

Bryan MacMahon had a great love of the Irish language, of which he was a fluent speaker, and spent much of his time in the islands and Irish-speaking areas. His translation from Irish of *Peig*, the autobiography of Peig Sayers of the Great Blasket Island, has gone through several editions. It was serialised by Radio Éireann and attracted a large audience. He was one of the very few outsiders who could speak Shelta, the secret language of the Irish travelling people. An important article written by him, on the lives of the Irish travellers, appeared in *Natural History* (New York) in 1971 and later in Merian (Germany), attracting world-wide attention from sociologists.

One of the founders of Listowel Writers' Week, an event which has attracted international attention and to which he acted as a literary adviser, he was the first to introduce to the Irish literary scene the notion of a Writers' Workshop which is now very widely accepted in Ireland. A life-long collector of native music, he initiated the popular Radio Éireann series, '*The Balladmaker's Saturday Night*', which helped to prepare the way for the revival of native balladry. MacMahon wrote the ballad, '*The Town of Listowel*' about the Listowel Racing Festival and '*My Silver River Feale*' about Listowel's famous river.

MAURICE WALSH

Maurice Walsh was born in Ballydonoghue on 2 May 1879. He received his early education at Lisselton National School and then spent two years at St. Michael's College, Listowel. He entered the British civil service in 1901 and was appointed to the excise department in the Highlands of Scotland. On the setting up of the Irish Free State in 1922 he returned home to help build up the customs and excise service of the new State. He retired in 1933 and died in Dublin on 18 February 1964.

His first novel, *The Key above the Door*, appeared in 1923. Subsequently he wrote twenty novels and numerous short stories. The short story upon which the Academy Award film, *The Quiet Man*, was based was first published in 1934, one of his novels, *Trouble in the Glen*, was filmed in England 1954.

His novels are set either in the highlands of Scotland or the lowlands of north Kerry. Scotland had an extraordinary fascination for him and eight of his stories came 'out of the heather'.

The following is a list of the titles of his full-length books (his publisher was Chambers of Edinburgh): *The Key above the Door* (1923), *White Rivers Run* (1926), *The Small Dark Man* (1929), *Blackcock's Feather* (1932), *The Road to Nowhere* (1934), *Green Rushes* (1935), *And No Quarter* (1937), *Sons of the Swordmaker* (1938), *The Hill is Mine* (1940), *Son of Apple* (1940), *Thomasheen James, Man of No-work* (1941), *The Spanish Lady* (1943), *The Man in Brown* (1945), *Castle Gillian* (1948), *Trouble in the Glen* (1950), *Son of the Tinker and Other Tales* (1951), *The Honest Fishermen* (1954), *A Strange Woman's Daughter* (1954), *Danger under the Moon* (1956), and *The Smart Fellow* (1964).

In 2002 the papers of Maurice Walsh were presented to the University of Limerick by his family and are available on view in their Literary Archive.

GEORGE FITZMAURICE

George Fitzmaurice was born in 1877 in the family home, Bedford House, just outside Listowel on the Ballylongford road. With his father's death in 1891, the family was forced to move to a farmhouse in Kilcara, outside the village of Duagh. The circumstances surrounding the family meant none of its members was ever quite considered of the landed class, and neither did they fit in as locals.

Local stories tell of 'Master George' being seen composing his plays in the woods, in the parlour of his home, as well as in a large 15 acre top field on their farm. George was inspired by the colourful characters he met, as well as the people's stumbling attempts, at the end of the 19th Century, to speak English instead of Irish.

He moved to Dublin where he was employed by the Civil Service. His earliest writings were published in Dublin weeklies between 1900 and 1907.

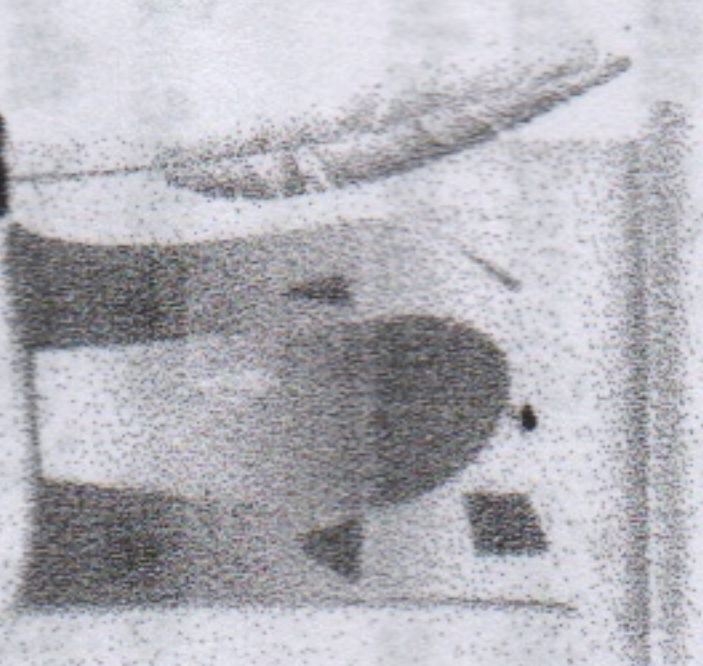
His first major success came in 1907 with an Abbey production of his comedy *The Country Dressmaker*. One of Fitzmaurice's most notorious characters, Luke Quilter, the man from the mountains, appears in this play that proved hugely popular with audiences, much to the surprise of one W.B. Yeats.

His second play, a dramatic fantasy entitled *The Pie Dish*, was totally rejected by critics and considered blasphemous. It led to the rejection of what is now understood as one of his best plays, another dramatic fantasy, *The Dandy Dolls*. Ironically, the Abbey Theatre produced this play in 1969, six years after his death.

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*Seanchai is a museum of words &
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worlds of the great Kerry writers
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Welcome to the Kerry Writers' Museum at the Seanchai Centre, Listowel. - Located in a splendidly restored 19th century Georgian residence the museum features the words and voices of the great North Kerry writers - John B. Keane, Bryan MacMahon, Brendan Kennelly, Maurice Walsh & George Fitzmaurice.

JOHN B. KEANE

John B. Keane, dramatist, novelist, poet and raconteur, was born on 21 July 1928 in Listowel, where he resided with his wife Mary over their much-frequented public house, until his death.

John B. Keane has contributed greatly to both local and national theatrical life. His first play, *Shve*, presented by the Listowel Drama Group, won the All-Ireland Amateur Drama Festival in 1959, and its enormous impact immediately made Keane's reputation. *Sive* is concerned with the traditional theme of the made marriage. It was followed in 1960 by *Sharon's Grave*, one of the author's favourite plays.

His next plays turned away somewhat from the folk past of North Kerry and depicted some of the elements of change in rural Ireland at that time. *Many Young Men of Twenty* (1961), is a musical about emigration and portrays the lack of jobs and opportunities which forced the people of Keane's small town to depart for the modern world of England.

Other plays penned by Keane include *The Man from Clare* (1962), *Hut 42* (1962), *The Year of the Hiker* (1963), but a stronger plot and characterisation make *The Field* (1965) one of Keane's best plays. This play was subsequently adapted for screen by Noel Pearson and Jim Sheridan in 1996.

Big Maggie (1969) dealt with a familiar Irish phenomenon, that of the domineering mother, and provided material for an actress to play a strong formidable central character on stage. *Moll* (1971) is another woman's play, the main character being a canny and domineering housekeeper of the local parish priest. Next came *The Crazy Wall* (1974), *The Buds of Ballybunion* (1976), and *The Chastite* (1979). Keane's imagination and humour are unique and surreal - as anyone who has had the privilege of hearing him speak well testify. His wit and talent are also evidenced in his many journalistic compositions, some of which have been collected in volumes of short, chatty essays.

In 1967, with the *Letters of a Successful T.D.*, Keane began a series of epistolary novellas. The other titles include *Letters of an Irish Parish Priest*, *Letters of a Love-Hungry Farmer*, *Letters of a Country Postman*, *Letters of a Matchmaker* and *Letters of an Irish Minister of State*. In his mid-fifties, Keane wrote a series of best-selling works, including *The Contractors* (1993), *The Bohrin Makers* (1986), and *Durango* (1987), which was filmed by Hallmark Hall of Fame in 1999.

J. B. Keane was president of Irish PEN, a member of Aosdána, and the recipient of numerous awards and honours, including honorary doctorates from Dublin University, University of Limerick and Marymount, Manhattan College, New York.

John B. Keane died in May 2002, during his beloved Listowel Writers' Week, of which he was a co-founder.

BRENDAN KENNELLY

Brendan Kennelly was born in Ballylongford in 1936. One of a large family, he went to the local National School, where amongst his teachers was the late Johnny Walsh, who died recently. He received his secondary education at St. Ita's College, Tarbert, an inter-denominational school, where at the age of 12, he was reading Baudelaire.

In 1963 he was appointed to the Department of English in Trinity College, Dublin, became a Fellow of the College in 1967, was promoted Associate Professor of English in 1969, and became the first occupant of the newly-created Chair of Modern Literature in 1973. He retired from this post in 2006.

By 1963 he had published four books of poems, *Cast a cold eye* (1959), *The Dark About Our Loves* (1961), *The Rain, the Moon* (1962), and *Green Town Lands* (1963) in conjunction with Rudi Holzapfel. Since then he has published a further twelve books of poems: *Let Fall no Burning Leaf* (1963), *My Dark Feathers* (1964), *Moloney Up and At It* (1965), *Collection One: Getting Up Early* (1966), *Good Souls To Survive* (1967), *Dream of a Black Fox* (21968), *Selected Poems* (1969), *A Drinking Cup* (1970), *Bread* (1971), *Love Cry: The Kerry Sonnets* (1972), *Salvation: The Stranger* (1972), and *Selected and New Poems* (1972).

Two novels by him, *The Crooked Cross* (1963) and *Florentines* (1967), have been well received. He won the AE Memorial Prize for Poetry in 1967 and the Critics' Special Harvey's Award in 1988.

His best-known work is the popular and controversial book-length poem sequence, *Cromwell*, published in Ireland in 1983. his book-length sequence, *Judas*, was published in 1991, and his work, *The Man Made of Rain*, was published in 1998 in both book and tape form. Other collections include *Begin* (1999) and *Marital Art* was (2001). His most recent publication *Reservoir Voices* was published in 2009. To celebrate his 75th birth a collection entitled *The Essential Brendan Kennelly* has just been published which includes a CD recording of Brendan.

BRYAN MACMAHON

Bryan MacMahon or as he was more affectionately known in Listowel, *The Master*, as the 'All-seein' God' bestowed a prolific literary talent on 29 September 1909 to the North Kerry town.

Bryan attended Listowel Boys' National School, St. Michael's College, Listowel, and St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. In 1936 he married Kitty Ryan, with whom he had five sons. He later became the principal teacher of Scoil Réalta na Maidine, Listowel.

MacMahon was a folklorist, short story writer, poet, playwright and producer of plays, novelist, lecturer and ballad-maker. He also wrote pageants, radio features, and television scripts and plays. His play *The Bugle in the Blood* was produced in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in March 1949. *The Honey Spike* was produced by the Abbey in 1961 and is still being produced at Irish drama festivals, having won major national and international awards. *Song of the Anvil* was again choice of the Abbey Theatre for the International Theatre Festival in 1960, using music composed by Seán Ó Riada. His autobiography, *The Master*, appeared in 1992.

MacMahon was one of the founders of Listowel Drama Group and its first producer. The Group won nationwide acclaim, producing some of the dramas written by Bryan himself. In 1952 his novel, *Children of the Rainbow*, was published in Britain, the United States and Canada. In 1970 he published also in the US a further book for children, *Patsy-O and his Wonderful Pets*. He also wrote *Brendan of Ireland*, a book of the life of a child in the Irish countryside.