

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: University of Oxford		
Unit of Assessment: 28 - History		
Title of case study: Cultural Dimensions of the Irish Revolution		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Professor Roy Foster	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Carroll Professor of Irish History	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 01/10/1992 - 30/09/2016
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2018		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact Roy Foster's research has enhanced public understanding of the Irish revolution as a cultural event that shaped modern Irish national identity. This case study focuses on two successful documentaries. The best-selling book, <i>Vivid Faces</i>, led directly to Foster's collaboration with Bob Geldof on <i>Fanatic Heart</i>, an award-winning, two-part television film about W. B. Yeats's importance in the construction of Irish political and cultural independence. Foster's research also underpinned the feature film <i>Citizen Lane</i>, exploring cultural controversies and national identity in Ireland on the eve of the revolution. While the primary beneficiaries are film-makers and their viewers, Foster's work has also extended and deepened public encounters with poetry, drama and the visual arts, especially but not only in Dublin.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research Studies of the Easter Rising and the Irish revolution (1916-22) have generally concentrated on political and military aspects of the struggle for Irish independence. Foster's <i>Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890-1922 (R2)</i>, shows how the Rising was shaped by the works and lives of unconventional cultural avatars. The book casts new light on the origins and varieties of the revolutionaries, highlighting the role of women and the <i>avant garde</i>, and revealing the ensuing disappointment among many of the protagonists.</p> <p>The research for the book was funded by a Wolfson Foundation/British Academy Research Professorship from October 2009 to September 2012. This prestigious and well-funded award (GBP150,000) was only one of four chosen from a pool of 174 applications. <i>Vivid Faces</i> was a number-one best-seller in Ireland for several weeks, and in 2014 was a book of the year in both the <i>Times Literary Supplement</i> and the <i>Observer</i>. In 2015 it was awarded the British Academy Medal, an annual award recognising an outstanding achievement that has transformed understanding of a particular subject or field of study in any branch of the humanities and social sciences. The book also won the 2016 Frokosh Prize from the American Historical Association. The Irish revolution had already been a central theme of Foster's earlier research on W. B. Yeats, culminating in the two-volume <i>W. B. Yeats: A Life</i> published by Oxford University Press (the Irish revolution and its aftermath are examined in volume two, <i>The Arch-Poet 1915-1939</i>, published in 2003 (R1). The biography, which reinterprets Irish cultural identity through the epic life of the poet, was shortlisted for the British Academy Book Prize in 2004.</p> <p>Foster's research on the art dealer and benefactor Hugh Lane includes two papers (R3 and R4). R4 was published in an edited volume published to mark the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Dublin City Gallery. The chapter led to a public lunchtime lecture at the National Portrait Gallery in London, and then an article in the <i>Guardian</i> (30 May 2015) on the controversy over the Lane bequest. This strand of research focuses on Lane's campaign to create a municipal art gallery in Dublin, and on the codicil to his will, made shortly before his death on the Lusitania in 1915, which directed that his collection of impressionist paintings be left to Ireland rather than to</p>		

the National Gallery in London. This research positions Lane in the cultural history of Ireland alongside Yeats and Gregory as a key figure in the formation of the Irish cultural identity.

3. References to the research

- R1.**[Authored Book, available on request] R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats. A Life. II. The Arch-Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. xxiv + 798. ISBN 9780198184652.
- R2.**[Authored Book, listed in REF2] R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890-1922* (London: Penguin/Allen Lane, 2014), pp. xxiii + 463. ISBN 9780393082791.
- R3.**[Chapter, available on request] R. F. Foster, 'A Family Affair: Lane, Gregory, Yeats and educating the nation' in Barbara Dawson (ed.), *Hugh Lane: Founder of a Gallery of Modern Art for Ireland* (London: Scala Publishers, 2008), pp. 15-27. ISBN 9781857595758.
- R4.**[Chapter, available on request] R. F. Foster, 'That Great Pictured Song: Hugh Lane's Artistic Vision for Ireland a Hundred Years on', in Barbara Dawson and Jessica O'Donnell (eds.), *Sir Hugh Lane: That Great Pictured Song* (Dublin: Dublin Municipal Gallery, 2017), pp. 11-25. ISBN 9781901702514.
Extracts were published as 'How Ireland was Robbed of Hugh Lane's Great Art collection', *Guardian*, 30 May 2015.
- R5.**[Chapter, available on request] R. F. Foster, "'The Occupation of Living": Jack B. Yeats and the Irish Revolution' in Brendan Rooney (ed.), *Creating History: Stories of Ireland in Art* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2016), pp. 250-273. ISBN 9781911024286.

Grant awarded

The British Academy/The Wolfson Foundation: Wolfson Research Professorship awarded to R. F. Foster, 'The Development of Radicalization Among Opinion-Formers and Revolutionaries in Ireland, c.1890-1920', October 2009-September 2012, GBP150,000.

4. Details of the impact

The context for the impact was the 'decade of centenaries', the most ambitious programme of cultural events ever undertaken by the Irish state. This series of commemorations marks the foundations of Irish independence in the turbulent decade 1912-1922. The primary focus of public interest was the centenary of the Easter Rising (1916). Foster's prominence as a public historian and cultural commentator, evident in high-profile lectures, appearances at literary festivals and on radio and television, enabled him to influence the framing of the 1916 centenary as a moment of cultural transformation; he also contributed to the novel emphasis on inclusivity and diversity, and in particular on the greater recognition of gender and sexual identity as central themes in national discourse. One prominent example of this influence was the historical TV series, *Rebellion* (January 2016). Foster was consultant on this drama, the most expensive ever produced by the state broadcaster RTÉ. The writer, creator, and executive producer has stated that *Vivid Faces* helped him to present the revolutionary period as 'a time of seismic cultural and social upheaval'. In creating the fictional characters in the drama, he was building upon Foster's portrayal of 'the lesser memorialised opponents of British rule in Ireland, those whose backgrounds or agendas did not fit that narrative – women, socialists, the Anglo-Irish, Unionists as well as lesbian and homosexual radicals'. [E1]

The broader importance of *Vivid Faces* in establishing key themes for the commemoration has also been recognised. As one member of the Irish government's Expert Advisory Group writes, the best-seller 'undoubtedly helped to shape many of the commemorative events that were organised throughout the island'. In particular, Foster highlighted the active engagement of many of the 1916 generation in 'women's suffrage, the labour movement, amateur dramatics and

literary publications'. [E2] Foster's presentation of the 1916 generation as modelling a more ecumenical notion of Irish nationalism has also been acknowledged by the Cultural Director of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs:

Foster's groundbreaking research and insights on the more complex, progressive and plural backgrounds of many of the revolutionaries played an outsize role in shaping the debate in the key months leading into the [1916] centenary, particularly in pushing back against more comfortable binary orthodoxies which were easy prey for partisan and ideological purposes. His personal participation in key public events and fora in 2016 was just one marker of that influence, amplified by high-profile broadcast and print interventions. [E3]

Fanatic Heart

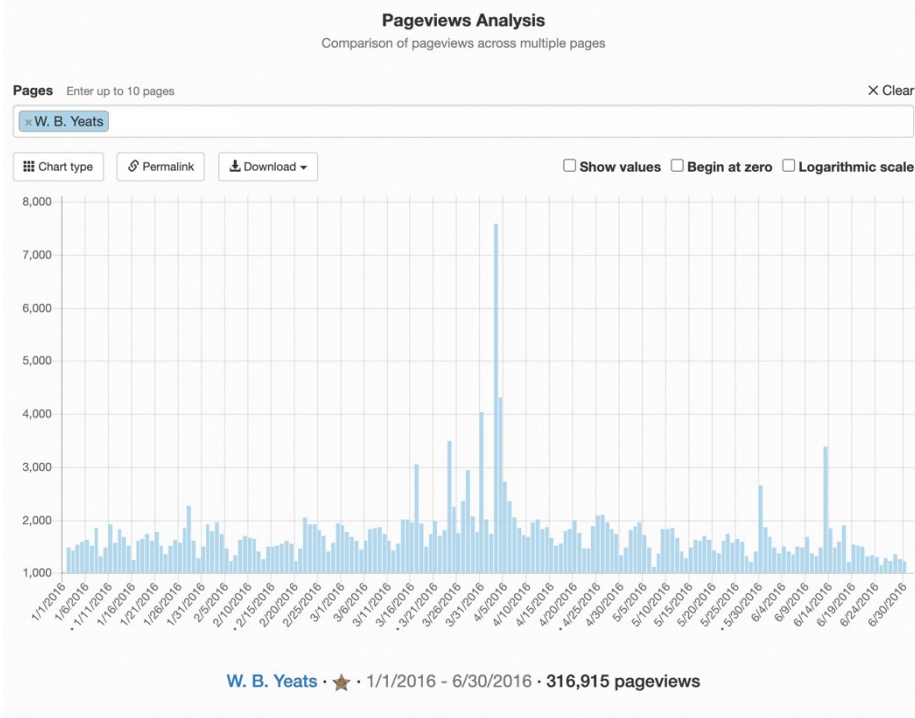
Foster's collaborations with film-makers followed directly from his books, public lectures and media events. On 12 May 2015, for example, he wrote and presented 'Things Fall Apart', a half-hour Radio 4 programme on W. B. Yeats. On 12 September 2015 he curated and presented 'Beautiful Lofty Things', an evening of performances of Yeats's poems and music at the National Concert Hall, Dublin, in the presence of the President of Ireland. This was a sold-out event, recorded and broadcast by RTÉ Radio 1 (25 December). The former Director of Poetry Ireland, who organized the event, warmly acknowledges that 'Roy worked closely with the creative team in devising the whole arc of the evening'. [E4]

Bob Geldof explains that it was Foster's *Yeats* biography that 'set me off on whole universes of speculations and curiosity', while *Vivid Faces* 'began my imagining a personal and polemical documentary to counter any potential dangerously nationalist spoutings around the centennial "celebrations" of the oversold 1916 Rising'. [E5] The result was the two-part documentary, *A Fanatic Heart: Bob Geldof on W.B. Yeats*. In the course of the close collaboration between Geldof and Foster, the main conclusions of the historian's research were translated into popular terms appropriate to a TV film. Geldof comments that his film proposal would have been 'dismissed as some populist pop singers amateur maunderings were it not underpinned by rigorous academic knowledge'. [E5] Foster's expertise was indispensable in the development of the project. Geldof continues: 'The documentary was commissioned on the basis that Professor Foster would advise and challenge my speculations both off and on camera. It was apparently the argumentative nature of these discussions that garnered the international hosannahs and awards we received and what made a documentary about a long dead poet one of the popular hits of the year.' [E5] Geldof's opinion is borne out by reviews: the *Irish Independent* noted the 'interesting chats with Roy Foster (the film's consultant)' while the *Sunday Business Post* welcomed 'the guiding (perhaps restraining?) scholarship of historian Roy Foster'. [E6]

Fanatic Heart was screened on RTÉ on 24 and 31 March 2016. The viewing figures for the two episodes were 199,900 and 192,200, an impressive audience share of 17.12% and 17.35% respectively. [E7] The documentary also appeared on BBC 4 on 3-4 April 2016 and on BBC 1 Northern Ireland on 30 May 2016 (later repeated on BBC 4 on 3 October 2019, and 10 December 2020). [E8] It was widely reviewed and selected as best factual documentary at the 2017 Irish Film and Television Academy awards. In the *Guardian* (16 April 2016) Clive James described the film as 'excellent ... the perfect tribute'. The reviewer in the *Spectator* (9 April 2016), who thought *Fanatic Heart* 'certainly the best literary documentary I've seen for a very long time', praised the 'neatly argued theoretical framework' of the programme. Two years later, the DVD was given five stars in the *Financial Times* (30 March 2018) and described as 'Unmissable for anyone interested in Yeats, or 20th-century Ireland'; the reviewer highlights 'the thoughtful insights of Yeats's biographer (and the film's co-writer) Roy Foster'. The comments of Amazon viewers (4.5 star) include: 'Fantastic. Thought provoking, disquieting but thoroughly watchable.' [UK, 28 March 2018]; 'A Happening! love the entire film, filming, country, poetry and presenters.' [Canada 6, January 2020]; 'Brilliant, touching and deeply researched doc on W.B. Yeats! [United States, 12 July 2018]; 'One of the best documentaries I have seen. Visually pleasing and intellectually stimulating.' [United States, 28 June 2018]. [E6]

One rough indication of the film's reach is the record of searches for W. B. Yeats on Wikipedia.

As Pageviews Analysis shows, there was a very dramatic spike around the release of the documentary, with 4,029 searches on 31 May and 7,581 on 3 April 2016. [E9]



Citizen Lane

Foster was also lead consultant and presenter on *Citizen Lane*, a documentary-drama about the art collector and philanthropist Hugh Lane, backed by RTÉ and the Irish Film Board. It was shown on general release in Ireland in May-June 2018, and later screened on RTÉ and BBC 4. The genesis for this documentary-drama was Foster's 2015 lecture at the National Gallery in London, which was attended by the Executive Producer and the Director. As the latter puts it, 'Roy's determined plea – that the few really outstanding French Impressionist paintings that remained in London should be returned – inspired me, as it had [the Producer]. Listening to Roy we believed, as he did, that the story deserved a much wider audience.' [E10]

As with *Fanatic Heart*, Foster featured prominently in the film; his research was central to the development of the project and to its credibility. The Director writes that Foster 'gave access and permission to use his writing when we pitched for finance for the film. Undoubtedly, his involvement had helped secure the commission.' He goes on: 'Roy's personal contribution gave the film a depth and resonance it would not otherwise have had. Roy told Lane's story with consummate expertise and charm, but finally, he also gripped the audience with his deeply-felt expression of the "righteous rage" at the present location of the best of Lane's paintings in the National Gallery's collection.' [E10] This last point was echoed in the *Sunday Times* review: 'The real star isn't so much Vaughan-Lawlor [the well-known Irish actor who played Lane] as the historian Roy Foster, whose contributions bristle with passion'. [E11]

Citizen Lane opened in Irish cinemas on 18 May 2018 and had a successful 15-week theatrical run, with numerous film club bookings around Ireland. The film was screened internationally (Palm Springs International Film Festival, the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, the Frick Museum in New York, and in London, Paris and London). In Ireland the film was shown on RTE 1 primetime on 5 September 2018, attracting 109,000 viewers, a 10.5% audience share. The feedback was universally positive from press and audience alike: 100% on Rotten tomatoes; 4.5* review *RTÉ Entertainment*; 4* review in *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent*, *RTÉ Guide*, *Evening Echo*, *Sunday Times*, *Sunday Independent*, *Entertainment.ie*, *Scannain*, *Newstalk*. Writing for

RTÉ Entertainment, Sarah McIntyre praised the ‘insightful contributions from a host of experts, including historian Roy Foster’. Her overall verdict reveals the underpinning thesis of so much of Foster’s research: ‘*Citizen Lane* doesn’t put a foot wrong in its expertly paced 80-minute running time. As well as providing an insight into Lane, the documentary also delves into the changes enveloping Ireland in the early 20th century, where a new sense of Irish cultural identity was emerging’. [E12]

Another direct beneficiary of the impact was the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin. In September 2018, when the film was screened on RTÉ, the number of visitors to the gallery showed an increase of 2,500 over the same month in 2017. As the gallery’s Director explains, ‘every visitor is hard won so the boost of *Citizen Lane* was very welcome’. [E13] The gallery also decided to distribute 715 DVDs of the film to all secondary schools in Ireland. A major theme of the film was the controversy over the ownership of eight of Lane’s paintings, including Renoir’s *The Umbrellas*, Monet’s *Lavacourt under Snow* and two works by Manet: *Music in the Tuileries Gardens* and *Eva Gonzalès*. In an unsigned codicil to his will Lane left these paintings (and 31 others) to Dublin, provided that a suitable Gallery of Modern Art was established. Foster’s lecture at the National Portrait Gallery in May 2015 kick-started a fresh campaign to press the National Gallery, London to honour Lane’s last wishes by vesting ownership of all 39 paintings jointly between the two institutions. In December 2019 a new Sir Hugh Lane Agreement was negotiated, in which the National Gallery London formally acknowledged a partnership with the Hugh Lane Gallery, thus bringing to an end decades of disputation. The Director of the Hugh Lane Gallery writes that Foster ‘has been a very strong and credible supporter of the Irish claim of ownership of the Lane pictures and is a very important ally in London. ... Roy’s championship of the Irish claim to these paintings was a key support in securing this formal acknowledgement’. [E13]

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- E1. Statement from writer/creator/executive producer, *Rebellion*, 11/01/2021.
- E2. Statement from member, Expert Advisory Group on the Decade of Centenaries, 12/01/2021.
- E3. Letter from Cultural Director, Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, 20/01/2021.
- E4. Statement from former Director, Poetry Ireland, 22/01/2021.
- E5. Statement from Bob Geldof regarding *Fanatic Heart*, 01/10/2020.
- E6. Press coverage and reviews of *Fanatic Heart*: *Irish Independent* (26/03/2016), *Irish Mail on Sunday* (03/04/2016), *Sunday Business Post* (27/03/2016), *Sunday Independent* (two articles, both 27/03/2016), *Irish Times* (02/04/2016), *Sunday Times* (03/04/2016), *Guardian* (16/04/2016), *Spectator* (09/04/2016), *Financial Times* (30/03/2018), Amazon.co.uk.
- E7. Email from Executive Producer, *Fanatic Heart*, providing viewing figures, 20/01/2021.
- E8. Screenshots of BBC webpage for *Fanatic Heart*, giving broadcast details. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b076qphj>. Accessed: 30/01/2021.
- E9. Screenshot of Wikipedia pageviews analysis webpage, showing that increased search activity relating to W. B. Yeats coincided with the release of *Fanatic Heart*. <https://pageviews.toolforge.org/?project=en.wikipedia.org&platform=all-access&agent=user&redirects=0&start=2016-01-01&end=2016-06-30&pages=W. B. Yeats>. Accessed: 11/02/2021.
- E10. Statement from Director, *Citizen Lane*, 13/10/2020.
- E11. Reviews of *Citizen Lane*: *Independent.ie* (05/09/2018), *Irish Times* (18/05/2018), *Sunday Times* (20/05/2018).
- E12. ‘*Citizen Lane*: Overview and Reviews’, document prepared by Production Executive, Soho Moon Pictures, Dublin, 11/01/2021, including viewing figures.
- E13. Statement from Director, Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin, 28/01/2021, accompanied by a copy of an article on *Citizen Lane* appearing in the *Irish Times*, 12/05/2018.