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"John Fisher" Visits St. John Fisher

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Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"Driving from Buffalo to New York City in 1990, after appearing in "A Moon for the Misbegotten" at the former's Studio Arena Theatre, I passed through Rochester and remember thinking what a lovely city it looked like and how unlikely it was that I would ever have occasion to re-visit it. I'm very glad to say I was wrong."



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Driving from Buffalo to New York City in 1990, after appearing in “A Moon for the Misbegotten” at the former’s Studio Arena Theatre, I passed through Rochester and remember thinking what a lovely city it looked like and how unlikely it was that I would ever have occasion to re-visit it. I’m very glad to say I was wrong.

The circumstances that occasioned my second arrival were serendipitous.

Some years ago in the television series *The Tudors* I played Bishop John Fisher, a most excellent and honorable man. His words to the crowd assembled to witness his execution are truly moving. I was honored to portray him in the show and to repeat those same words, and I hope I did him justice.

Shortly after the series aired I received an email from Professor Tim Madigan telling me of the existence of St. John Fisher College and saying that he and some other faculty members had enjoyed my portrayal of Fisher. Thus began an exchange of emails, which in turn led to a meeting with Tim in Dublin and the beginning of a lasting friendship.

Upon learning that I perform a one-man show, *I Am of Ireland*, on the life of the great poet William Butler Yeats, Tim asked if I would be interested in bringing it to Rochester and when I agreed, he, with characteristic enthusiasm and energy, set about making the trip a reality.

Tim was coincidentally in Dublin in March of 2016 when the date came for me to depart for the USA and so we travelled together. Deposited in the excellent Woodcliff Hotel I laid out the costume and props I had brought with me. All there, thankfully, but I was nevertheless short a very important and essential item. A walking-stick. An ordinary walking-stick does not really fit the bill – these lines give some idea why -

*“I went out to the hazel-wood
Because a fire was in my head
And cut and peeled a hazel wand
And hooked a berry to a thread.”*

But an ordinary walking-stick seemed to be all that was available. Not even Tim could overcome this difficulty!

On a previous trip my “wand” – which I had personally cut from the hazel wood in Sligo mentioned in Yeats’ *The Song of Wandering Aengus* - disappeared from my luggage. I have replaced it since but no longer was risk travelling with it abroad and so here I in Rochester without my trusty stick.

I awoke early next morning to find glorious sunshine. I decided to go for a walk through the beautiful woods surrounding the Woodcliff. Not a single person did I encounter, which struck me as somewhat eerie, as I proceeded with care along the snow and ice-covered trails. An eagle flew overhead. The air was clear and unusually warm for the time of year. It was heavenly. Then, to add to my satisfaction, out of the corner of my eye I spotted the perfect stick, just lying there partially covered with snow. Problem solved! My magical walk was complete and when I performed the show in Rochester I had a piece of Rochester to help me. Perhaps W.B. was keeping an eye on me to make sure I did a good job of telling his story.

I have been performing as Yeats for a considerable number of years, the first time being in 1975 in a television drama about Lady Augusta Gregory who, with Yeats, co-founded Ireland’s National Theatre, The Abbey Theatre. In 1988 I was offered the role of Yeats in *I Am of Ireland: an Entertainment of W.B. Yeats* by Edward Callan. Most exquisite harp music was composed and played live by Gráinne Yeats to underscore much of the text. Gráinne was married to Senator Michael Yeats, son of the poet. I was immensely privileged to become a friend of the family and Gráinne and Michael were kindness and generosity personified. They gave me access to anecdotes and personal views of the poet which aided me considerably in my task of representing him. It is gratifying that many who have seen the show remark that it enabled them to see Yeats as a human figure with a surprising sense of humour, as well as being a statesman and arguably the greatest poet of the twentieth century. Gráinne and Michael are now both deceased, as is Edward Callan, and I miss them all. The music Gráinne composed for the traditional Irish harp - which is wire strung and produces a rather other-worldly sound - and the modern nylon-strung harp still accompanies me whenever I perform the play.

Saturday of that week was the Rochester St. Patrick’s Day Parade. I am accustomed to appearing in public as a “character” and not as myself and though I was very pleased to be guest of honor of *The Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians* I was surprised and a little disconcerted to see that the float we were to ride on was decorated on both sides with very large photographs of myself! After the parade began I had another surprise; some among the enormous crowd chanted my name as we passed along. Heady stuff indeed, but stranger still was to follow.

As Tim and I disembarked from the float I heard a deep voice behind me say: “Mr. Hogan, sir, I am a great fan of yours, sir. May I have my photo taken with you, please, sir?”

I turned to find myself looking into the midriff of a very tall marine sergeant in full regalia and carrying a regimental flag. Naturally, I was extremely happy to oblige. What a day!

I was treated with great hospitality by every single person I encountered in Rochester and count myself blessed to have had the opportunity to meet with people such as Fr. Bill Graf, a man of remarkable wit and grace; M.J. Iuppa, who writes such elegant prose; Mr. and Mrs. Mike McCarthy –Mike’s delightful book *The Flight of the Wretched* is now doing the rounds of my friends -; Mr. and Mrs. Edward Hourihan and Mr. and Mrs. Jim Holahan and so many others too numerous to mention here.

I hope to return to Rochester to meet again my new-found friends and to re-live that wondrous Parade.

Bosco Hogan has been a professional actor since the age of eighteen. The intervening fifty years have been filled with considerable success in radio, theatre, television and film.

For previous *Verbum* articles about Bosco please see “St. John Fisher is Irish” <http://www.sjfc.edu/dotAsset/4c9f3168-08f7-4fe7-8dbe-9d529c29922b.pdf> and “St. John Fisher in Galway” <http://www.sjfc.edu/academics/arts-science/departments/irish/documents/sjfc-in-galway.pdf>



Bosco Hogan with the mask of the character in the Tudor TV series



Bosco Hogan (and Tim Madigan) in the Rochester St. Patrick’s Day Parade