

How McGahern triumphed over grim circumstances

In a tribute he wrote about the Presentation Brothers who ran his secondary school in Carrickon-Shannon, the late writer John McGahern said: "I look back on those five years as an adventure that has not stopped."

He recalled that without realizing it, "through the pressures of the mind, I was beginning to know and to love the world."

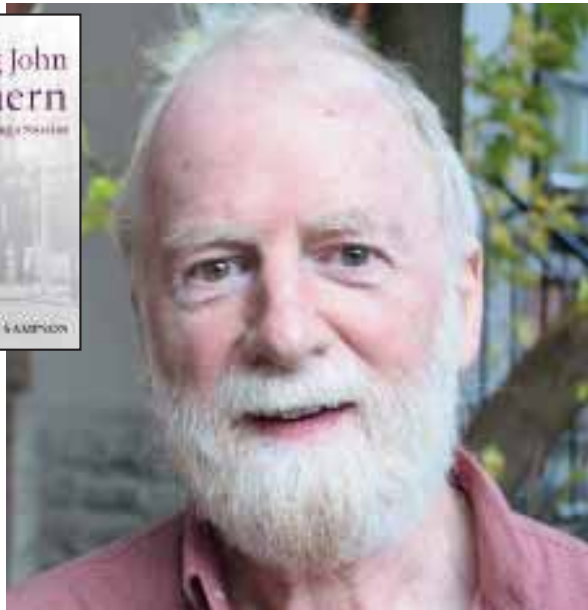
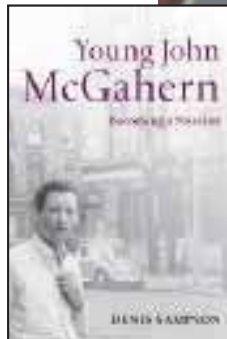
"These were the years when he gained intellectual 'tools,'" writes Denis Sampson, the author of a new study about McGahern, "and performed exceptionally well in examinations, ending with the top results in County Roscommon in his Leaving Certificate so that he won a scholarship to university and was also 'called to training' as primary teacher."

In "Young John McGahern: Becoming a Novelist" (Oxford University Press, hardcover, \$45), Sampson said he posed the question: "How did a young man living in Dublin in the 1950s enter the mind and heart of a middle aged-woman dying

of cancer and write a classic novel, 'The Barracks', in such a mature style?"

"How did McGahern learn his art so early and so completely? To answer these mysterious questions," he said, "I tell the story of his personal and cultural circumstances in Dublin and London, draw on letters and apprentice writing, but most of all investigate his reading of Proust, Yeats, Beckett, Tolstoy and others. He became a supreme writer through being an intensely focused reader."

Sampson, who has worked as a teacher and writer in Montreal since the 1970s and now divides his time between Canada and Ireland, said: "This is a book about the power of reading and of personal triumph over grim circumstances."



Denis Sampson

What is your writing routine? Are there ideal conditions?
Morning, a rested mind and

body, a quiet house; whenever possible, a short nap and have another morning.

What advice do you have for aspiring writers?

Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite. Appreciate how style and personality are connected. Develop a voice that is clear, confident and passionate about the subject and the chosen method of approaching it. Communicate with an audience beyond yourself and your friends.

Name three books that are memorable in terms of your reading pleasure.

V.S. Naipaul's "Finding the Centre" and "The Enigma of Arrival"; Eamon Grennan's "What Light There Is" and other poems"; J.M Coetzee's "Boyhood: A Memoir."

What book are you currently reading?

DENIS SAMPSON

Date of birth: March 28, 1948

Place of birth: Limerick

Spouse: Gabrielle Kelly

Children: Conor, Robert, Anna

Residence: Montreal and Kilkenny

Published works:

"Outstaring Nature's Eye: The Fiction of John McGahern" (1993); "Brian Moore: The Chameleon Novelist" (1998); "Young John McGahern: Becoming a Novelist" (2012), Etc. (academic articles and editing; memoir/travel essays and book reviewing for newspapers and literary reviews).

Laurent Binet's "HHhH" and V.S. Naipaul's "Between Father and Son: Family Letters."

Is there a book you wish you had written?

W.G. Sebald's "The Emigrants," "The Rings of Saturn" etc., or, on another day, in another mood, Colm Toibin's "The Master."

Name a book that you were pleasantly surprised by.

George O'Brien's "The Village of Longing," not just for the power of its vivid evocation of an Irish childhood in the '50s but for its design as a narrative.

If you could meet one author, living or dead, who would it be?

Chekhov

What book changed your life?

"A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" (in secondary school, discovery of the idea of liberation); McGahern's "The Leavetaking" (as a young man now settling in Montreal, discovery of the writer whom I will soon meet and write about in appreciation all my life); James Olney, "Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography" (in early middle age, discovery of memoir genre, discovery of Montaigne). And change goes on.

What is your favorite spot in Ireland?

Dunmore East and thereabouts, that is: Woodstown beach and cliff walk to Portally Cove, although Kilkenny for everyday living.

• You're Irish if . . .
You want to be.

World champions!



Scotia-Glenville Pipe Band, Colonie, N.Y., won 1st place in the World Pipe Band Championships - Novice Juvenile Division 2012 in Glasgow, Scotland, on Aug. 11. Out of 26 bands competing with this youth division, Scotia-Glenville was the only band representing the United States. All members of the band are under 18 years.

Honoring labor

By Irish Echo Staff
letters@irishecho.com

"This is a delusional time in American history," said New Jersey poet Daniel P. Quinn, heading into this Labor Day weekend. "We think we are middle class, but the middle class is collapsing."

"People in America tend to look to the future but forget the past," he said. And that means, argued the prolific actor, director and producer, forgetting the role that the labor movement played in build-

ing the middle class. Over the last three decades, he added, the movement has been fighting a rearguard action defending the gains won in previous generations.

Quinn's "organized labor: Collected Poems" contains pictures of the 1913 strike in Paterson, N.J., and also some going further back of his Irish immigrant great-grandfather Bernard O'Neill at his Landmark Tavern, on West 46th Street, at 11th Avenue, Manhattan.

Quinn, who said that that Paterson will mark the centenary of the long strike next year, will give a talk on Sunday, Sept. 23, at the Paterson Museum about the historic links between the city and Lyons, France. It begins at 2 p.m. The museum is in the Thomas Rogers Building at 2 Market St. Call 973-321-1260 for details.



Daniel P. Quinn.