

## **‘THE GREAT OUTSIDER OF IRISH POETRY’**

### **PRESS NOTICE – RADIO DOCUMENTARY**

*“Desmond O’Grady is one of the senior figures in Irish literary life, exemplary in the way he has committed himself over the decades to the vocation of poetry and has lived selflessly for the art” (Seamus Heaney)*

Poet, translator, teacher, wandering Celt - Desmond O’Grady is a name heard in too few Irish households. Outside of literary circles, little is known of the exploits and the remarkable distances this man has covered in devoted pursuit of his crafts.

By the end of World War Two, Desmond was all of ten years old; less than a decade later, he had published his first book, *Chords & Orchestrations*. And he did so, on the back of a move to Paris, as a mere teen, where he encountered the likes of Samuel Beckett, Pablo Picasso and Jean Paul Sartre.

In his early twenties he uprooted and settled in Rome, where his name would soon surface as a poet and a Joycean scholar. Moving amongst the intelligentsia, he gained passage to artistic evenings in the homes of the aristocracy where writers, painters and composers would convene.

With Joyce’s work experiencing a renaissance of sorts, both he and O’Grady became all the rage amongst the literati. One man paying very close attention was the Italian film maker, Federico Fellini who cast O’Grady in *La Dolce Vita*.

Life continued apace and Desmond was open to direction. Ironically it came in the words of literary critic and Joyce biographer Richard Ellmann, asking – “Desmond, why not America?” And so his curiosity was piqued.

Desmond’s arrival at Harvard coincided with a shift in thinking at the University: a new interest in European literature was just coming into focus and he was on hand to chart its course. But his yearning for a return to a cultural hotbed would eventually usher him back to Eurasia.

Today O’Grady is anchored in Kinsale. His zeal for language untempered, he continues to write and translate with daily discipline. Considering his labelling as the great outsider of Ireland’s poets, Desmond wryly offers no argument to the contrary; comfortable in the choices he has made.

Ireland has changed and so too O’Grady’s relationship with the land he once jettisoned to find his own voice. It’s now his sanctuary – from which he ventures to engage with significant others, on his own terms.

For an expatriate who returns home, there is a universal insecurity: how those who never left view you. Desmond still grapples with this, even contemplating how his kin consider him. He offers no apology, nor expresses regret but realises a cost incurred.

*(“Desmond, What of the Blue Nights?” was made by David Young and Donal Hayes, with the support of the Broadcasting Funding Scheme, Sound & Vision, a Broadcasting Authority of Ireland Initiative.)*