

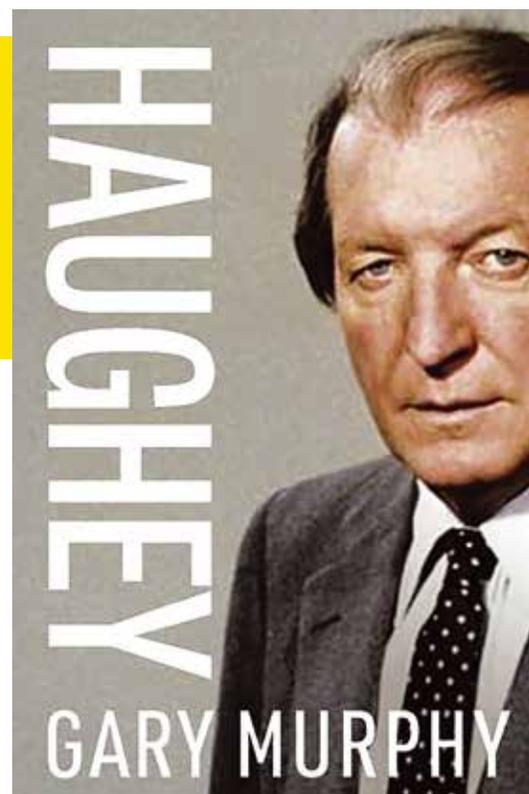
Haughey: Conor Lenihan reviews the well written, but unfortunately *authorised*, biography of the disgraced former Taoiseach

Both the source of the Haughey money and his energetic libido deserve more detailed exploration

GARY MURPHY of Dublin City University hit the pre-Christmas market with a 716-page tome on Charles J Haughey. Unfortunately it will not be the last word on his subject.

It is not a criticism of this book to state that many more books will emerge on the topic of Mr Haughey. Murphy has provided the most exhaustive account to date. The DCU academic has been greatly helped by his access to the Haughey private papers and assistance from the Haughey family. The result is a colour portrait of a man who has often been painted in black and white.

My own book, 'Haughey - Prince of Power', written in 2015, drew from my own connections with the former Taoiseach. The pressure for me was to pare the material down to make my biography readable and accessible to younger readers. Gary Murphy, as befits an academic, has written at length and in great detail. His portrait of Haughey's early years and fam-



ily background is new and insightful.

However, Murphy treads carefully and too cautiously on the two explosive aspects to the Haughey career - his corruption and his 27-year relationship with femme fatale Terry Keane.

The first Moriarty report concluded that Haughey “unethically” received more than £9m from businessmen between 1979 and 1996, and that he had done corrupt favours for some donors including a youthful Revenue-challenged Ben Dunne and a passport-seeking Arab sheik. The incidence and scale of these payments, Moriarty declaimed, “particularly when governments led by Mr Haughey were championing austerity, can only be said to have devalued the quality of a modern democracy”.



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Flash, for the 1960s

Murphy unwisely downplays this. His assertion that “there was no evidence of any political impropriety by Haughey in relation to the monies he received” counts as one of the most egregious misjudgements in recent Irish political biography. Certainly the book suffers as the official or authorised biography and UCD professor Diarmuid Ferriter inferred that Murphy was derailed by deference.

It as if Murphy has both a disdain and mental reservations on Haughey’s prime delinquencies. Wide-ranging existing research on his seamier sides: corruption and Keane, goes unreferenced. Keane gave a series of very telling interviews about her fiery and longstanding relationship with Haughey. Both the source of the Haughey money and his energetic libido deserve more detailed exploration. For instance with the Haughey millions stashed in the Crown colony of the Cayman islands it is hard not to believe that CJH was fatally compromised in relation to dealing with the British, a belief propounded by his successor Albert Reynolds. Haughey’s furtive offshore accounts can hardly have passed unnoticed by hostile UK security services.

I knew Terry Keane and conclude the opposite to Murphy - she was very influential and did act as a political confidante to Haughey throughout their time together. My father, Brian, often dined with the couple. He often noted that in many respects her political judgements were far more acute than Haughey’s. Terry Keane also brought an eclectic string of new admirers to the Haughey table - drawn from the world of media, the arts, and fashion and not naturally supporters of Fianna Fáil.

Haughey’s supreme failure was his caution. He rarely refound in his late career as leader and Taoiseach the extraordinary reforming and enlightened approach that he purveyed as Minister for Justice and Finance in the 1960s - the Succession Act, the tax exemption for artists and free travel for the elderly. The decisiveness of the early years was later superseded by a surprisingly dithering Charvet modality.

The Arms Trial, a serious car crash and repeated health problems seem to have rendered him risk averse on key agendas. On the positive side, unlike his nemesis Garret FitzGerald, he had tremendous executive skills and could both conceive and implement big, some might say grandiose, projects or plans; the IFSC, Temple Bar, the Museum of Modern Art. Haughey was also the first Taoiseach to hire an advisor on the environment, academic ornithologist David Cabot, well before ecology was normalised in the Irish public consciousness.

For official Ireland his greatest shame is his naked venality and criminal pursuit of money to support his lavish lifestyle and high-maintenance political career. Ownership of racehorses, a Gandon Mansion with a stocked cellar and an island off Kerry, sparked rumours but embarrassingly little media investigation. It’s honestly difficult to say if the same caution would prevail today.

Unfortunately, very few villains of Irish public life actually go to jail. The irony in Haughey’s case was that it was prejudicial gauche comments by the often

zealous Mary Harney that allowed him to avoid the rap of the criminal law.

In the Gary Murphy version Haughey’s dodginess reads like the prosaic graft and corruption of US city bosses like Boss Croker and James Curley of Boston. Such carry-on was of course antithetical to statesmanship. Counter-intuitively the abrasive Haughey was chronically insecure apparently preferring to play as a big fish in a small pool than risk his strokes in a big pool. The novelist Francis Stuart once acerbically remarked that the problem with Haughey was that he wasn’t gangster enough.

Disillusioned with his early experiences as Taoiseach Haughey confided in Terry Keane that he wanted to quit public life and settle in the South of France, with her of course. Sadly he spent so much effort becoming Taoiseach he was either too cynical or too exhausted by the time he ascended. His success after 1987 was largely due to an under-appreciated new-found humility and the knowledge that he only had a very short time to confound his critics.

Insecurity didn’t cut across his ego. PJ Mara recorded that Haughey had “a great sense of himself”. But neither insecurity nor ego can excuse his disgraces. One day Anthony Cronin came in to Leinster House to meet me for lunch. It was the time when the Tribunal of investigation was afire and Terry Keane had just gone on the TV to tell her side of the affair. Cronin and I talked books rather than politics. Eventually I asked Cronin, a writer, and life-long friend of, and cultural advisor to, Haughey, what he thought of the latest revelations about his former boss. The Cronin reply was all-knowing. “He sort of let himself down, a lot”. It was an interesting take from the man who subsequently gave Haughey’s funeral eulogy

The journalist and editor Vincent Browne has been working for the best part of twenty years on his biography of Haughey. It may well be that this will be something of an antidote to Gary Murphy’s academic but well-written book. The lesson from the Haughey career is a reminder of the psalm’s counsel: “put not your faith in princes”. **L**

Conor Lenihan is a former Minister, TD and journalist. His second best-selling book ‘Albert Reynolds - Risk-taker for Peace’ is in shops now.



Put not your trust
in princes