

[PDF] Are You Somebody?: The Accidental Memoir Of A Dublin Woman

Nuala O'Faolain - pdf download free book

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Description:

Self-preservation did not come instinctually to Irish journalist Nuala O'Faolain. One of 9 children--her mother had 13 pregnancies in all--she grew up in the 1940s and '50s in a defeated Dublin household. Her reporter father seems to have spent his time and money, and even love, elsewhere--and as the family grew more isolated and unable to cope, alcohol became her mother's only way out. "One of the stories of my life has been the working out in it of her powerful and damaging example in everything," the author admits, "Nothing mattered to her except passion." Some of O'Faolain's siblings emphatically didn't make it, but she was lucky to find refuge in books. They have been a defense, a comfort, and a delight.

Does her memoir then follow the standard rags-to-self-acceptance trajectory? Are you wondering if perhaps you can give it a miss, and in fact send the entire genre on a well-deserved vacation? Don't. *Are You Somebody* (the title unaccountably lost a question mark somewhere between the Irish and American editions) offers a wrenching account of childhood and a highly provocative take on the sexual and professional situation of Irish women. Though literature made O'Faolain, the male-dominated literary life and industry certainly didn't, and she now gives it more than a few body blows. It was a world in which writing and drink mattered far more than women: "The 'literary Dublin' I saw lied to women as a matter of course and conspired against the demands of wives and mistresses.... Women either had to make no demands, and be liked, or be much larger than life, and feared."

Irish women didn't seem to know to look for, let alone demand, equality. O'Faolain miraculously avoided pregnancy; but others were not so blessed. "Lives were ruined at that time, thousands and thousands of them, quite casually.... They were hotly pursued, and half longed to yield, but they were not able to defend themselves against pregnancy, and they were destroyed if they got pregnant." For all her energy and ambition and good fortune (and she needed this trio to jump her family's "sinking ship" and avoid getting pregnant), O'Faolain fell for the cant that she must marry, have children, and serve. Some will be initially shocked by her assertion that she was lucky never to have had a child. "Childbearing, along with bad education, relationships that managed to be simultaneously all-absorbing and rewarding, and financial dependence--these were the enemies of promise. But that's not why I'm glad; I didn't think of myself as having promise. I'm glad because under the old system it was so easy to rear children badly. The child wouldn't have properly survived." Yet the '70s enabled her to break out of the assumptions and realities of Irish women's lives, not to mention her yearning to be like "the troubled, rich, English upper-class people in books."

At the end of her memoir, O'Faolain knows she finally is, in fact, somebody. Still, those who don't recognize her see her only as a single, middle-aged woman. Like children, such individuals "aren't supposed to kick up." Thanks to this bracing book, the author gets to permanently do so. The writing exercise has answered some of her questions and some of her fears, but O'Faolain is too honest not to admit that for others there is no response or cure. She leaves us wanting to know more about her life but grateful that she has allowed us in. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

From Library Journal "I'm not anybody in terms of the world, but then, who decides what a somebody is? How is a somebody made?" asks Irish Times columnist O'Faolain. The answer can be found in her moving and painfully honest memoir, a best seller in her native Ireland that deserves as much attention here.

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