

Tips from Irish seminar

# Poets shouldn't marinate in ancestral juices



Chairman Desmond Maxwell

By ROSEMARY McCracken

At 26, with no skills, Brian Moore came to Canada because he had heard that you could get a job on a Canadian newspaper with no special qualifications.

An ex-patriate Irishman now living in the States, Moore, on a panel discussion last Wednesday opening the five day Irish Studies Seminar, said writers often become expatriates before they discover whether their own country is hospitable to them as writers.

"I wrote in Canada because it was the time for me to write, not because Canada was the environment conducive to me as a writer," said Moore, author of the "Canadian" novel *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*.

"Scratch any writer and you'll find someone trying to sort out patterns in all that shifting sound," continued novelist Maurice Leitch. "He is trying to put these patterns into cold storage for future posterity. I'm not so much interested in the present violence in Northern Ireland as what motivates the violence."

In turn, Sean Lucy, Irish poet and professor of modern English at University College at Cork, cited three "schools" of poetry in Ireland: the nationalistic work of Ulster, the Dublin poets who "try to be urbane and international" and the more romantic rural poetry of south and south-western Ireland.

According to Lucy, Irish poetry has been influenced by a very strong oral tradition, "a strong element of playing around with language" and a sense of dramatic self-awareness.

"The Gaelic tradition of myths should be resurrected and used, but these myths must be related to intense personal experience of the poet." Lucy warned against "marinating in ancestral juices" or an obsession with traditional poetry inspired by secondary experience.

Desmond Maxwell, master of Winters College and chairman of the seminar, said the poetry readings were the most successful events of the five days; although the Irish Studies

Seminar has been held for seven years, this is the first year poetry readings have been introduced.

On Friday, the organizers screened *Dusty Bluebells*, a film depicting Belfast children at play, directed by Bernard Toney. David Hammond, the film's producer, said he had at first wanted to film children's impressions of the war, but came to realize that children have no opinions of war. "At best they would only be giving their parent's views."

The film shows children from the poor parts of Belfast playing the age-old clapping, dancing, ring-a-round-a-rosy games all of which are accompanied by song. Some could be easily identified by international audiences; others are derived from Gaelic myth and ballads.

Hammond wanted to capture "a dying art in which children enact drama, music, mime and dance similar to primitive ritual", before it is destroyed by television and other multi-media influences.

"The children are creating a world with no past, present and future," he said. "These experiences are more real to them than the world of their parents."



James Simmons, poet, songwriter and lecturer at the New University of Ulster, played guitar and sang his own compositions Saturday during the Irish Studies Seminar. His songs included a ditty composed entirely of quotes from the 19th century women's liberationist, Mary C. Stokes, extolling the female orgasm.

The Canadian Irish Studies Seminar is funded by the Canada Council, and others; York contributed \$3,000 to the event.

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