

PRESS RELEASE

AWARD-WINNING BOOK PUBLISHED

ARBORETUM IS THE FIFTH BOOK OF POETRY FROM JOHN ENNIS WHO LIVES IN BUTLERSTOWN IN WATERFORD. HE WORKS AS HEAD OF HUMANITIES AT THE REGIONAL COLLEGE. THE WORK WAS ONE OF THE WINNERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL OPEN-POETRY COMPETITION AT LISTOWEL WRITERS' WEEK IN 1990.

ARBORETUM IS A LONG POEM WHICH TAKES AS ITS FRAMEWORK A DAY'S OUTING TO KENNEDY PARK IN MAY. A TRIO OF MOTHER, FATHER AND ✓ YOUNG BOY WANDERS THROUGH THE YOUNG FLOWERING TREES OF THE VARIOUS CONTINENTS. THE FOUR SHELTERS OF THE ARBORETUM WALK SERVE AS MAJOR REFLECTIVE STOPS IN THE POEM.

OTHER CULTURES AND OTHER PEOPLES AND THEIR PHILOSOPHIES OF LIFE ARE SUGGESTED BY THE TREES IN BLOOM. UNDERLYING THE POEM IS A ✓ SENSE OF THE MAGIC AND THE MYSTERY OF THE TREE WITHOUT WHOM, LITERALLY, WE COULD NOT BREATHE OR HAVE LIFE.

THE ORDERLY LAYOUT AND HARMONY OF THE ARBORETUM WITH ITS ✓ NUMEROUS TREE FAMILIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD IS SET IN STARK CONTRAST TO THE CONFUSION, THE HURT AND SUFFERING AMONG HUMANS WHETHER THEY BE PERSONAL, THOSE OF OUR ISLAND OR THE VARIOUS CONTINENTS. THUS, THE EUCALYPTI EVOKE THE TRIALS AND ✓ DISAPPEARANCE OF THE AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINALS; THE INCAN ALDER, THOSE OF THE NATIVE SOUTH AMERICANS OF TODAY; THE AFGHAN ASH BRINGS TO MIND THE HORRORS OF THE WAR THERE. ECHOES OF THE '98 RISING AND OTHER REVOLUTIONS ARE WOVEN INTO THE TAPESTRY OF THE TREESCAPE.

THE POEM IS ONE OF HOPE. IT ASSERTS THE VALUE OF LIFE AND OPPOSES THOSE FORCES THAT WOULD CUT IT DOWN, LAY IT WASTE, MISUSE OR DEVALUE IT. JUST AS THE TREES OF IRELAND WERE CRUELLY DEFORESTED SO NOW, BEFORE OUR EYES, ARE OUR RURAL ✓ COMMUNITIES. THE POEM INTERWEAVES OUR VARIED HOPES AND FEARS AS PART OF A COMMUNITY.

✓ THE WORK IS A PLEA FOR TOLERANCE AND BALANCE AT ALL LEVELS, FOR THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE WORTH OF THE INDIVIDUAL IN OUR WORLD. AS THE TREES IN BLOOM MINGLE THEIR POLLEN, YET KEEP THEIR IDENTITIES, SO TOO MIGHT THIS STATE OF MIND BE POSSIBLE AMONG HUMANS. THOUGH SADLY THIS IDEAL IS RARELY ACHIEVED, ARBORETUM STOKES AN OLD ASPIRATION AND THE FAMILY CELEBRATES THIS HOPE WITH A SIMPLE MEAL AT THE END OF THE DAY IN KENNEDY PARK.

ARBORETUM IS PUBLISHED BY DEDALUS PRESS, 24 THE HEATH, ✓ CPRESS DOWNS, DUBLIN 6W. THE PRICE IS £4.95.

Somehow we are not surprised to discover, behind the bluster and the bombast, a writer of a certain compassion and delicacy. He seems to have admired Austin Clarke, who had also endured private hells; like Clarke, he had a strong religious sense. This collection contains two of Jordan's poems in Irish and one in French and two translations of poems in Irish by Micheál Mac Liammóir. Dublin was not kind to Jordan; a cruel mother, hugging and smothering at the same time.

Leland Bardwell's poetry smacks of the smoky self-indulgence which Jordan sometimes advanced as a sort of philosophy. The title suggests the tendency of so many contemporary Irish poets to seek affinity with Russian writers old and new, as if thereby to gain some additional merit of some kind; one suspects too many of our poets consider O'Riordáin, Ó Cadhain and others simply not worth mentioning, as if intellectualism and struggle were secrets only the Russians possessed.

The fifty poems here represent varying degrees of personal embattlement and experience; like Jordan and other Irish writers, Bardwell was drawn to Spain, and there's the poetry to prove it: "Skipping Banville in Barcelona", dedicated to Colm Tóibín, who also knows Spain, illustrates the close-knit stuffiness of the Irish literary scene rather than any desire to move abroad. Again, Bardwell refers to Russians and their experiences in an effort to define her own, but succeeds only in hemming herself in: "Kassia" is about a ninth-century Byzantine poet, but apart from sounding a low feminist note it is not particularly interesting as a poem. The title poem reveals a distinctly Jordanesque desire to suffer like the Greats:

I am locked in this acropolis
just Feodor and me ...

and it is no surprise that this poem faces "In Memoriam John Jordan", a poem which illustrates better than any essay just what it is that governs an entire school of Dublinocentric poetry:

We were long on the one bitch road
between the 'Hatch' and that 'Low' Leeson Street ...

Such self-obsession is for private diaries and letters; not poetry.

John Ennis's long poem "Arboretum" was the poetry prizewinner at Listowel Writers' Week two years ago. Ennis's notable ability to blend aspects of history, place and commentary into a poetic whole in some senses makes him unique in Irish poetry. Trees figure strongly, as one might suspect, in what turns out to be a tapestry of poetic interludes

woven together; Ennis seems intent on discovering the precise point at which trees "Sap our myths with their own complexities/ Like old confessors taking in past dioxides ...". The poem is set, apparently, in the John F. Kennedy Park in Wexford, and this quasi-historical backdrop sets off the rest. Simplistically, trees inform most of what we do and experience in some form or other; trees have similarly informed and been witness to world history. The human condition assumes an arrogance which is particularly pitiful against the overwhelming presence of these absolutes of nature. As usual with Ennis's poetry, the language is vital, direct and often startling. He is not a comforting poet.

FRED JOHNSTON

Brian Fallon, *Edward McGuire, RHA*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1991. 143 pages. IR£17.50.

Edward McGuire, RHA, (1932-1986), was the third child of a well-known Dublin businessman, quondam owner of Brown Thomas of Grafton Street. During his lifetime McGuire enjoyed much status as a portraitist, a reputation that has solidified since his death. He painted a number of social and political figures (e.g., Charles Haughey, William Whitelaw, and Sir Alfred and Lady Beit) though he is best known for his numerous literary portraits, which include Paul Durcan, Francis Stuart and (most famously) Seamus Heaney. McGuire was meticulous rather than prolific, but between portraits he managed to produce a number of remarkable still-lives — mostly dead and/or stuffed birds — and a few very fine landscapes. McGuire's work will be remembered for his subtle chiaroscuro, his ornate backgrounds and his extraordinary concentration on surface detail.

Brian Fallon's *Edward McGuire, RHA* sets out to fulfil two distinct requirements. First, the book functions as a ground-breaking reference tool. Fallon's seventy pages of biography and analysis give a clear picture of the painter's milieu and working methods: McGuire's years in Italy make for particularly good reading. Sara McGuire has added an illustrated catalogue detailing over 200 of the artist's paintings and drawings. James White's Foreword gives a brief but enlightening analysis of McGuire's use of colour. The text is complemented by twenty-six colour plates and many photos of McGuire and his paintings.

But apart from its contributions to scholarship, *Edward McGuire* also serves as a handsome tribute to a well-known Dublin personality. Fallon writes with candour but also with considerable respect for

Fred! He falls like Irish rain on the just and
 the unjust, blending them all into much!
 164 J. F.