on the steps and shivered until John showed up in a taxi to take me to his home on the Lower Canal Road.



John and Emer Behan

His wife, Emer, recently died of cancer. His house shows clear signs of being the residence of a couple, with many traces of Emer's presence everywhere in evidence.



John Behan's house on Lower Canal Road, Galway

One of them is the computer on which the notes for this report were typed up. John has thoroughly rejected the home computer revolution; the room where Emer worked (she was a doctor and public health official) has been left untouched since her death.



Doves, by John Behan

John is the most successful sculptor living in Ireland today. Take a look at: <http://www.thekennygallery.ie/artists/behanjohn/>

He employs a secretary in an office in downtown Galway to handle his correspondence. Thus, he doesn't ever have to look at a computer. When I told him that Seamus Heaney had written an essay about him which one can read on the Internet, he was genuinely surprised.

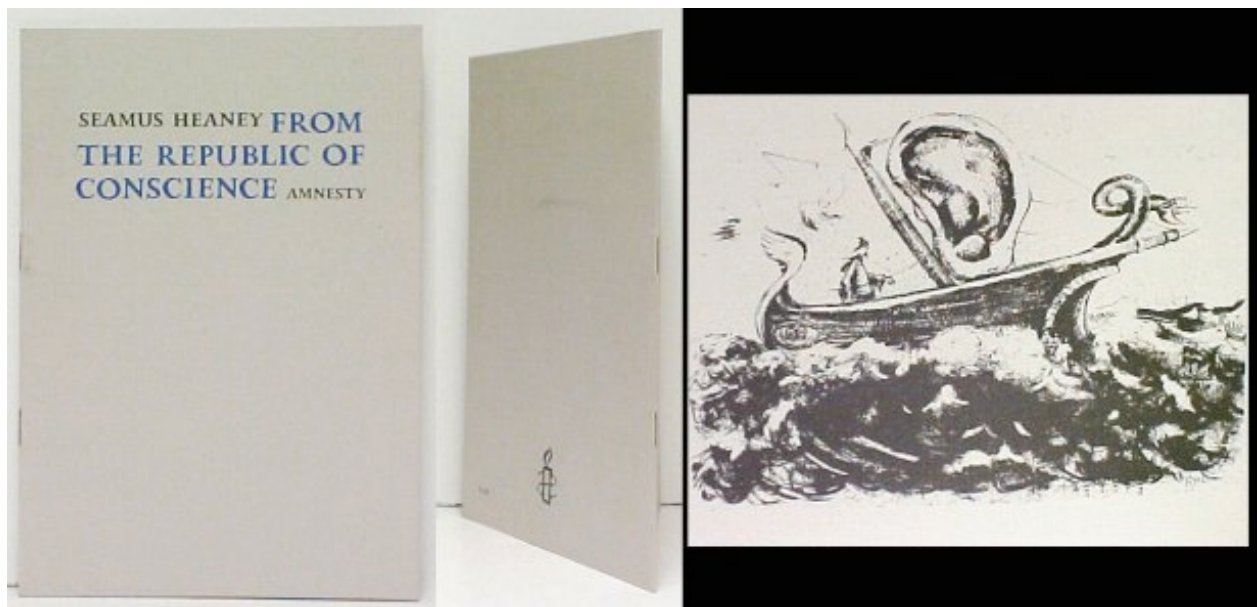


Illustration by John Behan :Seamus Heaney's "Republic of Conscience"

An account of the origins of John's amazing career can be found in the novel that I wrote in the 1970's, "Harvest of Chains", based on my experiences in Ireland (The novel is available as a Kindle E-Book)

http://www.amazon.com/Harvest-Chains-Fable-Artists-Dublin-ebook/dp/B00ILWKTG4/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1394652876&sr=8-1&keywords=roy+lisker



In this novel I describe the creation of the Project Gallery in Dublin. Several young and largely unrecognized artists collaborated in setting up the gallery, their "*Salon des Independentists*". John Behan was on the board of the gallery and dedicated himself to keeping it afloat. It is a true "Academics versus Impressionists" fable, a script made for the movies. In the 70s, the artists associated with the Project Gallery were routinely vilified by the successful artists, the Establishment, the society painters and so on. All of this is described in Harvest of Chains.

Soon after I left Europe to return to the States in 1972, there was a complete revolution of public fashion and taste, and the artists set up the Project Gallery have *become* the Establishment! At the same time there

John's house has 4 bedrooms on the second floor. Deirdre, Charles and Danny Figgis spent much of their visit together in their bedroom. They joined John and myself for outings and meal. Danny Figgis is very much a night owl. When I was there he slept in until 3. One can find out about him from his profile on the Internet.

<http://danielfiggis.com/biography>

He was born in 1961, making him about 53. He doesn't look it; rather he appears to be a somewhat worn 40- year-old. There is something of a "wraith-like aura" about him, a kind of disembodied energy. In fact he is both a composer and actor. In 1969, at the age of 8, he played the role of the boy in Peter O'Toole's production of "Waiting for Godot" at the Abbey Theatre. Since then he's starred in several movies. He also has a degree in philosophy from Trinity College. I didn't get a chance to hear any of his compositions, but apparently he writes in a style that combines rock, hip-hop and classical elements. I withhold judgment, though to my high-brow ears the mix appears somewhat insalubrious.

Cautious with me at first, Charles soon opened up. For a child of 3 his vocabulary is remarkable. He learned my name on the first day of my visit, and continued to address me as "Roy" for the next two days without once having to be reminded. Perhaps one should not be surprised at this: his father was a prodigy actor, his grandfather John Behan, his grandmother, Constance one of the leading feminist voices in Ireland.

Danny comes alive in the evenings. After dinner he entertained me with a host of stories. His speech was rapid and articulate; while his stories were amusing. However they all had that characteristic "I put

them in their place, all right!” punch-line, which soon gets to be somewhat tiresome.

To give one example: he related an account of the birth of Charles in a hospital in Galway. When the baby was brought out to show to him, no-one appeared to be able to get him to stop crying. However (so Danny claimed), when Charles was passed over to him, he stopped crying at once. Doctors and nurses were amazed; according to him they’d never seen anything like that. Then one of the nurses said, in all seriousness: “You have an inappropriate feminine response” (!)

Clearly it is inappropriate for men to act like women, or women like men! The story, an indicator of backwardness in the local mentality, should have just stopped there. Unfortunately, Danny ruined it by relating how he insulted her and put her in her place. Several other stories were told in a similar fashion.



Galway's Mall

On the morning after my arrival I went out to do some shopping. Galway's large pedestrian mall combines the predictable honky-tonk flavour of such venues with touches of genuine Irish charm. My goal was Powell's, a store for arts supplies and musical instruments. Powell's sits in a niche at the corner of Bridge and Applegate Streets. Its wooden

store front is painted dark green and black, with chrome lettering windows in the style of medieval uncials above the shop. My goal was a soprano recorder, and possibly an alto as well.

The display window on the side of the main thoroughfare held a variety of musical instruments. On the floor of the display I discovered what I was looking for: a case holding a beautiful alto recorder in 3 pieces. The price: a mere 245€! (\$330)

It didn't exactly fit my budget, so I entered the store and spoke to the manager (presumably though not necessarily Mr. Powell himself). He was an elderly man, very clean cut, dressed in the buttoned-down fashion one finds in the local shopkeepers. When I stated the price he was as astonished as myself. Together we went outside to look at the window. When he'd confirmed what I'd told him, he turned to me, somewhat apologetically and said: "It's entirely made of wood". Then he walked me back inside to a team of 3 salesclerks, a young man and woman in their twenties and an older man of about 35. I ended up buying a plastic recorder for 20€ and an alto for 30€.

Before I left they handed me a card. With this card, they explained, I could go to the airport and redeem all the Value Added Taxes (VAT) on my purchases in Ireland. Participating stores only needed to swipe the card in a credit card box. In my 10 days in Ireland I was unable to find another store or restaurant that knew anything about this card.



For dinner that first night, John invited us all to the Kashmir restaurant, a few blocks from John's home. Deirdre, Charles, Danny and I took up seats around a table at the front of the restaurant's dark interior around 6; John joined us soon afterwards. Surrounding us on all

sides was a small museum of Indian paintings, canopies and statuary. Given that this was Ireland (though not the North) it was a natural enough question to ask if the cuisine was "Kashmiri Hindu" or "Kashmiri Muslim"! Charles stood up and wandered about. He came running back exclaiming that he'd seen a statue with 10 arms and no head! So the ambiance was Hindu.

The menu itself was highly eclectic, with traditional dishes from Rajasthan to the Punjab to the Deccan. After pakoras and salads, John ordered a biryani, I ordered a north Indian beef curry; I don't remember what the others ordered, but there was a marked emphasis on chicken-based dishes. The food was excellent and the portions huge; in fact the leftovers provided me with lunches at John's house over the next 4 days.

John always goes to bed early. He's not an alcoholic by Irish standards, but he does drink too much. After a day's work in his studio, he goes to a bar on Dominick Street, named the Bierhaus. This street has been immortalized (sic!) by the sleazy, sadistic "Jack Taylor" TV detective series as a warren of squalid fleshpots. The Bierhaus is actually a quiet, respectable bar with no visible traces of Mafiosi, Italian, Irish, Polish, Croatian or otherwise. Here he joins his friends in a drinking fest that can last several hours, consuming several glasses of wine, beer, bourbon, whiskey. Then he goes to dinner, drinks some more, and ends up in bed before 10. He does very little in the way of home cooking; no doubt that was done by Emer. The 3 meals he prepared for me while I was there were identical: rashers and sausages, tea and soda-bread.

Some of the friends I met at the Bierhaus were very entertaining. Of notable interest are Adrian Frazier and Danny Rosen.



Adrian Frazier

Adrian Frazier is on the English literature faculty at the National University of Ireland at Galway (NUIG). His career has been very non-standard for an academic scholar. Adrian grew up in a farm in rural Missouri; he still enjoys farming. After studies at Pomona College and Wash U in St Louis, in 1970 he ended up as a doctoral student at Trinity College in Dublin. He stayed there several years. The reason he gave for leaving was that they'd offered him the post of department chairman. As he told me, "Academic departments are filled with eccentrics; the bigger the university the bigger the eccentricity."

Following a 3-year stint at Nanjing University in China, he accepted what to most academics would be considered a catastrophic reduction in status: a faculty position at Union College in Schenectady. He stayed there for 20 years! From there he somehow ended up at NUIG.

Adrian is devoted to Ireland. His first and second wives are Irish (the first died from a tragic illness), and I gather he considers himself more Irish than American. However, he retains his American citizenship.

He is the author of several literary biographies, including the one that has made him famous , a comprehensive life of the novelist and general man-of-letters, George Moore.

Adrian also lives on Dominick Street , adjacent to the Lower Canal and virtually around the corner from John. Several months ago, even before I'd begun planning my trip, he got in touch with me. He's researching a biography of John and was fascinated by the portrayal of the artistic world of Dublin that I've written about in "Harvest of Chains". Much of it he'd seen himself first-hand because he was studying in Dublin in the 70s. Before my arrival in Galway on June 1, we'd already made arrangements for him to interview me.

The interview was conducted over lunch in a sea-food restaurant on the Galway docks. We spoke for about two hours. He asked me if I could identify the specific models on which the characters of "Harvest of Chains" is based. He was personally acquainted with some of them. He also thought that Harvest of Chains was a better account of that period in Dublin than some of the other works of fiction he'd consulted. The early 70's marked the beginning of the "troubles" in Northern Ireland. Efforts were made then to break the grip of the Christian Brothers on public education. Catholics were permitted for the first time to get a degree at Trinity College. Nixon and his wife paid a visit to the homeland of their 'roots'. What he found most useful for the purposes of his biography of John, was the account of the origins of the Project Gallery. After that I saw him practically every day after that when he showed around 5:30 PM at the counter of the Bierhaus bar.



Danny Rosen at his doughnut stand

In the first few days after my arrival, Danny Rosen was in Paris visiting his father, an astrophysicist celebrating his 80th birthday. He returned to Galway around June 4th. In a predominantly Catholic country, indeed a theocracy in all but name, Danny is self-righteously Jewish. He seems to have re-invented himself as a celebrity actor of the old Yiddish theatre, a kind of down-home Galway Menasha Skulnik. He designs and manufactures his own clothing, which could well be as comfortable on Broadway as it is here. One might describe him as a bizarre alloy of exhibitionist and anarchist. He did mention that his father's family had been dislocated by the Holocaust, which may explain why he's chosen to live in Galway; like so many other members of the Jewish Diaspora he lives everywhere and nowhere.

Danny's income comes from several improvised professions. On Saturday mornings he operates a crepe and doughnut stand near the entrance to the Galway Mall on Saturdays. Appropriately, it's named "Boychick Donuts"!

Galway, Dublin June 2-10

The big news this past week has been the scandal centered about the “mothers and babies” home in a suburb of Galway called Tuam.

Between 1926 and 1961, the order of nuns known as *Bons Secours* (good rescue), ran a home for unwed mothers. The mothers were treated as sinners and separated from their children. Evidently the children themselves were starved and neglected; diseases complicated by malnutrition caused a death rate 5 times the local average. This was in a poor district of the country, with primitive sanitation and great poverty.

The children were not given names. When they died they were buried in mass graves, with no records kept of where they were. Ireland seems to have little love for its children. In recent decades we have seen exposures of the notorious pedophile priest scandals, the century long abuse in the national industrial schools, and the chattel slavery of the Magdalene Laundries. Now one learns about this.

Exaggerated rumors to the effect that the skeletons were buried in discarded septic tanks, and that medical experiments with untested vaccines were done on them, are not entirely without foundation. One way or another, 796 anonymous deaths were recorded at this one home in Tuam over 34 years. Investigations of the mothers and babies homes have now been opened up across Ireland.



On Thursday, June 5th I visited the National University of Ireland in Galway (NUIG). I was only acquainted with one other person (besides Adrian) on the faculty, an applied mathematician named Patrick O'Leary. I'd met him through an introduction by John to his wife, the composer/pianist Jane O'Leary. Jane directs a contemporary music ensemble in Dublin. She comes from Connecticut; she didn't appear to know any of my friends among the local musicians. She has studied with Milton Babbitt at Princeton University.

Galway's university is quite close to John Behan's house on the Lower Canal. I walked north along the canal, parallel to the metal railing and the swans until I came to the cross street that divides the Lower from the Upper Canal and serves as a bridge. Traffic lights in Galway are few and far between. I've been told that this is because the city has experienced astronomical growth in the past few years; formerly empty streets are now clogged with traffic. Maybe so: a walk about town is fraught with danger, and even John warned me to be very careful.

The University begins on the left bank of the Upper Canal. Trees line the left side of the asphalt road at the entrance, with low buildings on the right. After walking a distance of about a city block, I came to a modern building with glass revolving doors called the Ryan Institute for Marine Biology. On the first floor one finds a zoological museum. Some of the species in the glass cases were gifts from the Darwin estate presented to the university in the 19th century.

I'd brought a sketch pad with me, and a case holding pencils, pens and crayons. The next hour was spent sketching a few of the taxidermed animals: a huge rodent from South America, a long alligator, and some small fox-like mammals.

Before going on to the mathematics building to look up Patrick O'Leary, I wandered into the Harriman Building. It's quite long and houses at least a dozen departments. Another hour was passed strolling through the Irish archaeology department, the Physics department, and the English, History and Philosophy departments, getting impressions and reading bulletin boards.

Mathematics is in a different part of the campus; a graduate student in Chemistry walked me over there. Patrick O'Leary's name was listed on a bulletin board as an Emeritus. Two grad students helped me search for his new office, which apparently had only been recently changed. Then I was handed over to Michael Tuitte, a math-physics professor who took charge. At O'Leary's former office we found a faculty member from

France who indicated the location of his new office. Michael went up to the next floor, then soon returned and told me that Patrick wasn't there.

We got into a conversation; he wanted me to know about the translation by members of this faculty, of a recently discovered paper by Albert Einstein. In this paper Einstein anticipated Fred Hoyle's "Steady-State" universe by a decade or more. Einstein didn't publish the paper because he found a flaw in the argument. The same thing happened to Hoyle of course, only much later. Michael promised to send me the URL reference to the translation: <http://arxiv.org/abs/1402.0132>

The reference was in my E-mail when I got back to John's house. In the meantime John had discovered that Patrick O'Leary was in Venice with his wife, Jane. I had 3 short articles of mine about relativity and cosmology that I thought Michael would be interested in, so I took some lunch then walked back to the University to visit him again and give him the papers.

When I told Michael that I'd learned that Patrick and Jane were in Venice he suddenly remembered that they go away each year at this time because of a terrible tragedy that had befallen them a few years ago. Their young daughter had taken up horse racing, which is not unusual in Connemara, where some of the world's finest thoroughbreds are raised. During a race she'd fallen off her horse and been trampled to death. Every year since then, the O'Learys take a leave of absence for several weeks.

John was very upset when I told him this. He knew that this anniversary is in early June but had forgotten. The next day I sketched a few more of the animals in the glass cases at the Ryan Institute.



Arts Millenium Building

Afterwards I visited the Arts Millennium Building, a very strange exercise in architecture indeed . The building is virtually dysfunctional. Its proportions are huge; it has almost no utilizable space which is not taken up by enormous atriums, corridors, ramps. My opinion was shared by some of the faculty that I spoke to. It holds a theatre dedicated to Siobhan McKenna.

Dublin June 7-10



. I'd arranged to meet Marion Kelly, a hard-working young enthusiast of authors and literature, for an interview in the bar of Dublin's Central Hotel. She promised, if possible, to bring along some local writers.

When she is not studying for a PhD at Trinity College, Marion manages a blog *The Parlour Review* (<http://www.parlourreview.com/>)

One finds a long list of recorded interviews with authors, many of them of international standing, on this website. She found out about me through the references in my website to Dublin in the 70s. We'd been corresponding for a few months and had agreed to get together sometime in the weekend of June 7 to 9.

By the time I arrived in Dublin, we'd narrowed down the time to either Sunday or Monday evening at 5 PM, June 8th or 9th, in the bar of the Central Hotel, right in the heart of Dublin, the district of Trinity University, the National Library, many museums, and the "arts district", the Temple Bar, (which has much to do with art in Dublin as modern day Montmartre has to do with Impressionist painters!)

As per usual, I stayed the 3 nights in Dublin at the Youth Hostel on Mountjoy Street. The hostel is definitely recommended, above all for its young staff from all over the world. However the building is old and some of its utility systems don't work properly. An example: during my stay in Galway I, and everyone else in John's house, picked up a flu virus from 3 year old Charles Figgis. On Sunday morning I wanted to take a shower. The water in the bathrooms of the 3rd floor was ice-cold. The staff at the front counter apologized; sometimes the hot water doesn't manage to pump up to the 3rd floor properly. Fortunately, the cold and fever died away over the next few days, (although it did not disappear entirely until my third day in England, June 12th).

On Sunday afternoon I received an E-Mail from Marion fixing the interview appointment on Monday at 5 PM. To get to the Liffey River from Mountjoy Street involves a brisk walk down O'Connell Street, past Parnell Square (where the Writers Museum is located), the Parnell Statute, past the famous Post Office where the rebellion and civil war were launched in 1916, and over a bridge holding street vendors and pan-

handlers. I headed down to the river in plenty of time, and made it to the Central Hotel bar by 4:30.



The word “bar” might not conjure up an accurate picture of the large lounge on the second floor of the Central Hotel. Think of a relatively well-lit room holding an assortment of armchairs, with part-colored upholstery, gathered around a dispersion of small circular tables. The setting gives one the feeling of being in a 19th century novel, (though one might be at a loss to say *which* novel it is). The ambiance is very cozy, quite different from the standard image of the “Irish pub” as it’s been promoted all over the world.

Marion showed up around 5:30. She’d brought along with her the lawyer and writer Ronan Sheean. A prominent middle-aged lawyer and novelist, he was dressed in a well-pressed blue suit, brief case at the ready, silvering hair, basic white and peach Irish complexion, strongly

built with large legs that had problems adjusting to the low armchairs of the bar.

Marion was somewhat different from what I'd expected. For one thing she is very young; for all I know she might still be in her 20s. One doesn't find many such strongly self-motivated people in their 20s these days (*I began to turn into an old crab about 5 years ago when I reached 70*). She tends to shortness (*what an odd phrase!*), on the plump side, (definitely not fat). A large shock of black hair falls over her head like the shade of a Victorian lamp. Her eyes are very intense, set in a dark, pale face. She is filled with energy, as one can readily testify from the work that she's accomplished.

She has a long-standing love affair with writers. However, once we'd been seated and ordered drinks, the conversation turned away from literature to my political activity and jail sentence in the 60s and 70s. This connected in a natural way with my visit to Ireland in 1970. At that time I'd appeared on a radio talk show with the writer and biographer of Dylan Thomas, Constantine Fitzgibbons. Everyone I've met who knows him disparages him, and indeed I treat him as a deplorable figure of fun in my novel "Harvest of Chains". All of which makes one tend to feel sorry for him, I agree.

However, in this radio interview of 1970, he treated me (and all pacifists) as traitors and cowards, blustered and bellowed and, in general, wouldn't let me get a word in edgewise. On other occasions he

was known for humiliating his wife in public (she did eventually divorce him.) It is so convenient when a personality can be so effectively described on the basis of a few traits (generally negative)! It makes the writer's task so much easier.

Now I had to demonstrate to Marion and Ronan that I was not a traitor and coward. I took them through all the events of the period from 1965 to 72, from the original anti-war demonstration in Union Square in New York (November 5, 1965), my decision to go to Europe in 1968 after waiting years for the appeals to come through; my decision to stay in Europe when I was supposed to be in jail; my passport being taken away from me; travelling in Spain, Switzerland and France without a passport: arranging with the FBI and the ACLU to come back to the US in July of 1972 to serve out a 6 month sentence; the gallery of celebrities and characters I encountered in the federal prisons (Clifford Irving, Ralph Ginsburgh, the Berrigans and others)

Marion wasn't familiar with all the references, but Ronan was. In addition to being a lawyer and a legal scholar, he knew many aspects of the legal background of these events, notably, the vote in Congress that made draft-card burning a felony; the work of the ACLU during the Vietnamese war with the draft resistance movements; organizations such as the War Resisters League, the ACLU, Fellowship of Reconciliation, the Catholic Worker; and other aspects. All of us agreed that communicating this in a book is long overdue.

(2) Tracing Alexander Grothendieck to a cottage in Mormoiron, in the Vaucluse, in June of 1988.

Oh yes - and (3) The chanted monologue “The Dog Was Walking The Dog”!

