

FOREWORD

IT IS A GREAT PRIVILEGE to write the Foreword to this history of The College Historical Society by Dr Patrick Geoghegan, published to mark the 250th anniversary of the oldest student debating society. It is a splendid scholarly piece of work written by a leading academic historian with the elegance and ease that Dr Geoghegan has brought to his major studies of Robert Emmet and Daniel O’Connell, to his lectures, and indeed to his popular radio programmes. When the project was mooted it was clear that he was by far the best qualified person to write a professional history of 250 years of a society whose members have contributed so much to Trinity College, to Ireland and indeed worldwide. It was obvious that Dr Geoghegan would bring great skills and experience to the task, and that the book would entertain as much as inform. He is an eminent authority on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the consequent ability to set the Hist in its political, social and intellectual context – it was founded in the eighteenth century and arguably it had its greatest impact in the nineteenth century.

Three revolutions were powerfully influenced by former members of the Hist, 1798 (Wolfe Tone), 1803 (Robert Emmet) and 1848 (Thomas Davis). The Irish Parliamentary Party (1874) was founded by Isaac Butt, the Gaelic League by Douglas Hyde (1893) and the first signatory to the Ulster Covenant in 1912 was Edward Carson. Dr Geoghegan describes the careers of its most remarkable members as undergraduates and graduates, taking us from one extraordinary episode to another. Readers will find that the story of the Hist is intricately intertwined with the changes in the island of Ireland and the relationship with the United Kingdom – great figures of the day spoke at the Society while some among the members who debated with them went on to replace them. Hist members spoke and later acted on opposite sides of big matters – Robert Emmet was

defended by one Hist lawyer and prosecuted by another. Carson defended the Marquis of Queensberry when he was accused of libel by Oscar Wilde, who had been a fellow member of the Hist.

Dr Geoghegan, a Fellow of Trinity College, has been a loyal supporter of the Society, speaking often and chairing debates – he is a fine orator and the members were honoured when he accepted the invitation to be elected a Vice-President. We value the fact that he was a student member of the Literary and Historical Society, the ‘L&H’ of UCD – he did not see the Hist as an insider; likewise this history shows a perspective that comes from a person who started as an outsider. We will never know how Dr Geoghegan managed to produce such a detailed account of the Hist while holding his appointment as a special adviser (2017–20) to the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar TD, during the Brexit crisis. We are deeply grateful to Dr Geoghegan – he has opened up so many new associations for the Hist, with many surprises, for example connecting with James Joyce who was never a member and may never have spoken at the Society, and Sir Robert Anderson, an ex-Auditor who became famous for his work in Scotland Yard. These are sidelights on an otherwise extraordinary story of a Society that was usually focused on great questions of the day – though punctuated with humorous motions that tested the wit of the members.

The Trinity Trust made an important and generous grant to support publication including research assistance for Dr Geoghegan. The manuscript was skilfully and knowledgeably edited by Ross Hinds, Vice-President of the Hist, and published jointly by Hinds and by The Lilliput Press.

The Hist was founded by students with the permission of the Board of Trinity College Dublin in March 1770, just at the time when many ideas of the Enlightenment were coming to a head. Baroque music was giving way to Classical – Ludwig van Beethoven was born in December 1770. The European world, adapting to the Reformation and invigorated by Isaac Newton’s science, was reacting to the ideas of Francis Bacon, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith, the philosophy of René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, John Locke, David Hume and Immanuel Kant, and a host of other great thinkers. The Marquis de Condorcet and others were arguing for equality of men and women, and for the abolition of slavery. The

last of the thirty-five volumes of the *Encyclopédie* on science and philosophy, compiled by 150 authorities under the leadership of Denis Diderot, were about to be published. James Hutton and others were arguing how the shape of the Earth had been and was continuing to be changed inexorably by great forces of nature over millions of years. Biologists were astonished by the discovery of monstrous fossils leading the Comte de Buffon, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin to argue that evolution had occurred. Joseph Black, the Irishman who discovered carbon dioxide, Henry Cavendish (hydrogen), Joseph Priestly and Antoine Lavoisier (oxygen) were laying the basis for modern chemistry. James Watt, a friend of both Smith and Black at Glasgow, radically modified the steam engine providing the power needed to give the industrial revolution its name – engines before Watt were so inefficient they could only be used beside coal mines. The world was alight with discoveries, debates and discussions, and books to match, of a significance that we can now recognize had never been seen before. Within a few years, the American Revolution (1776) and the French Revolution (1789) would transform the legal basis of government and set us slowly and steadily on the paths to secular liberal democracy – the nation state as we know it today was being defined in those few decades at the end of the eighteenth century. These times can be seen as the most concentrated, most pervasive and significant revolutionary period in modern history. Even if today the transitions are far from complete, the writing was on the wall: faith was being challenged by reason, monarchy by democracy and edicts were being replaced by laws made by increasingly representative assemblies.

We can see that those thirteen students who founded the Hist, had set up a debating society devoted to historical analysis and diligent exploration of the facts of any matter, where they could develop skills that encouraged them in revolutionary thinking at a time of revolution. The College, set beautifully in the magnificent buildings of Parliament and Library Squares, was tiny, with 400–500 students – incidentally the numbers were about the same at Cambridge, which did not have a debating society until forty-five years later (McDowell and Webb).

The case for founding the Hist was made to the Board of the College by Michael Kearney, one of the seven Senior Fellows who

were in those days *ex-officio* members of the Board. It is more than a curiosity that he was the seven times great grand-uncle of Barack Obama. Kearney was a friend of Edmund Burke from whom he had obtained the Minute Book of Burke's Club of 1747. It was probably expected that the Hist would be influenced by Burke, as it has been. The Minute Book of the Club is the most prized possession of the Society; the Hist participated in raising funds towards the statue of Burke that was unveiled at Front Gate in 1868; in 1897 it initiated the celebrations of the centenary of Burke's death; the minutes of the first meeting of Burke's Club were read in 1920 to celebrate 150 years of the Hist; the text of the Minute Book, edited by A.P.I. Samuels, *ex-Auditor*, was published posthumously in 1923. College and the Hist celebrated the Bicentenary of Burke's birth in 1928 when the Burke Bicentenary Commemoration Fund was established to support the Hist. In 1947 Harold Laski gave a major address on Edmund Burke commemorating the bicentenary of Burke's Club – there was enough in Burke to be admired across the political spectrum. The occasion is brilliantly described by Dr Geoghegan.

The Society prospered. Membership increased to fifty by the end of 1770, and to over 700 in the next twenty years – most of the members were graduates (*The College Historical Society*, R.B. McDowell. Dublin University Press, 1932). The Society met in what is today the magnificent Senior Common Room, which came to be known as the 'Historical Room'; the Board felt it had to ask permission to use the Hist rooms on the occasion of the visit of the Lord Lieutenant in 1783. This was a year after substantial political independence had been conceded to Grattan's Parliament. Some members of the Society were MPs. Laurence Parsons, later 2nd Earl of Rosse, was an MP when he was elected Auditor of the Society (for the second time) in 1781.

Patrick Geoghegan builds on the earliest record of the Society so lovingly produced by T.S.C. Dagg (*College Historical Society: A History (1770-1920)*. Tralee 1969) and the valuable anthology edited by Budd and Hinds (*The Hist and Edmund Burke's Club*, Lilliput 1997) after the Society had celebrated its bicentenary in 1970. Geoghegan tells how students in the Hist, who were later to play leading roles in the transformation of Ireland, North and South, first tested their ideas in the Society. It took its name from the its initial

focus on historical questions, at first restricted to British history. This may have seemed a benign and constructive objective to the Board, but it did not last long. In 1782, reacting no doubt to the new status of the Irish Parliament, the Board lifted this restriction, and the Society gained confidence as it developed its long and sometimes tempestuous relationship with College. Students joined in demands for Catholic emancipation and, as McDowell and Webb record, 'liberalism soon came close to treason'. Tensions arose and by 1794 the Board moved to confine membership to students of the College, which would have disbarred 500 members. The Board forced the issue and decided to exclude the Society from its magnificent rooms unless it agreed to this new rule. This caused a split in the Society between those who accepted it, the Intern Society, and the rest who formed the first Extern Society. The schism was finally ended in 1806 when the records and property of the Extern Society were presented to the Intern Society. By 1815 the Society had left College again, reviving once more outside College where it remained until 1843.

As Geoghegan recounts, many great figures first made their reputations in the Hist. Tone, Emmet, Thomas Moore, Davis, John Blake Dillon, Butt, Hyde and Carson are more or less household names in Ireland, having made such lasting contributions to modern Ireland and are held high in various pantheons. Davis, who was Auditor (1839) and President (1840), made the mistake of being a thinker, a poet and a writer who did not die for his country, but he left the most generous and constructive ideas for a new Ireland. The Young Irelanders grew out of the Hist, as did their paper the *Nation* with its call 'educate that you may be free'. It took our country more than a century to take Davis's advice – one might wish that he would have had a larger influence had he not died of scarlet fever when he was thirty, but perhaps not. I cannot see that some of those who say they followed his ideas could have properly understood him. It is less well known that the Society's members included many notable novelists, from Charles Maturin, Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker to Oscar Wilde and Samuel Beckett.

Edward Carson, the leader of Unionism, was a friend of his contemporary, John Redmond, the last important leader of the Home Rule movement; Carson attended Redmond's funeral Mass. It is not clear whether Redmond was in the Hist with Carson but

there is no doubt that many friendships were made in the Hist that endured in spite of significant political differences. Many Hist people had leading roles in the legal and political administration of Ireland, and in the Church of Ireland, between the Union and independence, including Lord Ashbourne, Lord Chancellor of Ireland, and William Connor Magee, Archbishop of York – Dr Geoghegan has ensured they are not forgotten. Some played important parts in the transition from British rule to the new regimes, North and South. Lord Glenavy, ex-Auditor and President of the Society, became the Chair of the Seanad of the Free State frustrating – for a while – Mr de Valera’s impatience with the Upper House. Sir Donnell Deeny, Vice-President, formerly Lord Justice of Appeal in Northern Ireland, has recently made the case that Sir James Andrews, ex-Auditor, and other Hist lawyers, helped to establish and maintain the independence of the judiciary of Northern Ireland at a difficult time.

In the nineteenth century there were ‘few among the leaders of public opinion in Ireland who did not pass through *The Historical*’¹ but that could not last. Competition came from the graduates of four new universities founded in the nineteenth century, each with its debating society (led in three out of the four cases by an *Auditor*), each contributing leaders in politics and the law and other walks of life, North and South.

Hist members largely missed out on the revolutions that led to the partition of Ireland, and indeed Trinity was somewhat disconnected from the newly formed Free State – though many senior political figures spoke at the Hist and Hist people went on to the law more or less as before independence. But no one would have said that Trinity or the Hist was fully engaged in the new Ireland – partly because some wanted to isolate the College.

Joining the Hist in 1962, I found a society that was completely different from all others in Ireland. The infamous ‘Ban’ by which Archbishop John Charles McQuaid prohibited Catholic parents from sending their children to Trinity on pain of ‘mortal sin’, was too widely complied with, and vigorously enforced when challenged. One result was that many students came to Trinity from Great Britain to fill the

1 William Macneile Dixon, *Trinity College Dublin* (London, 2002)

available places. About one third of the students came from the Republic, and the same from Northern Ireland (almost all Protestants) and from Great Britain. There were a few students from the Commonwealth following in the footsteps of Jaja Wachuku, first Foreign Minister of Nigeria. The UK students had a different schooling, wider experiences and good grants, so they set the pace in many respects, which was good for us all. The membership of the Hist reflected the student body. This made for a great variety of personalities and ideas, ranging from members of the Cumann Gaelach and the Fabian Society, to the entire membership of the '1964 Committee', an active group of young Tories, led by Patrick Evershed CBE. Of the few Irish Catholics many had been students at Clongowes Wood College which had a reputation for encouraging independence of mind. British Catholics, including Michael Newcombe, Auditor 1962-63, made distinctive contributions. Women were excluded from the Society.

You could not have made it up! But when all was said and done the Hist, with all its weaknesses, was thoroughly cosmopolitan, a contrast with almost everything else in Ireland. It provided a rich intellectual and social formation. What it lacked in 'Irishness' was compensated for by its diversity in membership and ideas. Moreover it was a superb debating society, ruled by laws that owed much to curious traditions and governed by Private Business – which often went on into the early hours of the morning. It fulfilled the role that Davis envisaged when he spoke to the Society on *The Utility of Debating Societies in Remediating the Defects of a University Education*.

The College Board had a way of regulating the Society; motions for discussion had to be approved by the Board before the beginning of term. In 1957 the Hist debated the motion 'That this house disapproves of Birth Control', which was debated in camera, that is in private, 'at the request of the Board'. In 1958 the Hist decided to debate divorce. The Auditor, Michael Knight, suggested that the Correspondence Secretary, Ian Simons, invite Archbishop John Charles McQuaid, which he did. The Archbishop is believed to have spoken with Provost A.J. McConnell, who summoned Knight and Simons and instructed the Society not to debate the subject. Later in the session the Hist debated a motion 'That A.I.D. should be accepted by Society' with Bethel Solomons, the famous Jewish

gynaecologist, in the Chair. Perhaps few people knew what A.I.D. was. In 1959 he was again in the chair when the Society debated homosexuality. In 1962–63 motions still had to be seen by the Board. One motion in Newcombe's year, 'That Abortion be made Legal' on 27 February 1963, had to be held in camera. The Hist was pushing at boundaries that were only fully breached fifty years later.

Elected Auditor for 1964–65 at a time when there was hope for reconciliation between North and South, and for the modernization of both, I wanted to explore in my Inaugural Address what lay ahead for Ireland. The population of the Republic of Ireland had fallen below three million. The policy that our past should be our future was failing. I loved my country and yet I despaired of it – much as I do today, though the balance has shifted very much for the better – the Enlightenment is winning out in the end even if it taking a bit longer than I expected.

I hoped to have Brian Faulkner and Charles Haughey, the two rising powers in Irish politics, among the speakers. Faulkner declined, Haughey accepted, ducking out at the last minute and 'sending' Brian Lenihan in his stead – an early example of their relationship. As mentioned by Patrick Geoghegan, my invitation to speak to Father James McDyer, the dedicated social reformer, perhaps the most powerful orator in Ireland, was not approved by his authorities. He was confined as much as possible as curate in the remote village of Glencolumbkille in County Donegal, where I had spent three weeks at a student workcamp. Remarkably he was not even allowed to accept my separate invitation to attend the meeting. Peadar O'Donnell, 'the grand old man of the left', and McDyer's great supporter took his place. Lieutenant General Michael Costello, the innovative manager of the Irish Sugar Company, spoke. He was also supporting Father McDyer by running a vegetable processing industry in Glencolumbkille. Costello had made a grant to Trinity leading to the foundation of the Department of Genetics by George Dawson and represented my interest in modernizing Ireland through science and technology. Senator Owen Sheehy Skeffington, a nearly lone liberal voice, who had taught me how to debate at non-denominational Sandford Park School, took up the theme of modernisation in politics and society. He had been banned from speaking at the L&H in UCD in 1949 by President Michael Tierney.

Skeff had by some distance the greatest influence on the students of the College in the 1960s and was highly regarded throughout the country. As Garret FitzGerald wrote: ‘Although avowedly agnostic, his behaviour was of the kind commonly called Christian, although not universal amongst people of that faith.’² The Trinity Christians recognized his qualities by electing him to Seanad Éireann on four occasions between 1951 and 1969. Sean O’Faoláin in his funeral oration called him ‘the inspiration, and very often the conscience, of all who knew him’.³

I have always thought myself fortunate to have spent more time in the Hist than anywhere else in College. Ideas flowed freely, speeches were often brilliant. Most of us had serious interests in the affairs of the world. Every student in College could become a member for a few shillings – between 100 and 200 students attended debates from time to time and came from throughout the College. A few hundred more read the papers and magazines in the Conversation Room, played snooker and billiards for a small charge that helped to pay for the Society, or studied in the workrooms at the top of the GMB. My officers included three scientists (Michael Cameron, David Wagstaff and myself), one mathematician (Cian Ó hÉigearthaigh), one medical student (Hugh O’Neill) and one historian (Edward Liddle). Ó hÉigearthaigh, as Record Secretary, once read the minutes in Irish (an Entrance Scholar in mathematics, he was elected a Scholar of the House in Irish) but had to recant when faced with impeachment. A brilliant speaker, he was nominated as the ‘Committee’ candidate for Auditor, with the surprise support of a Tory, Brian [now Sir Brian] Williamson. Shortly afterwards, in a packed chamber, with standing room only, a motion to admit women was defeated. In an unforgettable moment Ó hÉigearthaigh rose to his feet, shaking with emotion, and declared that he was withdrawing from the election for Auditor. He was a candidate in the election – the Committee insisted that it would not withdraw *its* nomination. In the event Michael Cameron, who had also advocated the

2 Garret FitzGerald, *All in a Life: an Autobiography* (Dublin, 1991), p. 48

3 Andrée Sheehy Skeffington, *Skeff: A Life of Owen Sheehy Skeffington*, (Dublin, 1991), p. 240

admission of women, was elected. A great admirer of India, where he had lived for a while, he went on to succeed in business in the United States, becoming a generous and loyal supporter of the Society.

Competing with students from the Literary and Debating Society in NUI Galway, the Philosophical Society in University College Cork, the Literary and Historical Society in University College Dublin and the Literary and Scientific Society at Queen's University Belfast at university interdebates, and in The Irish Times Debating Competition, broadened my experiences in ways that could not otherwise have been fulfilled. Anthony Clare, Patrick Cosgrave and John Cooke were prominent in the L&H, which met in the Physics Theatre in Earlsfort Terrace on a Saturday night: it was the greatest challenge, a bear pit, in which weak speakers were cheerfully destroyed by Edward McParland and other wits. While Cosgrave (later the biographer of Margaret Thatcher) and others there seemed to believe the sun rose and set in London, we in Trinity, at least those of us who were Irish, thought Ireland was more important. Michael D. Higgins, Seán Ó hUiginn and Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh were prominent in Galway; Belfast had Eamonn McCann and Michael Farrell.

The influence of the Hist showed itself over and over again, on no occasion more so than in 1970 when we celebrated the Bicentenary with a week of celebrations, which are fully described by Geoghegan. Senator Edward Kennedy pleased us all by quoting Macneile Dixon's accolade: the Hist 'may fairly be described as the greatest of all the schools of orators'.

The Hist was remembered by Roy Jenkins, Chancellor of Oxford, speaking at the Quatercentenary Dinner of Trinity in the House of Commons in 1992. He vividly described his participation in a debate followed by a meal and 'blind' in the GMB – compared to this event he said, Oxford and Cambridge were decidedly red brick. In the late 1990s, Eric Lowry, ex-Auditor and Vice-President, organized a meeting in the rooms of the Oxford Union, at which many former members of the Hist and other Trinity graduates heard a brilliant exposition of the Peace Process by the former Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds. Edward Heath was in the Chair. Afterwards Reynolds told a few of us over coffee that the IRA would never disarm – they would put the guns 'under the thatch'. Reynolds was due to speak at the Inaugural of Tim Smyth in 2007 but was too ill to attend. Sir John

Major took the opportunity to speak of Reynold's contribution to the Peace Process in the most generous terms, leaving no one in any doubt that Reynolds did his country great service.

Now as the Hist heads past 250 years we can say that it has been of some service. Not only has it provided Trinity students with a vigorous forum in which to argue their ideas, where they learned how to run a democratic organization, it also ensured that they could listen to and challenge leading figures from all walks of society. We may have been more polite than the L&H but we were no less a challenge. 'Dangerous ideas positively encouraged', a headline claim of Trinity College today has been at the heart of the Hist for 250 years.

As students few of us knew that William Rowan Hamilton, one of the greatest mathematical physicists of the nineteenth century, participated keenly in the Hist while he was a Fellow. His status was illustrated by being the first person elected a foreign member of the National Academy of Sciences in Washington. Three generations of the Churchill family spoke at the Society. The Hist has been addressed by every leader of the Free State and the Republic of Ireland and by many leaders from Northern Ireland. In 1934 Éamon de Valera, then President of the Executive Council, who was as wary of Trinity as it was of him, chose to speak at the Inaugural Meeting of the Society; his address could have been seen as an overture to Trinity, which was not taken up for many years. The Society can be proud of its more recent graduates, none more so than Mary Harney. The first woman to be elected Auditor, co-founder and leader of the Progressive Democrats, she became the first woman to be Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister). We mourned the early passing in 2011 of Brian Lenihan, an officer in the late 1970s who became a Fianna Fáil TD and then Minister for Finance during the deep crisis of 2008 – he had a brilliant future. David Ford, ex-Auditor, Scholar in Classics, became the first non-ordained holder of the Regius Chair of Divinity at Cambridge.

The Hist has long had links with the Department of Foreign Affairs, numbering Frederick Boland – always remembered as a wise Chancellor of the University – and Conor Cruise O'Brien among our members, both of whom served as Presidents of the Society. It can be argued that O'Brien had the most formidable and wide-ranging intellect of twentieth-century Ireland – who else can match

the author of books on Albert Camus, Thomas Jefferson and Edmund Burke – who also held many senior offices. He was Minister for Post and Telegraphs with responsibility for policy on Northern Ireland, he was special representative in the Congo of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, he was the founding Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ghana and he was Editor-in-Chief of *The Observer*, just some of his other achievements in a radical career fizzing with controversy. Recent graduates include David O’Sullivan, Ambassador of the EU to the United States, and Rory Montgomery, Irish Ambassador to the EU. Dr Geoghegan tells the role of the Hist in the career of Taoiseach Leo Varadkar – he was a member but was not elected to the Committee of the Hist in the same week as he was elected Chair of Young Fine Gael – many will agree, some grudgingly no doubt, that this was a good week for Irish politics. Recent members have welcomed him to the Hist stand in Freshers’ Week when he has been known to renew his membership.

Micheal O’Siadhail, one of those renegades from Clongowes, started in the Hist where his powerful oratory dominated debates even as a Freshman. Although Calliope, his muse, called him away he has remained close to the Hist and the many friends he first met there. He stood apart then and has continued to be a *different* poet, now more international than Irish, which is mightily seen in his courageous exploration of the Holocaust in *The Gossamer Wall* and his startling history of civilization in *The Five Quintets*. He has honoured the Hist by readily agreeing to celebrate the Society in verse. ‘Hist’ portrays the Society as it was in the 1960s. No one should ever expect the Hist to remain the same but it is pleasing to dream about the time when you were there and have it written up with such affection by one its most remarkable members.

DAVID MCCONNELL
Ex-Auditor
President

HIST

In Celebration of 250 years of
The College Historical Society,
Trinity College Dublin

Let two hundred years, two score and ten
Echo through this chamber of debate:
That this house... A motion passed again,
Ayes and *no's* such arguments create.
Emmet, Davis, Goldsmith, Moore and Tone,
Solemn names of those who surely spoke,
Whose prestige and eloquence we loan,
Ghosting orators to still evoke.
Sometimes loggerheaded either-ors,
Yielding to the win-lose logic of debate;
Yet those times we spark more light than heat,
Dared nuances someone's speech explores.
Now from both sides of the floor we fête,
This arena where we found our feet.

On a point of order! someone calls —
Order we more honour in the breach —
Still for novices a silence falls,
Soft deflowering of a maiden speech.
Broken in, you face the taunting few,
Brazen out the wag and heckler's jeer,
Grasp the ballot box to steady you,
Trusting to a countering *Hear! Hear!*
Confident, keep learning ploys and tricks,
Play then to the house, outwit with guile,
Driving home an argument that sticks,
Score your point to swing the rank and file.
Ordinary members' aye or no
Sway a balanced motion's touch and go.

On a point of information! Youth
Parallels the universe and we're
Cocksure of the black and white of truth,
Members aren't ordinary here!
Finding what in turn we might become,
We both pose and posture as needs be;
Left or right we beat our callow drum,
This or that of burning certainty.
Through the chair! Do we then slowly grow
Into all those argued views we hold,
Taking every stance to heart as though
Roles we play will shape how we unfold?
Full of green and youthful self-esteem,
Gravitas and swaggered futures dream.

Lessons in the politics of power,
Ballots and electoral upsets,
Private business till the witching hour,
Late cabal intrigues, impeachment threats.
Laws and rules and learned formality,
Proper modes and manners of address,
Earned marked thanks of the Society,
All in earnest — yet a playfulness.
Although sincere we somehow still all know
How the Hist is our first practice run,
Our tongue-in-cheek careers in embryo,
Mixing both what's serious and fun.
In rules and arguments our lives gestate,
Interns in the hothouse of debate.

Those who stood before this membership
Never will now suffer from stage fright,
Or in mid-speech begin to lose the grip,
Letting belly butterflies take flight.
Through our lives if we are called to speak
Or to marshal arguments at speed;
Schooled in oratorical technique,
Everyone who hears us will take heed.
In debate's seedbed a sureness bloomed,
More a confidence than simply skill,
Self-belief with which we were imbued.
Fluency and presence now assumed,
Unbeknownst to us we're moving still
Motions of a lifelong gratitude.

MICHEAL O' SIADHAIL