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The Poet's Hymn

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Muldoon who himself keeps circling the nest and nesting within poetic *oeuvres* other poetic *oeuvres*—would either seek or believe it to be possible for a poet to achieve an “independent” or “fledged” selfhood.

An elegantly written investigation of a less obvious father figure for Muldoon is offered by John Redmond, a scholar whose modest manner has consistently belied the cumulative power of the insights offered in his work. In his reading of how Frost mediated for Muldoon the pragmatism of William James, Redmond concludes that pragmatism offers to the Irish poet a “form of thinking about philosophy and poetry” that “steers clear of formulaic procedures and solutions, it evades rigid thinking” (99).

Observing how Muldoon “saturates his poetry with an impressive-sounding indecisiveness, constantly pointing out the danger of framing concepts too rigidly,” Redmond keenly connects such moments in

Frost’s own work with those in Muldoon, hinting even that the “moose or eland” on a cliff in “Yarrow” might hearken to the “great buck” of “The Most of It.” Redmond continues, however, that such “literary game-playing,” such concession to whatever counters rigidity, can itself yield to “pragmatic urgency” in such poems as Frost’s “Out, Out” where work requires absolute focus if a home is to be wrested from a landscape where “the most intimate relationship one can have to objects” such as a machine tool, or for that matter a coultter, “is to be possessed by them” (105). In “Cows,” Redmond concludes, Muldoon shows us that we must work but, as Frost also admonishes in “Out, Out,” we must also rest if we are to understand how work, and others’ work, works on us.

Rarely must poets work as cooperatively with others as they do as librettists. David Wheatley’s brisk introduction to Muldoon’s

work in that role, alert to themes that recur across *Shining Brow*, *Vera of Las Vegas*, and *Bandanna*, delineates and clarifies the several themes that operate on multiple levels in these works, from border crossing to cross-dressing. As is typically the case in Wheatley’s erudite, inviting critical essays, the wide familiarity with cultures high and low in European and American as well as Irish sources provides a helpful, contrapuntal bass, as in his references here to Lorca and Mayor Daley, Stravinsky and Purcell, Blind Lemon Jefferson and Joyce.

Wisely, the editors chose to end this fine collection with Matthew Campbell’s “Muldoon’s Remains,” an extended musing on how nothing is ever quite buried in Muldoon, how grief never really gets worked through into a proper elegy. As Campbell cogently defines the uncomfortable state between loss and surrender, between the conditional and

the indicative statement, “such memorial verse is at one and the same time literal and figurative, the referent and the referred” (176). The dismembered parts that are the misremembered errata or slips of everyday life, lead, in fact, to a “multitude of bodily remains” whose very multiplicity “postpone the inevitability” of the elegist’s resolution of grief (181). Attentive to Muldoon’s own circlings, gettings round, and other forms of embracing the elusive referent, Campbell concludes that “the resolutely lapsed Muldoon’s version of this is immortality as a recycling, a coming round again” (180), a trope that is of course particularly inviting for scholars who hope there remains more to say on a poet given, as he writes in a recent and punning essay on Marianne Moore, to “more.”

—Washington University

The Poet’s Hymn

JAMES LIDDY

The Doctor’s House: An Autobiography
Salmon Press, 2004, €15

Reviewed by
TYLER FARRELL

AT THE MILWAUKEE BOOK LAUNCH for James Liddy’s new memoir, *The Doctor’s House*, the author stood before friends and colleagues at a local and frequented Irish pub to proclaim, “Autobiography is a way of going home. And tonight I am not homeless.” With such a sentiment the writer announces his entrance into a new world of Irish literary elite by finally gracing his readers with an account of his Irish upbringing, his Dublin education, his American journeys, and his poetic sensibility. Straight from the mouth of the poet we see Liddy’s sense of fun, development, and intellect spill onto the page through small vignettes and quick anecdotes told with an artistic diction drowned with people and places, pubs and writers, reflections and recordings.

The Doctor’s House is a poetic autobiography, (somewhat unconventional) but not unlike Austin Clarke’s or George Moore’s autobiographical writings of upbringing, formation, and humanizing description. Liddy’s historical placement falls in with the new generation of Irish writers, poets of gathering and gossip, poets influenced by previous generations, but poets who also wanted their own time and voice. Both Clarke and Moore tend to poke fun at themselves (as well as their audience) and create subtle patterns and textures. Liddy does the same, but expresses a fondness for his subjects that are comic and spontaneous, never savage. Liddy’s sense of style and tone is not unlike the Irish autobiographies before him, but where Clarke and Moore leave off with true tales of Ireland and the literary and religious worlds, Liddy’s picks up with description that adds more gaiety, light discussion, reverie, delight, and gossip. We see fractured tales of bar stools, literary figures and a company that has had a keen impact on the author.

Liddy jumps back and forth between the influence of his journeys, the placement of his opinions and ideals and the people who

helped to shape him. He is like a child again running through an encyclopedia of memories. We glimpse his passionate love for his mother (a New York born socialite prone to stories and drink) and respect for his father (a Dispensary doctor filled with constant work and opinion). We see Irish festivals, travels to Spain, readings, adventures and American connections to Ireland. He looks fondly on his links to Patrick and Katherine Kavanagh, John Jordan, Michael Hartnett, Liam Miller and Richard Riordain. He fills the reader with a sense of adventure in mid-century Dublin, 1960’s San Francisco, New Orleans and its French Quarter and finally the surprisingly poetic Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The book is revealing and generous to its subjects. Its stories have a flow and lucidity that send the reader into an enthralling world described with a distinctly charming wit and a poetic and proud tone.

The description that begins the book is of Liddy’s childhood home in Coolgreany Co. Wexford. It is a youthful tale told with innocence. There are visions of the surrounding gardens, flowers, white stones, trees and a tennis court. It seems rather magical, somewhat opulent, in a simple light colored by the author’s hand. There are blissful, small tales of his mother in the kitchen, his father and mother at a world’s fair, echoes of religion, childhood, upbringing. These are followed with stories and thoughts of friends, relatives, neighbors. It reads as a bygone era of gatherings placed in a historical context. Liddy is never too far from letting his reader know the time frame, the implications of subjects such as Roosevelt’s statements to Ireland during World War II or even the celebration at O’Rafferty’s pub on the feast of SS. Peter and Paul. Liddy is exalted by history and religion, an inquisitive mind even as a child that leads him to his next stop: Literary Dublin.

The stories of mid-century Dublin are Liddy’s evocation of the everyday, the writers, sights and sounds of a time that defined a second literary Ireland. His personal style is honest and funny, a reminiscence dotted with dialogue and poetry, names and tales. Dublin represents the middle and formative years that seem necessary for the formation of the poet’s

voice. Liddy tackles his less formal education by Kavanagh at McDaid’s with a smattering of significant events and personal recollections. Here we see Bohemian Dublin told to us differently than John Ryan or Anthony Cronin. Liddy’s sense of Dublin is respectful, but not as serious or egotistical. He tells tales of the opening of the Martello Tower, meeting Austin Clarke and conversing with John Jordan, Anthony Kerrigan or Liam Miller, but doesn’t dwell on them ad nauseam. The poetic diction is not verbose. It moves quickly and remains evocative and confident while relaying recurrent visions of middle youth as we see Liddy emerge as a unique figure in a new generation of Irish writers. Some of the best tales involve Patrick Kavanagh, vacationing with Michael Hartnett in Spain or the making of *The Dolmen Miscellany*. The historical aspects of the memoir are impeccable and ruthlessly revealing while also being carefully presented in a fluid and effortless manner. Liddy’s characterization of an age says the most for Dublin at this time and does so in a tender and expressive manner worthy of all previous writing on the subject.

These descriptive memories leave little doubt that Liddy is praising the Dublin of his youth, an inspiring city in all its glory. It is almost mystical when we read of Kavanagh’s jaunts through the alleys or the ghost of Oscar Wilde haunting Liddy’s psyche and hanging over his shoulders. His poetic style is lucid and joyous, capturing the sights and sounds of a time told uniquely by a writer whose perspective is new and startling, young and enchanting. Liddy writes, “Ireland is one pub, and friendship is one lounge. No one is ever there without a drink in hand. A melody of lights and brights. Buzz in a labyrinth.... We all thought the Baggot Street summer would be endlessly renewed. There would be nods to libations and gods” (57). Liddy is friendly in his gossip, true to the form of tales heard in a pub. His stories of Michael Hartnett are flattering and personal, portraying the poet with respect and candor. Soon we come to the end of Liddy’s Dublin wonder city to see a glimpse of the Ramstown Arts festival before moving into the final section. Liddy’s historic crossing of the Atlantic shows an America filled with

even more wonder and excitement than the author even knew.

Part four of *A Doctor’s House* is enthralling and addicting. Liddy’s tales of respect for fellow teachers like Janet Dunleavy, Nic Kubly, and Mel Friedman are balanced by his poems, memories and times in an America with a new pulse, a time never to be duplicated. The section recounts friendships, encounters and observations from an Irish born poet (now a teacher in America) and signals a new breath in places like San Francisco, New Orleans and later Wisconsin. It seems in this passage that Liddy hits his stride. He is impressed by America, interested and curious, and his proud tone reflects his inquisitiveness. His influences begin to show and in San Francisco his love for writers like the Beat Generation begin to peak out from behind his language. He lives like those writers once did, drinking, writing in a small apartment, going out to meet friends and writers, simply loving life. He meets many people recalling a friendship with Jack Spicer and cronies at the White Rabbit Press, talks with Louis Zukovsky and George Stanley, has encounters with Robert Duncan and Richard Brautigan. Then he hears of the death of Patrick Kavanagh back in Ireland and everything slows. Although Liddy is sad at the passing of his mentor, he gives his respects and remembers where he has been placed at this time in his life. “My captain is dead though I am among the captains and the kings” (119).

Liddy wanders further into the United States making moves through New Orleans and the fairy tale French Quarter with small stories of being mugged (truly a symbolic yarn) and the beauty, flowers and simplicity of living in the Crescent City in a seemingly magical time. Liddy bounds with ease through these passages until he reaches many conclusions about life, art and friendship teaching the reader a few lessons along the way.

When his movements begin to peak we finally reach his ultimate destination of Wisconsin where the language becomes more flattering and inquisitive about his love for poetry, his adoration of young poets and his simple wanderings and “exile” in a state not much bigger than the entire

country of Ireland. He turns more reflective and inward in this last section still making quips about the very notion of the wandering and exiled poet. "The spirit wandereth whence it is employed or patroned. The artist type is outside the first social force of Mammy and friends; distance beckons new interruptions, and maybe memory spins into

backlash" (133). There are many things that remind the poet of home, including Wisconsin poet Lorine Niedecker, whose notion of the sacred Liddy compares to Yeats. He writes of taverns and etiquette, nightlife, friends and findings all within Milwaukee, a town filled with a surprising amount of poets

and artists. The writer is happy. The mood is respectful.

Then the memoir closes its once opened doors. The journey culminates on a favorite street corner in Milwaukee and we are left wanting more. More of Liddy's stories and memories. More of the poet traveling

physically and mentally. More descriptive times written for all to hear. Hopefully this will not be the only installment of Liddy-isms. There is always room for another poetic memoir, especially one with this much history and joy. •

The Golden Age of Irish-American Teachers

JANET NOLAN

Servants of the Poor. Teachers and Mobility in Ireland and Irish America
University of Notre Dame Press, 2004,
\$45.00, \$18.00

Reviewed by
MAUREEN MURPHY

JANET NOLAN'S *Servants of the Poor. Teachers and Mobility in Ireland and Irish America* follows *Ourselves Alone. Women's Emigration from Ireland, 1885-1910* (1989), her pioneering study of Irish women's emigration that demonstrated that the economic self-sufficiency of young Irish women immigrants to the United States provided mobility, a choice of marriage partners and other options which meant independence. Her research revealed that Irish girls attended local National Schools in greater numbers and for longer periods than their brothers. Believing with Bishop Moriarty of Kerry that "The National Schools have replaced the crowbar" (1868), Nolan argued that their greater literacy led to higher expectations, and those expectations encouraged young women to aspire to lives with more opportunities in America. (David Fitzpatrick also noted the same connection between education and emigration in his essay, "A Share of the Honeycomb": Education, Emigration and Irish Women.") Nolan's new book *Servants of the Poor. Teachers and Mobility in Ireland and Irish America* continues her investigation of the way that National School education prepared young Irish women for emigration. In this study, it is the model of National School teachers: their financial independence, their intelligence and their style that inspired immigrants' aspirations for their American-born daughters who entered the teaching profession in extraordinary numbers between 1880 and 1920, the "golden age" of the Irish-American urban teacher. Nolan examines the connection between those Irish-American teachers and the growing prosperity and respectability of the Irish community during those years when Irish-American women entered the white-collar workforce a generation ahead of their brothers.

Servants of the Poor begins with an

examination of Irish public education starting with the Dublin Society for Promotion of the Irish Poor (1812), the forerunner Irish National School, the first British experiment with state funded schools. The curriculum emphasized literacy, numeracy and the inculcation of time and work disciplines. Nolan considers the pedagogy and the curriculum of the system as it evolved into the state-supported, non-denominational National Schools. (They were *de jure* not *de facto* non-denominational and sectarian.) Nolan pays particular attention to the content of National School textbooks, the readings that prepared schoolgirls for domestic life or domestic service. To Nolan's survey, one might add *The Girls' Reading Book* (1887) lessons in kitchen fire-safety, a sobering reminder of the American newspaper accounts of Irish domestic servants injured or killed in fire-related accidents.

Nolan's study on Irish-American teachers focuses on three cities which had high concentrations of Irish-Americans at the turn of the century and where teachers with Irish surnames made up a large part of the teaching force: Boston, San Francisco and Chicago. By 1910, Irish-American teachers were one of the largest ethnic groups in Boston (twenty-five percent); they accounted for one-third of the teachers in Chicago public schools and forty-nine percent of San Francisco teachers. Nolan finds that while Irish-American teachers found some discrimination in terms of ethnicity and religion, they challenged those barriers armed with their education, the normal school training and their success in passing the examinations introduced to limit their access into the public school system.

Servants of the Poor also traces the role of Irish-American teachers in the campaign for job security, pensions, better teaching conditions and the rights of women teachers in matters of gender equity in pay and opportunity. Here again there was an Irish model, the Irish National Teachers Organization founded in 1868. Despite the attempt to raise the bar with required additional training and/or professional examinations, Irish-American teachers were prepared to make the sacrifices to stay in the classroom. Still, the opportunities for teacher mobility became limited by the policy of

hiring male "experts," administrators who controlled curriculum and instruction.

Nolan includes a number of examples of Irish-American teachers who worked for equity. Her most memorable was Margaret Haley of Chicago, the woman Nolan has called "the Patrick Henry of the classroom teacher movement" for her leadership of the Chicago Teachers' Federation. While *Battleground: The Autobiography of Margaret A. Haley* was published in 1982, one hopes that Nolan might be tempted to further study this urban educator whose ideas about social justice were shaped by her Irish heritage, her Catholic education and contact with Irish-American Dominican sisters in Chicago. She might also consider taking on a biography of another Irish-American Chicagoan, Amelia Dunne Hookway sister of "Mr. Dooley," Peter Finley Dunne. (Nolan has written the Margaret Haley entry for *Women Building Chicago 1790-1990: A Bibliographical Dictionary*, the Hookway entry for *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic Women*, and "St. Patrick's Daughter: Amelia Dunne Hookway and Chicago's Public Schools" for *At the Crossroads: Old St. Patrick's and the Chicago Irish* (1997).

Beyond the Irish-American teachers themselves, Nolan's study considers the contribution of Irish-American women to urban school boards and school committees. Julia Harrington Duff, elected on her platform "Boston Schools for Boston Girls," served one term on the Boston School Committee where she worked to protect Irish-American teachers' access to positions in the city school system. The reformer also saved Boston Normal, the teacher-training institution that educated Irish-American women. Duff was defeated for a second term by a combination of forces in the city's urban politics that opposed her reforms: the Public School Association that opposed reform which was supported by Boston's Democratic mayor John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald. The teacher, journalist, poet and peace activist Mary Elizabeth McGrath Blake ran unsuccessfully for the Boston School Committee in 1901. The Public School Association partisans who opposed her candidacy no doubt remembered Blake's husband Dr. John Blake's tenure on

the School Committee twenty years earlier when he was responsible for getting William Swinton's anti-Catholic *The Outline of the World's History* removed from the school system's list of approved textbooks.

While it is common to assume that the urban Irish were educated in parish schools, Nolan points out that in Boston, during the episcopacies of Bishops Benedict Fenwick and William H. O'Connell, Irish and Irish-American families were encouraged to send their children to public elementary schools which they supported as tax payers. (The diocese built secondary schools for the children of the Catholic middle-class.) Chicago Irish and Irish-Americans, on the other hand, sent their children to Chicago's parochial schools; however, Nolan demonstrates that those students later taught in city's public schools. (The work of Suellen Hoy and Ellen Skerritt documents the Irish and Irish-American lay and religious contributions to education and social welfare of Chicagoans in Catholic institutions.)

Nolan's methodology combines archival research: census returns, public school records, Irish National School records, textbooks, official reports, studies of pedagogy and curriculum. A specialist in oral history (Chicago public health, public spaces, neighborhoods, parishes and schools) as well as in Irish and Irish-American history, a particular strength of *Servants of the Poor* is the oral history that she includes: detailed life histories from her collection of thirty-six retired Chicago teacher who had Irish mothers or grandmothers. The collection is part of Nolan's larger project *Life Histories: Mothers and Daughters in Ireland's National and American public schools* which involved interviews with informants in Boston and in San Francisco.

Nolan has promised a further study of Irish-American teachers that will follow their history for another generation: *Minds to Hands: Teachers at the End of a Golden Age, 1920-1935*. Then, she can consider the legacy of the Irish-American teacher: their students whose education prepared them to take advantage of the G.I. Bill after the second World •

—Hofstra University

Under the Radar

Northern Ireland

• *Joe Cahill, A Life in the IRA*, by Brendan Anderson (O'Brien Press; University of Wisconsin Press, 2005, \$45.00, \$19.95), sheds light on his sixty year life with the IRA. Most interesting is his account of the rift between the Provisionals and Official IRA.

• *Stakeknife, British Secret Agents in Ireland*, by Martin Ingram and Greg Harkin (O'Brien

Press; University of Wisconsin Press, 2004, \$19.95), has a catchy title. It was the name of a high level British FRU (Force Research Unit) operative working inside the IRA. Apparently there were a lot of agents.

Journals

• A new journal in the field is *An Sionnach*, a Journal of Literature, Arts, and Culture, from Creighton University Press. The twice-yearly first issue, edited by David Gardiner, is dedicated to the words of Irish poet James Liddy. The journal publishes essays relating

to Irish Studies since 1958.

• *Irish Studies Review*, the journal of the British Association of Irish Studies, is published by Routledge Journals UK. One of the latest numbers, February 2005, features an eclectic collection of essays on history, politics, literature, and drama, along with two dozen book reviews.

For Your Classrooms

• Teachers of Irish literary studies will be heartened to hear of affordable reprints of classics from Houghton Mifflin's series of

New Riverside Editions. Selling for under \$20 a volume, the series includes, *inter alia*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings*, edited by Clement Hawes (Penn State University) and *Two Irish National Tales*, Maria Edgeworth *Castle Rackrent* and Sydney Owenson (Lady Morgan) *The Wild Irish Girl*, edited by James M. Smith (Boston College), with an introduction by Vera Kreilkamp (Pine Manor College).

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