The Irish Writer and the World

The Irish Writer and the World is a major new book by one of Ireland’s most prominent scholars and cultural commentators. Declan Kiberd, author of the award-winning Irish Classics and Inventing Ireland, here synthesises the themes that have occupied him throughout his career as a leading critic of Irish literature and culture. Kiberd argues that political conflict between Ireland and England ultimately resulted in cultural confluence and that writing in the Irish language was hugely influenced by the English literary tradition. He continues his exploration of the role of Irish politics and culture in a decolonising world, and covers Anglo-Irish literature, the fate of the Irish language and the Celtic Tiger. This fascinating collection of Kiberd’s work over twenty-five years demonstrates the extraordinary range, astuteness and wit that have made him a defining voice in Irish Studies and beyond, and will bring his work to new audiences across the world.

Declan Kiberd is Professor of Anglo-Irish Literature at University College, Dublin. He is the author of Inventing Ireland, which won the Irish Times Literature Prize for 1997, and of Irish Classics, which won the Truman Capote Award for the best work of literary criticism published in 2002. He was Parnell Visiting Fellow at Magdalene College, Cambridge, for 2003 and Visiting Professor of Irish Studies at Duke University in 2004.
In memory of Robert Law (1949–2002)
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A note on the text

I have retained the original referencing system for each of the articles, in keeping with the very varied backgrounds in which they originally appeared. Some are rather heavily annotated, others less fully underpinned, and some had no apparatus at all. In the latter cases, I have added a short bibliography which might help those in search of further reading.

Apart from some deletions in cases of repetition, I have left the work unrevised, even though there are passages in some of the earliest essays which I wish I hadn’t written. But since every work is produced at the mercy of its immediate occasion, even the blind-spots may have some exemplary value in tracing the history of cultural debate. Not every pub in the 1970s had a resident bard performing nightly, as I seemed to imply in ‘Storytelling: the Gaelic Tradition’; nor would I now, as a veteran of too many long nights, refer to the ‘fake glamour of the summer schools’. My remarks in the same essay on schoolmasters devoted to extolling folk pieties were wildly in excess of any offences committed; and in subsequent years I came to a different valuation. This was due in great part to friendships with Bryan MacMahon and Gabriel Fitzmaurice, who through the 1980s documented the lore of Kerry villages with the sort of understanding that can only come from love. The high esteem in which both men held W. B. Yeats as an interpreter of Irish culture led me in time to revise the rather harsh assessment offered in ‘The War against the Past’. While that essay offers some insights into Yeats’s ideas about tradition, it takes no account of the dialectical nature of an imagination which was even more attuned to the future. Denis Donoghue was quite correct in predicting that my generation, soured by the cultural and economic setbacks of the 1980s, would eventually return to Yeats as the inspirational figure of modern Irish culture. I trust that the treatment accorded to Yeats through Inventing Ireland and Irish Classics does something more like justice to the great writer.