

is a compilation of his poetry written over 30 years and his work explores the cultural traditions he has inherited and their increasing fragility. It doesn't take a Delphic Oracle to understand that we live in an increasingly nervous world, where the ravishes of consumer capitalism, not without some success, seeks to globalise and standardise, to commodify human experience.

In this context, the poetry of Gabriel Fitzmaurice is salutatory, in its adherence to the pristine purities of the local. This is poetry of the felt experience, as D.H. Lawrence would have advocated. The poetry reflects a continuous historical presence threatened by vulgarisation. In a sense Fitzmaurice's elevation of Moyvane has resonances with Oliver Goldsmith's *Auburn*, and Patrick Kavanagh's *Shancoduff*. The eternal verities of place, character, and local colour are frozen like a Vermeer. The celebration of the humdrum, the bits and pieces of everyday. Everything of real interest doesn't happen elsewhere. This is a media and celluloid fiction.

In the context of small but vibrant communities Moyvane is similar to Cathal O'Searcaigh's *Min a Lea*, within which the poet resides as a Buddha, a seer, and a prophet.

This transcendent overview is adequately expressed in a recent poem, 'To Jack Kerouac'

Leading through your books to  
night, a breeze of memory from  
My youth was resurrected, and, ris-  
ing in me, I felt the dreamy  
Beat that imitated you in the early  
seventies

1978. I was hooked on you. Day  
after day your work was a shot  
Of inspiration that lit up my mind  
and stretched my imagination.  
Then it wasn't Min a Lea or Fana  
Bhui I'd see but the plains  
of Nebraska or the grasslands of  
Iowa.

So, like O'Searcaigh's *Mount Errigle*, Jack Kerouac's *Route 66*, the poems evince the literary fosterage of Walt Whitman, Proust, and Rimbaud. Knock, knock, knockin' on Heaven's door.

Also, there is a strong sense that Fitzmaurice's poetry is antithetical to the idea that a *deus ex machina*, beyond the known, the familiar, and the ordinary is a non-runner, a geographic fallacy. And if you think this is odd, consider how a writer of the stature of Nabokov could see a halo around a flying pan. This sense of immanence and mystical individuality of things and places is present in poets like Gerard Manley Hopkins and artists like Redon. In effect, the poet is invoking people to see, and to see more clearly—the polar opposite of the phrase 'I can't see for looking'.

I have always believed that Gabriel Fitzmaurice's poetry is visionary and dura-

ble, unforced and deceptively simple. Much of the poetry is concerned with childhood vision, coming to terms with adulthood, proclaiming experience and re-claiming it also, and ultimately the truth of poetry in ordering experience.

Arise, Persephone...

This simple song sustains me  
As the darkness claims its dead—  
O light within the darkness,  
O carol in my head.

This is a refreshing book of poems which opens up new highways of vision, and the introduction by Declan Kiberd provides an illuminating framework of cultural comment, which is both a bonus and an exemplary piece of writing. ♦

## Brendan Hamill

### The People of the Sea

David Thompson

Canongate Classics £6.99

ISBN 1 84195 107 2

**The Celtic schtick is by now a little overused, in writing and music.** It is of like genus to the commercial necrophilia which beleaguers dead rappers where off colour macs become hobby horses all but used to model clothing, or anchor inventive spring break huggump marathons for the gratification of the music television programmers. That, and the family generic introduction by Heaney which adheres to this reprinted work aside, this book still has got real charm.

Written over some decades, **The People of the Sea** is a lambent chronicle of an Oxonian's journeys through early 20th century Ireland, Orkneys and Hebrides. It focuses on the various folklore surrounding what the Scots term selchies, atlantic seals with such appreciable emotion and intelligence that they were associated with land dwellers; as well as the interface of same with those very island/coastal peoples. In so far as it holds to the thesis the book certainly succeeds, providing such scholarly research as an addendum of annotated seal song. Yet interestingly, there is a co-mixture of elements, remote autobiography, anthropology, and elegy. The last, for the book depicts seafaring communities and their civilization of stories as moving into obsolescence.

Various stories and characters eddy within the binds. They are related with seeming artlessness, and light touch. Thompson seems to have allowed himself to succeed in that necessary task of letting the characters speak. That while counter-pointing

the world depicted with an unobtrusive yet certain foreignness. A narrative of similar modesty explicates the depopulation of Islands Aran, Shetland and co., through the disappearing of children to inland towns and cities for reasons of economics and excitation which the islands could not answer. The seals, and the lore surrounding them, relating normally to anthropomorphic fancy, are appointed great credulity. They serve to evidence the humanity and great broad care of these people. Legends such as that of the King Seal and King Conn recur with an artisanal metrical logic which is original and unforced.

A reflective mind and a good ear Thompson evidently had, and he was little jealous of others song, selchie or human. The book stands as proof of how good prose need not bully, and evidences with respect the passing of a people wondering close to the cadence of the sea. ♦

## Cian O'Neill

### A NATION OF EXTREMES

Diarmid Ferriter

Irish Academic Press £35.00

ISBN 0 7165 2623 9

**The Irish have had, and continue to experience an extraordinary relationship with alcohol. A Nation of Extremes: Pioneers, Drink and Irish Society** seeks to explore this relationship in the twentieth century from the point of view of the group who were intent on reducing alcohol consumption through membership in the Pioneer Total Abstinence of the Sacred Heart.

The Pioneers was formed in 1898 and the study of its origins, its *raison-d'être* and the impact of the group is long overdue. By the mid 1950s the association was to claim a membership of nearly half a million, identifiable by the wearing of a pin, the outward expression of an internal and deeply personal piety. It was a startling figure for such a small country but the stereotype of the Irish as a nation of heavy drinkers continued unabated, aided by vast expenditure on alcohol. As the century progressed two diametrically opposed cultures, abstinence and heavy drinking, were lying alongside each other.

Diarmid Ferriter makes use of previously unpublished sources in **A Nation of Extremes: Pioneers, Drink and Irish Society**. He examines the Irish temperance movement in the context of Irish society as a whole and attempts to tease out some of the intricacies and ambiguities associated with these two cultures.

The fact that the movement was founded at a time of intense cultural nationalism gave these debates an added potency, particularly as it had often been contended that increased sobriety was essential for any self-respecting self-governing nation. After Independence, the quest for sobriety and an initially robust Catholic crusade ultimately led to confrontation and confusion. ♦

## Darryl Armitage