

TRINITY by Leon Uris

Ed and Pat Rogan

Leon Uris' latest novel, Trinity, is an outstanding example of that particular genre known as historical fiction. The novelist working in that milieu must of necessity incorporate within the story line itself, an understanding of the culture, an exquisite ear for the subtleties and nuances of the language, and painstaking, scholarly research. Uris is eminently successful.

Trinity traces the lives of three generations of three families, each inescapably caught up in the internal conflict of Ireland as it struggles with itself and Great Britain. Ireland's troubles, or 'the Irish question' (as the English euphemistically phrased it) date back to the latter part of the 12th century. Uris, however, concerns himself with a relatively short 75 year period, albeit, a violent three quarters of a century. Trinity carries its audience from the ravages of the great famine of the 1840's to the ill-fated Easter Rebellion of 1916.

Haley's Roots relied heavily upon the reminiscings of an African storyteller, a griot. For author Uris, the truth is found in the person of Daddo Friel, an ancient and venerable shanachie, a teller of tales. It is through Daddo that we learn of Kilty Larkin, and his son Tomas, grandfather, and father of the protagonist, Conor Larkin.

The shanachie's tale is not a pretty one. There are no shamrocks, there are no blushing colleens, there are no cottages by the Lee, and no particular attention paid to the setting sun on Galway Bay. On the contrary, Daddo's recollections are a grim recital of deprivation, famine, and persecution. In the summer of 1846, a mysterious blight ravaged the potato crop throughout the whole of Ireland. The devastation that followed was rapid and total. Starving families, in bondage to the English landlord, were compelled to return the fruits of their labors in order to pay "rents and rates". The potato could be kept as the solitary source of sustenance. Unfortunately, there was no potato. England turned uncompromising eyes and deaf ears to the pleas of Irish leaders.

Death, disease, and famine were the result. Scenes of men, women, and children being found by the side of the road, dead of starvation, their lips stained green from desperate grubbing in the grass, evoke images of insensitivity and heartlessness tempered solely by Uris' compassionate portrayal. Uris renders a tender but honest portrait. There is not a hint of over-sentimentality, breast-beating, or self-righteousness. Commendably, Uris has a story to tell, and he tells it.

The trinity of the Larkins of Donegal, the transplanted Scot family of Mac Leods, and the Hubbles of English aristocracy is



inextricably interwoven. For the Larkins of Ireland, it is a land brutalized by England, capitalized on by the imported Scot, and sorrowfully abandoned by the Irish. For the Mac Leods of Scotland, Ireland represents a manifest destiny with the imprimatur of the Queen Mother. For the Hubbles of England, one is reminded of Moynihan's 'benign neglect', the benevolent despot.

The Plantation of Ulster, England's guarantee of sovereignty in the north of Ireland is reflected in the loyal Mac Leods of Belfast. Protected by religion, chosen by the Crown, and fiercely loyal to the Protectorate, their posture is threatened by creed, geography, and tenancy. The Hubbles of royal lineage suffer no pangs of guilt, no qualms of conscience. Ireland is a land to be rightfully governed, at worst, a vexing question to be solved. The Conor Larkins of Ireland are indeed, 'soldiers in dubious battle.' Where are the Boys of Wexford of 1798? Is Conor Larkin's Ireland the Ireland of Wolfe Tone and Robert Emmett, or have all the flowers gone? Not really. The flowers bloom in the hearts of James Connolly, Padraic Pearse, and Long Dan Sweeney, the dubiousness of battle notwithstanding.

The devastating famine of 1846 should have broken the heart and spirit of all Ireland. Many Irishmen did emigrate to America and Australia, but for those who remained, like a Phoenix rising from the ashes, a stiffening determination and a re-birth of national pride were forged in the fires of conflict.

The agrarian movement, an attempt to buy back the land from England was initiated by Michael Davitt. Charles Stewart Parnell led the political battle for Home Rule. Eamon De Valera, committed to Irish nationalism, fostered a return to the ancient language of the Celt, Gaelic. And The Irish Republican Brotherhood was born. Sinn Fein, 'ourselves alone'. For the men of the Brotherhood, there can only be one road to travel in order to achieve an independent Ireland. 'They've had their fill of terrible beauties'.

Uris speaks of the terrible beauty that is Ireland, and that paradoxical beauty is reflected in the ugliness and charm that is the city of Belfast. Belfast, a city steeped in history, has long been the seat of Irish problems. The Catholic minority struggle for their place in the sun. The Protestant gentry of England and Scotland control the land, the industry, the economy, the lives of all who live there.

To Conor Larkin comes the realization that for him, grandson of Kilty, son of Tomas Larkin, there can be no future in a divided Ireland. The Orangemen of Ulster are unremitting in their hatred of Conor and all that he represents. Torn between the love of a woman and his love of country, yet with an Irishman's pragmatic view of futility, Larkin must choose the one road he is to travel. And he does, a soldier in dubious battle.

Leon Uris has been honing his craft for more than twenty years; the result, Trinity, is the work of a shanachie, a master storyteller, at the top of his form, in his finest hour.