

**OLLSCOIL na hÉIREANN
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND**

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY:

PROFESSOR ANNE FOGARTY on 5 May 2022 in the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Literature, *honoris causa*, on **MARIE HEANEY**

A Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle (Chancellor, members of the University and distinguished guests), the National University of Ireland is proud to honour the distinguished career of Ms. Marie Heaney as writer, editor, journalist, and educator and her outstanding role as an advocate and patron of the arts and of Irish culture nationally and internationally.



Marie Heaney was born in Ardboe, County Tyrone, growing up near the shores of Lough Neagh. It is a historical landscape rich with legends. In keeping with the spirit of her native place, Marie Heaney has as broadcaster and author consistently forged connections between the mythic and the contemporary and worked to unite audiences both old and young, academic and generalist.

Marie Heaney trained as a teacher in Belfast and taught in Northern Ireland and later in the Republic of Ireland after she and her family moved to Dublin in 1972. In 1998 she completed an M.Phil. in UCD; her thesis was an exploration of *The Honest Ulsterman*, a ground-breaking literary journal which published the work of the Group, an illustrious poets' workshop founded by Philip

Hobsbawn at Queens University, Belfast for which she acted as correspondent, host and organizer.

As broadcaster, author, and journalist, Marie Heaney has produced a carefully shaped, and distinctive body of work. Her heart-felt love of art, clarity of purpose, deep-seated knowledge, and appraising vision shine through in everything she has written. Her best known work, *Over Nine Waves: A Book of Irish Legends*, was published by Faber & Faber to great acclaim in 1994. It is a unique volume which marries elegant retellings of myths about the Children of Lir, Cuchulainn, and Finn with legends about the three key Irish saints, Brigid, Patrick, and Columcille. As Angela Bourke observed in *The Harvard Review*, Marie Heaney while staying faithful to her sources triumphantly succeeded in restoring “life and movement to these tales from medieval Ireland”.

Marie Heaney’s empathy for her readership is a striking aspect of all her work. She not alone winningly restored well-known myths for a contemporary adult audience in *Over Nine Waves* but also for children. A companion volume, *The Names Upon the Harp*, beautifully illustrated by P. J. Lynch, was published by Faber and Faber in 2000. In it, Marie Heaney vividly re-narrates a selection of stories about the children of Lir, Cuchulainn, Deirdre of the Sorrows, Finn, and Oisín for young readers.

Marie Heaney has also excelled as an editor and anthologist bringing her gifts for empathetic reading and structural organization to bear on several projects. She has edited two selections of the beloved RTE radio programme, *Sunday Miscellany*, one *A Selection from 1995-2000*, published in 2000, and a second, *A Selection from 2003 and 2004*, published in 2004. Marie Heaney in these volumes skillfully grouped the diverse essays so that they spoke meaningfully to each other. Her emphasis in her prefaces on the quality of the writing as a

criterion for her selections underscores her love of the literary as well as of texts that make for a pleasurable reading experience. An anthology compiled to raise funds for Focus Ireland, published in 1999, *Sources: Letters from Irish People on Sustenance for the Soul*, is an unsurpassed example of her editorial ability seamlessly to interweave quite disparate statements about spirituality whether Margaret MacCurtain on Thomas Aquinas, Enda McDonagh on the “risk of God”, Tim Robinson on the mystery of prime numbers, or Paula Meehan on a devotional poem by an unknown tenth century author. Her skill for ordering the texts of others is matched by her gift for readerly openness. She notes in her Foreword how the assembled texts had begun to resonate with her and become in their turn a source of spiritual sustenance.

Undoubtedly, poetry is one of Marie Heaney’s overriding passions. Her unsurpassed command of this area of is an overriding feature of two singular anthologies of poetry which she has edited, *Heart Mysteries, 50 Poems from Ireland to Touch the Soul*, a volume from 2003, and *All Through the Night: Night Poems and Lullabies*, a collection from 2016. What makes these anthologies unique is their insistence on the transcendent as well as personal aspects of poetry, the wide span of texts they encompass including songs and texts from many historical eras including the contemporary, and the acknowledgement of the different audiences that poetry addresses. *All Through the Night*, in particular, succeeds in making its own of the ambivalence of the concept of night and to intermarry lullabies with darker poems about death and loss.

As an esteemed critical commentator, Marie Heaney has written a preface for *Voices at the World’s Edge: Irish Poets at Skellig Michael* published by Dedalus Press in 2010. She and a number of poets were invited to spend some nights on Skellig Michael and commissioned to write about the experience.

Marie Heaney's Foreword is a masterclass in oblique commentary and sharp critical engagement. She frames her experience of Skellig Michael through the poems in the volume in the first instance and only then goes on to describe its personal impact on her. Finally, she circles back to poetry to reflect on the numinous aspects of this onetime monastic outpost as a place which she declares quoting John Keats that "dost tease us out of thought as does eternity". Marie Heaney's professional and abiding devotion to the arts has assumed many more forms that I can begin to encompass, including her scripts for radio and tv and her numerous recordings and interviews. Her current role as Patron of Poetry Ireland is testament to her unstinting support of this mode of writing. Her advocacy of the arts has been genuinely life-enhancing for all who have come into contact with her in Ireland and internationally.

Above all, as consort of Seamus Heaney, she has played an inestimable role as a discerning reader and active enabler of his work. The continuing curation of the poetry and legacy of Seamus Heaney as expressed in the carefully selected *Seamus Heaney: 100 Poems* from 2018 with a preface by Catherine Heaney, the remarkable Seamus Heaney Home Place museum in Bellaghy, and the National Library of Ireland exhibition, Listen Now Again, at the Bank of Ireland Cultural and Heritage Centre at College Green in Dublin would be impossible without the work, critical acumen, and ongoing involvement of Marie Heaney.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis hanc meam filiam, quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneam esse quae admittatur, *honoris causa*, ad gradum Doctoratus in Litteris, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.