



Nathalie Ginoux et Laurent Olivier (dir.)

*LES IMAGES ET LES FORMES. FRANÇOISE HENRY (1902-1982),
LES HÉRITAGES D'UNE ŒUVRE PIONNIÈRE*

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FRANÇOISE HENRY, WILLIAM O'SULLIVAN AND THE *BOOK OF KELLS*

Bernard Meehan

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Françoise Henry, William O'Sullivan and the *Book of Kells*

Bernard Meehan

On 28 October 1974, the year of her retirement from University College Dublin, Françoise Henry could relish the publication of perhaps her most enduring work. Her illustrated volume on the *Book of Kells* opened up the exotic visual world of that great early medieval gospel book (Trinity College Dublin, MS 58) to a large audience.¹ As she had remarked some years earlier, the *Book of Kells* is 'not simply a manuscript with some pleasant pictures. It is a whole world, complexe [sic], strange, sometimes mysterious'.² Her study was essentially a commentary attached to reproductions of ninety-three pages, six half pages and thirty plates of enlarged details, rather than a facsimile of all 340 surviving folios. It was, however, a splendid production, with a slip case and marker ribbon. Many who own it think of it as a copy of the entire manuscript and an object of great value. I have often been approached by members of the public, whose copy is a treasured family possession. Her work has been in my thoughts for some time, as the book I produced, with the same publisher, in 2012, was conceived by Thames & Hudson as a direct market replacement for it.³ I emphasise the term 'market replacement', as both books are, to a significant extent, commercial products as well as treatises springing from the pure waters of academia. Her 1974 book has admirable qualities and set the agenda for the study of the *Book of Kells* for many years, with its informed judgements and its wide range of comparative references. It was illustrated copiously with photographs and with her own drawings, some of which contain an element of interpretation, and are all the stronger for that. Her study was written clearly, in a style that is engaging, memorable and entirely enviable, given that English was not her first language. From the first reviews, it was seen as authoritative: 'a model of scholarly objectivity... not only a pleasure to the eye but stimulating and engrossing to

1 *The Book of Kells. Reproductions from the Manuscript in Trinity College Dublin; with a Study of the Manuscript by Françoise Henry*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1974. A version of this paper formed part of my talk, 'Eighty Years of the Book of Kells', the Helen Roe Memorial Lecture, at the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, on 29 May 2014. I acknowledge the following permissions: the Board of Trinity College, the University of Dublin, to quote from unpublished material at Trinity College Library; the Royal Irish Academy to publish extracts from papers of Françoise Henry; and Thames & Hudson to publish their photograph of Eva Neurath.

2 RIA, FH/B13/391(17).

3 Bernard Meehan, *The Book of Kells*, London, Thames & Hudson, 2012; *Das Book of Kells. Das Meisterwerk keltischer Buchmalerei*, Freiburg im Breisgau, Herder, 2012; wbg Edition, Darmstadt, 2018; *Il Libro di Kells*, Genoa, Marietti, 2012; Tokyo, Iwanami Shoten, 2015; and a corrected edition: *Le Livre de Kells*, Paris, Citadelles & Mazenod, 2018. Editions other than English-language are by arrangement with Ultreya, Milan.

the mind', in the words of John Beckwith writing in *The Times Literary Supplement*.⁴ That was how most saw it. Brian Fallon in the *Irish Times*, on the other hand, knew that he should not 'carp', as he put it, but he did so anyway:

Dr Henry's chapters are essentially a précis of what is already known about the *Book of Kells*. It is highly unlikely now that we shall learn anything more about its history, or gain any more insights into the mind and styles of the men who created it... Her own analysis has become the standard one over the years, and after further examination she finds that she has changed her mind very little.⁵

Fallon found it to be no more than 'a typical deluxe art book... and as such it is rather on the expensive side'. Its selling price, £29, was 'a daunting affair for the ordinary buyer', he declared.

It is true that the book incorporated judgements she had formed many years earlier and had expressed not only in her 1967 book, *Irish Art during the Viking Invasions*, but earlier again in her 1940 study, *Irish Art in the early Christian Period*, both published by Methuen. In this and other respects, her 1974 book was long in the making. It generated a great deal of correspondence, some sections of which I have consulted formally, among Françoise Henry's papers at the Royal Irish Academy,⁶ and other elements informally, in a departmental file in Trinity College Library,⁷ where I worked for many years. The impetus behind her book was that Trinity College, and numerous publishers, were long aware of the inadequacies of the black and white facsimile of the entire manuscript that had been published by Urs Graf Verlag in 1950.⁸ It left much to be desired both in its images and its text, and it was out of print, but all parties took a long time to make up their minds about what to do. There had been two short publications, neither of them satisfactory from the commercial or academic angle: one in 1961, by George Otto Simms, Church of Ireland Archbishop of Armagh: it has frequently been reprinted;⁹ and in 1965 a UNESCO publication by James Johnson Sweeney, *Irish illuminated manuscripts of the early Christian period*,¹⁰ which had only twenty-five pages of text, and had little substance.

As far back as 1957, Françoise Henry had been discussing a study of the *Book of Kells* with Walter Oakeshott, for inclusion in his series, *The Faber Library of Illuminated Manuscripts*. In February 1961, Oakeshott felt that she could produce a text almost out of her head.¹¹ His plan was that it would appear close to a volume on the *Book of Durrow* by Rupert Bruce-Mitford of the British Museum. Françoise Henry agreed that she had the elements of a text more or less worked out,¹² as she was

4 *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 November 1974, p. 1235.

5 *Irish Times*, 1 November 1974.

6 Royal Irish Academy, FH/B13/389-98.

7 It is regretted that due to preparation for major building work taking place in Trinity College Library from 2021, it has not been possible to gain access to the correspondence for a final checking of details before publication of this paper; thus, the general citation 'TCD Library correspondence' is used below.

8 *Evangeliorum quattuor Codex Cenannensis*, ed. Ernest Henry Alton, Eric Milner-White, Peter Meyer *et al.*, Bern, Urs Graf, 1950-1951, 3 vols.

9 George Otto Simms, *The Book of Kells. A selection of pages reproduced with a description and notes*, Dublin, Dolmen Press, 1961.

10 James Johnson Sweeney, *Irish illuminated manuscripts of the early Christian period*, London, Collins/UNESCO, « Fontana Unesco art books », 1965.

11 RIA, FH/B13/389 (1).

12 RIA, FH/B13/389 (2).

preparing lectures for the Royal Academy exhibition in London of Trinity College Dublin's treasures that year (the exhibition was staged with the aim of raising money to build a new library); but by the end of the year, she was bowing out, as Faber were offering only eight plates, not enough for her to represent the manuscript's complexity or lack of cohesion.

While, sadly, I never met Mlle Henry, I have a strong sense of her personality from her correspondence with my predecessor William (Billy) O'Sullivan (1921-2000), whom I succeeded as Keeper of Manuscripts in 1983 following his retirement and with whom she was on the most affable terms (fig.1). The correspondence does a lot to bring their personalities to life. O'Sullivan had been Assistant in Charge of Manuscripts from 1954, his designation being changed in 1961 to Keeper of Manuscripts, and he must have known Françoise Henry from the early 1950s, if not earlier.¹³ They held similar views both on manuscripts and on those with whom they interacted, and his persuasion and support helped the book through publication. Her work was free of the 'rash fancies



Fig. 1 : Portrait of William and Neans O'Sullivan, 1960'. (Private collection)

of a James Johnston Sweeney',¹⁴ for example, as O'Sullivan put it. They shared an intense interest in gardening, and talk about plants is entwined, almost, one might propose, like interlace in an Insular manuscript, around the discussion of what kind of book she would produce. 'I have put a couple of the Neapolitan cyclamens into your little pots',¹⁵ O'Sullivan told her in 1971; 'besides the sour cherry', he asked hopefully, 'could I have a tiny piece of your violet phlox, and also the blue-lilac one that flowers late?'.¹⁶ When they raised their heads from gardening, their letters are shot through

¹³ A brief account of his career is in *Irish Society for Archives Newsletter*, Autumn 2021.

¹⁴ TCD Library correspondence.

¹⁵ RIA, FH/B13/393 (19).

¹⁶ RIA, FH/B13/393 (16).

with barbs aimed at those around them. It has been difficult to resist including some of these comments, if only because it was as much due to the perceived inadequacies of other scholars as to her own qualities that Françoise Henry was given so much encouragement to write the book. It also helped enormously that she saw the *Book of Kells* as having been produced in Ireland rather than in Northumbria or Pictland or another equally unacceptable location. Such views were fashionable in English academic circles, though not in Ireland, and had received a boost from a 1972 publication by the palaeographer Julian Brown.¹⁷

To provide a brief backdrop to the relationship, I backtrack to 1961 and Trinity College's exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. There was great excitement in the air. As Françoise Henry put it, 'The *Book of Kells* is fast becoming London's new Baby Panda and in such cases they completely loose [sic] their heads'.¹⁸ The lectures, by leading experts, were packed out. No speaker escaped comment. When Arthur Aston Luce, Professor of Philosophy at Trinity College, provided a lecture on the *Book of Durrow*, O'Sullivan needed only to say, 'Luce was himself',¹⁹ while Neans O'Sullivan, the Irish scholar and Billy's wife, remarked, '1 hour 20 minutes of Luce rhetoric! The performance was high class but, needless to say, quite unscholarly and Francis [Wormald] provided a nice douche of reality at the end'.²⁰ Due to high demand, Françoise Henry's lecture on the art of the *Book of Kells* was repeated, and so was Rupert Bruce-Mitford's lecture on the Lindisfarne Gospels. O'Sullivan remarked that Bruce-Mitford's British Museum colleagues had reported that he 'has given this lecture 3 times already without getting to the end, and they are coming again in the hope that he will really finish this time'.²¹ Françoise replied that if Bruce-Mitford were to finish his lecture, he would be on his feet for more than two hours; she had once sat through one hour and 30 minutes of his talk but he was still far from the end.²²

Discussion of a new *Book of Kells* publication resumed later that decade. By 1968, Faber tried again, with an offer of twelve colour plates, plus twenty-four black and white plates, if Françoise Henry could deliver 16-20,000 words in fifteen months' time. The selling price was to be sixty-three shillings. Again, this did not happen. Meanwhile, Braziller had long been trying to make headway on an agreement, but in June 1970 they were turned down, even for a smaller book. By then, negotiations with Thames & Hudson had been going on for the best part of a year, with the publisher promising something that, while not a facsimile, would be, they claimed, 'quite magnificent looking and absolutely authentic',²³ though 'a monumental task'.²⁴

By October 1969, still nothing had been resolved. Trinity's Librarian, Denis Roberts, reported to the College Board on the state of play with all parties:

17 Thomas Julian Brown and Christopher D. Verey, 'Northumbria and the Book of Kells', *Anglo-Saxon England*, 1, January 1972, p. 219-246.

18 In TCD MS 11134.

19 RIA, FH/B13/391(5).

20 RIA, FH/B13/391(6).

21 RIA, FH/B13/391(10).

22 In TCD MS 11134.

23 TCD Library correspondence.

24 RIA, FH/B13/393(4).

1- There were active negotiations with Irish University Press over a facsimile, but the test results were not satisfactory.

2- A firm called Associated Trapinex, based on the Shannon Industrial Estate in Co Kerry, offered to make a facsimile that would sell for £500. They got nowhere.

3- There was also Studio Vista, the company which, under another name, had published Sir Edward Sullivan's book on the *Book of Kells* in 1914.²⁵ They proposed to combine some of the Urs Graf facsimile blocks with a revised text. This had been under discussion since 1962 but it was taken even less seriously than Faber's 1957 proposal.

4- Further again down the scale of serious was the proposal by the shop manager to combine the Urs Graf pages with a text by George Otto Simms. O'Sullivan, who favoured a more rigorous approach, responded with the comment that he did not 'think the Library should do anything to encourage the Archbishop to further efforts'.²⁶

5- And lastly, there was the proposal from Thames & Hudson for a book to sell at around 12-15 guineas, with Françoise Henry envisaged as the author, though, as Denis Roberts commented to the publisher, 'Mlle Henry is always a little unwilling to part with her work while she believes it can still be improved', an approach which the publisher disparaged as 'perfectionism'.²⁷

It was decided to set up a small working party to look at all proposals. The working party was to bear in mind the need for high standards of scholarship and reproduction, along with satisfactory financial returns to Trinity College.

By July 1970 it was clear that Thames & Hudson's proposals were progressing in a way that was agreeable to all parties. They maintained in a letter to Françoise Henry that their efforts would result in 'a notable public service [and] a very handsome book',²⁸ and that she was the only person who could take it on: 'there is no scholar other than yourself who could possibly do justice to the task',²⁹ they gushed. At the root of discussions was the supposition on the Trinity College side that the publisher wanted simply 'a lavish picture book', whereas the College required 'a new study of the manuscript'³⁰ to go with it, and Françoise Henry's participation was essential. She could do it, O'Sullivan insisted, in a 'penetrating yet balanced way'.³¹ He had to keep encouraging her: the book, he said, will be 'really exciting, something altogether fresh and new'.³²

In August 1970 she agreed to finish by the end of 1973, allowing herself a generous preparation time. But it was achieved, like so many books, not in a sustained, relaxed campaign, but in competition with the messiness of life. She was teaching; she was travelling; she had bouts of illness and infirmity; she was worried about her house on Mespil Road in Dublin: it had been bought by the Irish Life insurance company and they wanted to knock it down; there were many and varied discussions, compromises and stand-offs with the publisher; and there were her gardening

25 Sir Edward Sullivan, *The Book of Kells*, London/New York, Studio Publications, 1914.

26 TCD Library correspondence.

27 *Ibid.*

28 RIA, FH/B13/393(4).

29 *Ibid.*

30 RIA, FH/B13/393(9).

31 *Ibid.*

32 RIA, FH/B13/393(54).

obligations: 'you remember your plan to take some suckers off the dark purple lilac',³³ O'Sullivan reminded her. On occasion, gardening presented an obstacle rather than a diversion: 'Excuse the handwriting—I fell in the rose-trees and I sprained a thumb',³⁴ she explained to O'Sullivan in 1972, an excuse which more than matched his own for poor handwriting back in 1961: 'Forgive the pen but it is new and I've not yet broken it in.'³⁵

Throughout long discussions, the publishers did everything they could to get her to commit to one condition in particular: they wanted extended captions to the plates, but persistently she refused: 'This I am not prepared to do. It is not that kind of book, and after all the average public is not quite so stupid as all that'.³⁶ In reading their wrangling over captions, I realised that, when my book appeared thirty-eight years later, the publishers at last had got what they wanted, as I was perfectly happy to provide long captions. There were also differences of opinion over where details of pages should go: whether they should be interspersed with full pages or placed in their own section. O'Sullivan was concerned that, 'the mixture of whole pages and details might be confusing for the unlearned'.³⁷ Françoise Henry started to doubt if Thames & Hudson were the right choice: 'Have Braziller been squashed? Have Faber been dismissed completely? From T&H I want facts, not pats on the back'.³⁸

By the early Summer of 1972, the publisher had become worried about progress, and here Mrs Eva Neurath (1908-1999), the redoubtable owner of Thames & Hudson, steps into the tale.³⁹ (fig. 2) Born and raised in Berlin, Eva, her second husband Wilhelm Feuchtwang, son of the chief rabbi of Vienna, and their son Stephan left Berlin for Rotterdam in 1938, on the day of the Anschluss, in flight from Hitler. They escaped arrest by only a few hours. A year later, the family travelled to London. To break the impasse, Mrs Neurath proposed that she visit Françoise Henry in her fastness in Burgundy. As Françoise reported to O'Sullivan in June, 'Mrs Neurath is on the warpath'.⁴⁰ Visiting France was the only way to be sure of a conversation, as Françoise Henry had no phone in her home at Lindry, about 12 km west of Auxerre. Where Mrs Neurath should stay was an immediate issue: 'I hardly think Auxerre will come up to her standard of hotel. There used to be a 4-star hotel, but... there being only one Aga Khan and one Shah of Persia in the world, and they not *always* on the roads of Europe, it has had to close its doors and be turned into an insurance office'.⁴¹

She suggested a hotel in Vézelay which 'would come up to standard and could cope with [Mrs Neurath's] Rolls Royce without having to leave it to the tender mercies of the public in the street'.⁴² Vézelay is a good hour away from Lindry, even in a Rolls Royce, and that may have been

33 RIA, FH/B13/393(49).

34 TCD Library correspondence.

35 RIA, FH/B13/391(5).

36 TCD Library correspondence.

37 *Ibid.*

38 *Ibid.*

39 <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2000/jan/06/guardianobituaries>, consulted October 2021.

40 TCD Library correspondence.

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Ibid.*



Fig. 2 : Portrait of Eva Neurath (Courtesy of Thames & Hudson)

a factor in her considerations. She would, she said, offer to put up Mrs Neurath herself, but she had no bathroom, which 'doesn't make the practical side of life easier', and in any case, she added mysteriously, 'do you remember the to-do about traffic noise?'⁴³ In the end, the visit – or perhaps it should be looked on as a summit – was a huge success and allowed progress to be made on issues of design and the choice of pages to be reproduced. In both these areas Françoise Henry succeeded in getting her own way, something that clearly meant a great deal both to herself and to Mrs Neurath. To give a flavour of the visit, here follow excerpts from a long, excited letter she wrote to O'Sullivan after Mrs Neurath's departure:

Dear Billy

Ouf! Mrs Neurath has come and gone! I am limp! But it has been worth it in every way.

This is how it went: she landed in Calais about midday on Monday, complete with Rolls (bright red), chauffeur driven, a young friend called Suzy who was going to visit her young man in Flavigny, and a great thirst for seeing French cathedrals. So she made a bee-line for Reims. God knows when they arrived there. God knows when they left. In any case, when they reached Flavigny, it was pitch-dark. Fortified gates, old houses, all very nice in the headlights. [...] I suppose a good deal of talk, but no supper. [...] When finally they reached Vézelay, it was well after midnight, and according to French

43 *Ibid.*

provincial custom, the place was closed, locked, and deaf to all knocking, banging, etc. So they went back to Avallon. All the hotels had notices: 'full'. So about 2 a.m., back in Vézelay, and nothing for it but sleep in the car!! (no supper, remember!).

It doesn't matter really: the woman is as tough as an old cart horse, and after that day of travelling and that night of not sleeping, she was still able for such a dose of work that she nearly had me collapsed (and she hardly younger than me).

At this date, Mrs Neurath was 63, and Françoise Henry was all of 70. She continued:

We did the whole list of plates, of which I am sending you a copy.

On Wednesday, I spent all the morning making models of plates with enlargements, which she came to inspect after giving a look at Auxerre. On Thursday she went to Bourges whilst I was concocting more models and came back so entranced that she was ready to accept all my arrangements.

You see, she volunteered towards the end the information that she was a Prussian. I had guessed it already.⁴⁴

In Françoise Henry's telling of the discussion, [Mrs Neurath] had arrived with a horrid pattern of a grid where she intended to march the Kells cats, dogs, snakes, mice and butterflies as if they were Frederick II's regiments. Quite simple really. You make the grid, which contains a well-balanced arrangement of eight, six or four equal compartments. Then you enlarge all the wretched zoo to any odd size which will make them fit.⁴⁵ In other words you press the book into your categories instead of accepting its own. The zoo didn't like it, –neither did I, –and I felt there was a lot of angry meowing, hissing, growling somewhere in the background.

So I went inventing irregular shapes, –or at least taking them from the book, and by a fluke she was so startled that she liked it. The whole thing, book, cathedrals and countryside heavy with the last hay and the first harvest, had been I think quite an experience to her, and she was blossoming out every minute. She is really very pleasant, and not at all as formidable when immersed in the country [...].

After further comments, Françoise signed off, with a phrase which she had probably learned in Dublin: 'So there you are.'⁴⁶ In view of her experiences, she might well have taken issue with the entry on Eva Neurath in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, which proclaims her, 'the aesthetic visionary behind such works as *The Book of Kells* (1974) and *The Bayeux Tapestry* (1985)'.⁴⁷

On receiving Françoise Henry's account, O'Sullivan wrote to Mrs Neurath, briefly and disingenuously: 'I hear from Mlle Henry that you had an enjoyable time in Burgundy as well as putting in some hard work on the plates'. The 'Auxerre Accord', as it might be termed, held firm. It was invoked the following year, when Thames & Hudson's designer questioned the order of plates. O'Sullivan warned him that it had all been settled 'in France', and any changes would have to be taken up with Françoise Henry. The publisher retreated.

The agreement had allowed photography to start in the Library in August 1972. It went on sporadically until December. Letters concerning the production process have the feeling of another age in more ways than one, with their discussion of plates on cylinders; measuring of leaves against images; absence of phone contact; and the reliance on post for sending documents. A record made

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ This is an apt description of pages in *Evangeliorum quattuor*, *op cit.*, vol. 3, Introduction.

⁴⁶ TCD Library correspondence.

⁴⁷ <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/73686>, consulted October 2021.

at the time of the photographic schedule makes it all seem even more distant. Dates and details of the pages photographed were recorded in the Library in a diary for the year 1928, in which '28' was crossed out and replaced with '72'. This was typical of O'Sullivan's urge never to waste anything, but it must have been a little disconcerting, even then, to be making notes in a day diary, which provided reminders of recent, key historical information, like Nigeria's annexation by the Crown in 1899, or the attack on England by eleven German airships in 1917, along with reminders of all current horse race meetings.

By April 1973, when her draft was close to completion, Thames & Hudson still had not given up the hope of expansive captions, allowing Françoise Henry to return to a familiar theme: 'I think that at the back of it all there is a good deal of complete bewilderment on the part of Mrs Neurath in front of things which have a certain elasticity. The orderly regiments of Frederic II, that's what, unconsciously, she can't get out of her mind'.⁴⁸

Moving the story forward to 1974 and the production of the book, there was a problem with the collation map (the diagrammatic representation of the structure of the manuscript). She found it hard to understand the distinction between the original structure as conjectured by Roger Powell, who had rebound the manuscript in 1953, and the physical structure which Powell had to impose on the manuscript to provide a functioning binding. In April 1974 Powell visited Thames & Hudson and reported to O'Sullivan that, 'the colours are good, and I am very pleased they are not mounting the plates in an album as was done with the facsimile',⁴⁹ but there was confusion over the collation map, as Françoise Henry had made a few errors. 'I gathered that they find her "difficult"',⁵⁰ Powell suggested. Thames & Hudson were not, he said, looking forward to meeting her in Dublin. O'Sullivan sprang to her defence: 'The M-K [Ian Mackenzie-Kerr, of Thames & Hudson] v FH trouble is two-sided. I have been hearing the other side. How they changed the text without understanding it and sent it off to the printer without her seeing it... It is a very delicate matter... it is tricky'.⁵¹ In a scribbled footnote, he added, 'they have met here and all will be well with the collation'. That, unfortunately, turned out not to be the case, as a few errors were carried over into the published volume.

As with so many books of this type, where the aim is to represent an object of beauty in an appropriate way, but to a deadline, there were snags, pressure points and differences of opinion. In the same month, April 1974, the publisher began to generate publicity material and to incur O'Sullivan's scorn. Their first attempt told the buying public that the *Book of Kells* is, 'the largest in size, the boldest in ambition. It is ageless, unsurpassed, unsurpassable'. O'Sullivan did not dispute that, but when they said that pages of the book show, 'the Virgin, Christ, the Evangelists, ... while others swarm with delightfully unexpected animals disporting themselves around initials or along margins', they might have known better: 'I think it will jolt most Christian readers to find the Virgin

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Trinity College Dublin, MS 10525/1/416.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Trinity College Dublin, MS 10525/1/417.

placed before Christ',⁵² he said—somehow, they resisted pointing out to him that that is exactly where the Virgin is placed in the *Book of Kells*—and he reminded them that placing animals in margins was largely a Gothic device. When the proofs started coming back, O'Sullivan was in his element:

We are not quite as delighted as you are... We are very conscious of the effort I made... to try to get the dominant blue right on such an important page as the opening of Mark, but there has been no correction of this colour.⁵³

In one set of comments, he ranged across the colour spectrum:

there has been a welcome loss of overall pinkiness... however, this has been accompanied by a cooling down of the plates to a level well below that of the MS, whose warmth perhaps relies on yellow in the vellum rather than pink... [and] in all of these pages the blues are too green.⁵⁴

As he reported to Roger Powell, 'I have been simply slaving over [the colours] and have just finished two days hard slog with the Swiss printers'.⁵⁵

The text was finalised in June 1974, though not without difficulty for the author, now in her 73rd year, as she had been hampered by the aftermath of Loyalist paramilitary bombings, the previous month, in Dublin and Monaghan which killed thirty-four people and injured almost three hundred more.⁵⁶ She explained to O'Sullivan that she 'got into a complete tangle after the bombs, as I still had a lot to do in the Academy, but the bus strike and the interdiction on parking made it harder and harder';⁵⁷ and, on top of it all, her legs, as she put it, 'began to refuse service'.⁵⁸ Thames & Hudson, she said, 'then got completely frantic in their usual way... and sent Mrs Neurath's chauffeur as a messenger to collect the TS—by air to Geneva, and then by car... (he had probably never heard of Orly)'.⁵⁹

It all worked out in the end. The publication even survived a near-panic over the sizing of the images when it was realised that some pages had variations from actual size of up to 5 mm, or three per cent. While slight, the variations, caused by the curvilinear distortion of the manuscript while it was placed in a position suitable for photography, were enough to prevent the publisher from advertising the pages as facsimiles. A rather opaque prefatory note cited 'technical reasons connected with the photography... the importance of the manuscript... [and] very rigorous conditions'.⁶⁰

52 TCD Library correspondence.

53 *Ibid.*

54 *Ibid.*

55 Trinity College Dublin, MS 10525/1/417.

56 <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/dublin/chron.htm>, consulted October 2021.

57 TCD Library correspondence.

58 *Ibid.*

59 *Ibid.*

60 *The Book of Kells. Reproductions from the Manuscript, op. cit.*, unpaginated preface.

There was a coda in 1977, when it was agreed that two sections of the *Book of Kells* – the Gospels of Mark and John – would be lent to the exhibition 'Treasures of Early Irish Art', at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the first of several venues in the United States.⁶¹ Eva Neurath proposed that Thames & Hudson produce a paperback version of the 1974 book for the exhibition, but O'Sullivan pointed out that her suggested design was 'entirely without taste or imagination' and would have led to text and images being unrelated to each other on the page. He urged Françoise Henry to work on the idea, but she demurred from writing for 'a large popular market'. One has the sense that the energy she could give to the subject was spent: when Mrs Neurath indicated that she wished the book to include material on 'the strange lives of the Irish monks', Françoise Henry, a little wilfully, interpreted the request as being for 'a monkish thriller'.⁶²

The question must be addressed of how Françoise Henry's book has stood the test of the past fifty or so years. The answer is: extremely well. It remains a marvellous, evocative synthesis, based on art-historical scholarship and connoisseurship, expressed in an undogmatic way, extending across the broadly comparable range of manuscripts in Ireland and Europe. Inevitably, some of her interpretations have fallen victim to research and changing fashions, but the bulk of her analysis was well founded. She identified three major scribes, for example, terming them, in a manner more prosaic than her usual style, 'A', 'B' and 'C'.⁶³ Her division of scribes has since been finessed with the addition of a fourth scribe, whom there was no option but to term 'D'.⁶⁴ She distinguished one artist from another, offering vivid characterisations of their personalities: the 'Goldsmith', so called because his compositions suggest metalwork in their use of golden yellow and silver blue and the intricacy of their patterns; the 'Portrait Painter'; and the 'Illustrator'.⁶⁵ She followed tradition in describing f. 114r as the Arrest of Jesus, whereas now it is normally recognised as Jesus on the Mount of Olives.⁶⁶ She had described her 'Illustrator' in 1940 as that 'wild, erratic painter', with his 'brutal idea of colour and a savage notion of drawing', who 'manages to create the most astonishing pages of the *Book*, because he is audacious, sure of himself... and is at times a sort of visionary'. Not all observers can see all of that, at least in this page.⁶⁷ In 1940, she identified 'a very attractive fourth' artist,⁶⁸ who was responsible, in her view, for a few pages including f. 8r, the *Nativitas Christi* page. As she observed in 1974, she had expected that the passage of time would have led to the loss of some of the evidence she had presented in the past, but she was surprised to find this not to

61 George Frank Mitchell, *Treasures of Irish art, 1500 B.C.-1500 A.D., from the collections of the National Museum of Ireland, Royal Irish Academy, Trinity College, Dublin*, exh. cat., New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art/A. Knopf, 1977. See also Bernard Meehan, 'Exhibition outside Ireland', in *The Book of Kells*, ed. Peter K. Fox, Luzern, Faksimile Verlag Luzern, 1990, *Commentary*, p. 328-329.

62 TCD Library correspondence.

63 *The Book of Kells. Reproductions from the manuscript*, op. cit., p. 154-155.

64 Bernard Meehan, 'The Division of Hands', in *The Book of Kells*, op. cit., p. 249-256.

65 *The Book of Kells. Reproductions from the manuscript*, op. cit., p. 212.

66 Jennifer O'Reilly, 'The Book of Kells, folio 114r: a mystery revealed yet concealed', in John Higgitt, Michael Spearman (ed.), *The Age of Migrating Ideas: Early Medieval Art in Northern Britain and Ireland. Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Insular Art held in the National Museums of Scotland in Edinburgh, 3-6 January 1991*, Edinburgh, A. Sutton, p. 106-114.

67 Françoise Henry, *Irish Art in the early Christian Period*, London, Methuen, 1940, p. 146.

68 *Ibid.*, p. 147.

be the case. Yet this 'very attractive' artist had disappeared from view by 1974. She seems to have had a silent change of mind, to which, after so many years of close observation and study of the manuscript, she was, surely, perfectly entitled.