

PSAI Fellow 2007-2009: Prof Tom Garvin

No political scientist working in Ireland today has exerted a more profound impact upon the discipline than Tom Garvin. As a founding co-convenor of the Political Studies Association of Ireland from 1982 to 1984 and then its first President from 1984 to 1987, Tom Garvin played a pivotal leadership role in the academic professionalisation of the discipline. As a teacher – and mentor to young researchers – at University College Dublin since 1967, he has been an inspiration to successive generations of students.

As a researcher, Tom Garvin has demonstrated a thoughtful and sensitive understanding of how to most effectively mine the resources of archival and primary sources. And as an author, he has consistently produced work which is not just readable, but essential reading for other academics and the political elite – and which, moreover, has deservedly achieved an enviable reach to all citizens seeking to understand modern Ireland.

Tom Garvin is primarily a political scientist, but his greatest strength as an academic is his ability to integrate politics, history, economics, social psychology, sociology and mythology. His research is informed by a deep analysis of all these areas, not just individually but most particularly in terms of how they interact together. Professor Garvin's body of work to date is uniquely coherent – a whole rather than a collection of publications. While he ranges over a diverse set of issues, from the earliest days of his career to today, Tom Garvin has produced a unified corpus which speaks to the totality of modern Irish development.

Quite simply, Tom Garvin is a towering figure in the political science community in Ireland: he has justly been described as the doyen of Irish political science. His contribution to our profession and to our understanding of Irish society as a whole has been immense.

The quality and importance of Tom Garvin's work was acknowledged in 2005 when Gill and Macmillan reissued four of his books together. As one reviewer wrote in *Irish Political Studies*, "It is an audacious step to celebrate the work of an academic in this way, and for Tom Garvin himself there can surely be no higher tribute than to have one's work published in this format." And indeed, that was a particularly fitting accolade, given that more than any other Irish political scientist, Tom Garvin's contribution is distinctively coherent and cohesive across his range of publications. The four books which were reissued in 2005 taken together constitute a remarkably penetrating and stimulating analysis of Ireland's socio-politico-economic development over the last 150 years.

Professor Garvin has never been content to merely describe how Ireland has changed, though he certainly does that. His body of work delves further, to suggest why change happened (or failed to happen) at each point in the historical sweep. His assimilation of the existing literature, archival sources, and primary research combines to produce the most detailed and illuminating analysis of modern Ireland. He, perhaps more than any other academic in any field, has consistently offered an integrated and comprehensive perspective on how our nation came into being and how it has become what it is today.

Tom Garvin is more than simply an academic who writes learned books and articles, though. He is in addition an excellent communicator, who wants his ideas to be discussed and debated as widely as possible. He is a tremendous lecturer, and seeks opportunities to present his work to audiences extending beyond academia into wider society. Pat Leahy wrote in an interview with Professor

Garvin (*Sunday Business Post*, 16 October 2005): “Professor of politics at the country’s largest and most politically important university for over a decade and a half, Garvin is something of an institution at UCD. He is beloved of generations of undergraduates as much for his accessibility and general bonhomie as for his entertaining lectures. A born teacher”

Professor Garvin’s work is used, recognised and cited everywhere that Irish politics and history are taught and researched. His standing in the field has already been honoured by the Royal Irish Academy in 2003, when he was elected a Member. He received a Fulbright Award as long ago as 1969, at the very start of his career, and another in 1987. In addition, Tom Garvin has held visiting appointments at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Colgate University, and Boston College.

It is no exaggeration to say that Tom Garvin has shone light on crucial aspects of our national development as an independent polity, and very often has done so precisely in respect of those aspects which were under-explored or indeed unexplored before his work. He has produced the most complete set of research so far on the nature, background, thinking and debate of Ireland’s revolutionary elite, and moreover has gone on to relate this understanding to a lucid and searching analysis of contemporary Ireland’s social, political and economic development. He is certainly among the most influential and most significant members of the Irish political science community. The PSAI owes Tom Garvin a tremendous debt.