Among School Children

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Among School Children

BY KELLY MATTHEWS

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HE COVER of Maurice Fitzpatrick’s book The Boys of St. Columb’s carries an epigraph from Seamus Heaney’s poem “From the Canton of Expectation”: “They would banish the conditional forever, this line is especially appropriate to the book’s focus on those Northern Irish political and cultural leaders (Heaney among them) who were among the first generation of Northern Irish pupils to receive free grammar school education under the United Kingdom’s Education Act of 1947.

MAURICE FITZPATRICK

THE BOYS OF ST. COLUMB’S

LIFE?: DUPLE EDITIONS, 2010, $32.95

Fitzpatrick’s thesis, that the Education Act itself made the Northern Irish civil rights movement possible some twenty years later, is borne out through transcriptions of interviews with eight of the most illustrious alumni of St. Columb’s Catholic grammar school for boys in Derry City: Bishop Edward Daly; IDLP leader and Nobel Peace Prize winner John Hume; poet and Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney; critic Seamus Deane; diplomat James Archer; activist Eamonn McCann; and musicians Phil Coulter and Paul Brady.

The interviews themselves are the heart of the book, and Fitzpatrick does well to transcribe them in such a way that each man speaks to readers in his own voice. Heaney’s voice comes through particularly clearly, as when he describes his first arrival at St. Columb’s as a young boarder, age eleven: “It was soul-marking, the day I came to Derry with my father and mother.... But of course I remember most about that day was the moment when they had to leave. They walked down the path towards the gates, and that really was a very bittersweet, sad moment of loss” (59). One is reminded here, as at other moments in the book, of the young Stephen Dedalus’ most poignant experiences at Clongowes Wood College in the opening chapter of A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. Fitzpatrick’s skills as an interviewer are evident, and he knows when to get out of the way and let his subjects describe their own memories, as well as their views of Derry City, Northern Ireland, the civil rights movement, and the importance of education.

Fitzpatrick’s goal is to discuss both Derry and St. Columb’s as microcosms of the North, and how they are deeply intertwined, as are many of the men who have shaped contemporary Irish society.

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IRISH LITERARY SUPPLEMENT • FALL 2011

Among School Children

Memory, Culture and History, Poetry, Drama, Fiction, Irish Writing and Folklore, Documents of the Self, Anthologies and Dictionaries, and Reviews, the last being essays on each of Murphy’s publications.

Having known Maureen Murphy for almost forty years, it’s silly to pretend to write a Johnny-I-Heart-Knew-You review of this book. I’m not alone. Indeed, there is hardly a student or scholar of Irish literature that hasn’t at some point run across Maureen at a conference, a classroom, or a pub. The lady gets around.

Maureen, who teaches at Hofstra University on Long Island, is a past president of the American Conference for Irish Studies (ACIS) and a past chair of the International Association for the Study of the Irish Literatures (IASIL). She serves on the boards of the American Irish Historical Association and Emerald Isle Immigration Center. She was one of the senior editors of the Dictionary of Irish Biography, published by the Royal Irish Academy and Cambridge University Press (2009). She edited Aerden Nicholson’s Annals of the Famine in Ireland (1998) and Ireland’s Welcome to the Stranger (2002); O’Donnell’s Your Fanciest Annie (2005), and, with James MacKillop, Irish Literature: A Reader (1987, 2006). She is currently writing a biography of Nicholson.

Maureen directed the New York State Great Irish Famine Curriculum Project (2001), which won the National Conference for the Social Studies Excellence Award in 2002. She was also the historian of the Irish Hunger Memorial in Battery Park City, New York.

Some of the most poignant essays are in the “Memory” chapter. Biographical essays by Robert Rhodes, James MacKillop, Alan Solar, and Eamonn McCann mount Maureen’s beginnings as a student at SUNY Cortland, her achievements in the American Conference for Irish Studies, her work integrating the famine into the curriculum of New York State schools, and her contribution to the creation of the Irish Hunger Memorial in New York City.

Among the essayists are Margaret MacCurtain, Declan Kiberd, Fintan O’Toole, Wolfgang Zach, Ronan Richman Kennedy, Maurice Harmon, Edna Longley, Lucy MacDiarmid, Ann Saddie, Christopher Murray, John Harrington, Mary Helen Thueste, Nicholas Grené, David Morse, Riana O’Dwyer, Heniz Kosok, Michael Keenelly, Margaret Kelleher, Catherine Shannon, James McGuire – and that’s only about half of them.

Additionally, there are essays by Michael Longley, Eiléan Ni Chuilleanáin, Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, Macdara Wood, and Vincent Woods. It’s hard to find another book with so many gifted contributors.

The book is published in Brazil, and because of currency restrictions and for ease of mailing, the ILS will ship this book. Make checks to Irish Studies, $30 U.S. and $40 outside U.S. Checks should be in U.S. dollars on a U.S. bank.

MARIANNA GULA, MARIA KURDI, AND ISTITUTO VASCO

THE BINDING STRENGTH OF IRISH STUDIES, FESTSCHRIFT IN HONOUR OF CELSIA BERTHA DONALD AND ENO M. MORSE

INSTITUTE OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF DEBRECEN, HUNGARY, 2011

The Binding Strength of Irish Studies brings together 26 scholars and poets to honor two standouts in the field on the occasion of 65th (she) and 75th (he) birthdays. They, and, coincidentally, their 25th wedding anniversary. They met at an IASIL conference in 1994 and were married two years later. Throughout their long careers together, they have taught many courses, supervised dissertations, and enriched the field of Irish-Hungarian studies.

—New York