

[PDF] Whereabouts Of Eneas Mcnulty

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Author: Sebastian Barry

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Description:

These days, Frank McCourt would seem to have on lyrical depictions of Celtic poverty. But never fear, Sebastian Barry--the brilliant Irish playwright, poet, and prose-wrangler--is here. His new novel, *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* recounts the odyssey of a small-town innocent, who grows up in circumstances more bucolic, but no less threadbare, than McCourt's. It's clear from the very first paragraph, however, that Barry means to take a wide-angle view of his Irish urchin: "In the middle of the lonesome town, at the back of John Street, in the third house from the end, there is a little room. For this small bracket in the long paragraph of the street's history, it belongs to Eneas McNulty. All about him the century has just begun, a century some of which he will endure, but none of which will belong to him."

Having handily survived his Sligo childhood, Eneas joins the British Army in time for World War I--and upon his return home, finds himself shunned as a collaborator. Tarred with this very Britannic

brush, he goes one better and enlists in the Royal Irish Constabulary. Alas, this move only cements his fate as a marked man, and his father is soon issued a warning: "Let your son keep out of Sligo if he wants to keep his ability to walk." With a price on his head, Eneas commences a life of wandering, from Mexico to Africa to Nigeria (which the moonlight, he notices, "brings closer to Ireland.") From time to time he sneaks back to Sligo and is promptly expelled.

In another author's hands, this epic of dislocation could well be a bitter one. Yet the stoical and simple-minded Eneas is surprisingly free of anguish, and even his constant fear "has become something else, could he dare call it strength, a privacy anyhow." And the reader, at least, has the delightful distraction of Barry's prose, in which the occasional Joycean notes are entirely subsumed by the author's own colloquial brilliance. In the end, *The Whereabouts of Eneas McNulty* is less a novel than an exhibition of bardic fireworks--a latter-day that's actually worthy of the name. --James Marcus --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From Publishers Weekly Known in England as a playwright (*The Steward of Christendom*), novelist and poet, Barry brings all the attendant skills to this stunning novel, with its evergreen theme of the parallels between a personal life and the political life of a country?in this case the fiery history of 20th century Ireland. Eneas McNulty is born in 1900 in Sligo, the eldest child of a dancing mother and a musician father. By the age of 10, he has forged a magnetic bond with his chum Jonno Lynch, an orphan and Eneas's lifelong opposite. WWI is the pivotal event in Eneas's life; he loses his footing and never regains it. Driven by a vague dream of fighting in French fields, he enlists in the British Merchant Navy and finds himself in Galveston, Tex., hauling machine parts. He returns home to find postwar Ireland in political turmoil and economic dire straits. Jonno, who has devoted himself to the "world of shillings and employment," won't acknowledge Eneas because of his connection to the British. After a jobless year, he signs up with the Royal Irish Constabulary, which cements the community's conviction that he's a British loyalist. To take his name off the "black list," Jonno and his crowd demand that Eneas become an assassin against the RIC. While Eneas doesn't fear his own death, he can't kill anyone else. And so his permanent exile begins. He works as a herring fisherman in the North Atlantic, joins the British army for WWII, digs a canal in Nigeria, opens a hotel for homeless veterans in London's Isle of Dogs. Eneas is in many ways an Everyman in this century of the migrant and the dispossessed, but Barry is careful to intersperse flashes of humor as well as moments of bone-deep longing in his protagonist's bleak odyssey. Work and the rare moments of fellow-feeling it produces are Eneas's solace as even his memories of home are salted with the menace of the men who've vowed to hunt him down. Barry's lyric prose, astute use of detail and poignant insight are a fit match for his tragic theme of an innocent buffeted by history.

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