



Princess Grace  
Irish Library

## A SENSE OF PLACE



A Talk by

**POLLY DEVLIN**

Ireland Fund of Monaco Writer-in-Residence  
at the Princess Grace Irish Library

Monday 2 April 2012  
at 20:00

Author, broadcaster, film-maker, art critic and conservationist, Polly Devlin has had a remarkable career, taking her far from her rural roots in County Tyrone to the sophisticated world of Vogue in London, New York and Paris. As Features Editor for Vogue, she interviewed many major personalities of the 1960s, including Bob Dylan, John Lennon, Janis Joplin, John Osborne, Andy Warhol, and worked with photographers including David Bailey, Norman Parkinson, Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Terry Donovan and Lord Snowdon.

She was married in Tuscany to industrialist Adrian Garnett and, when after her marriage she moved to Somerset, she became interested in conservation and planted thousands of trees, reclaimed hundreds of acres for wild flower restoration, bird reserves and lakes. It is now a Site of Special Scientific Interest and the subject of a book *A Year in the Life of an English Meadow* and is featured in many television programmes.

In 1993, she was awarded an OBE for services to Literature. In addition to her three acclaimed books, *All Of Us There*, *The Far Side of the Lough* and *Dora: or The Shifts of the Heart*, she is also the author of the *Vogue Book of Fashion Photography*, published by Thames and

Hudson in Britain and Simon and Schuster in New York. (There are Italian, German and French editions of this book). Other books include a guidebook to Dublin, a book of essays, *Only Sometimes Looking Sideways* and the meadow book.

Polly Devlin was born in a remote almost medieval area in Northern Ireland in the 1940's; there were no telephones or electricity in the region when she was growing up and ponies and two motor cars — one was her father's, the other belonged to the local priest.

Her first job was as a result of having won the Vogue Talent competition, the main attraction of which was a job on the magazine. She was twenty years old and she says the question she most often has to answer is how someone from so different and rural a background could have gone straight into life at Vogue. As Features Editor for three years she travelled the world interviewing people as disparate as Farah Diba, the Empress of Persia, to Barbra Streisand and Orson Welles. She was the first person to interview Bob Dylan in England, to write about Seamus Heaney, and almost certainly the first woman to travel across Abu Dhabi, which she did before that country became oil-rich. She recalls

seeing horses being turned off a patch of hardened earth as the tiny aeroplane which brought her to Abu Dhabi came in to land; as one recalcitrant horse galloped in front of the aeroplane she realised that their paddock was also the landing strip.

She became a columnist for the *New Statesman* when she was twenty-three, and had her own page in the *Evening Standard* a year later. Soon after, she went to live in Manhattan as a Features Editor and writer for Diana Vreeland on *American Vogue* covering international stories, theatre and the arts.

She returned to England with her husband and published her first two books — *All of Us There* and *The Far Side of the Lough* — on the same day, without reference to each other, by different publishers, Weidenfeld & Nicholson and Victor Gollancz. They have remained in print since then and have gone into several editions. *All of Us There* is now a Modern Classic in the Virago imprint.

In 1990, she became a roving critic, with particular emphasis on art and major exhibitions for *The International Herald Tribune* for a year and wrote a publication for the National Gallery of Ireland on their ceramic collections.

She has been a Judge of the Booker Prize in England and a judge on the Irish Times Aer Lingus Literary award.

In 1991, she bought a house in Dublin and finding she knew little about the city, set about finding out more. The result was *Dublin* - a comprehensive guide book to the city.

Her interest in photography led her to write the foreword to the large retrospective of British photography - *A Positive View* - at the Saatchi gallery in London in 1994. She hosted a series of talks and interviews on television for BBC Northern Ireland, has broadcast many talks and short stories and has written a radio play for the BBC in London. Stories from *The Far Side of the Lough* are frequently broadcast. She is on the Northern Ireland team in the Round Britain Quiz on Radio 4.

In the 1980's, she attended the National Film School in England on a director's course for four years and wrote and directed the documentary *The Daisy Chain*.

She is now a professor at Barnard College Columbia University New York where she teaches Creative Non-Fiction, lives in Paris and London and is finishing a book about Ireland in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

**A SENSE OF PLACE:** Do those who have a strong sense of place have it because they've lost it? Is a sense of place a sense of yearning? There's a real difference between a sense of place and of going home or of being 'at home'. In a way, by having a sense of place you've already left it. So can only dislocated people have a real sense of place, that place being, paradoxically the place you've lost? What is true is that a writer must be able to convey a sense of place if he or she is to be a writer. You have to know where you are: but more importantly where you have been. And it is this place of 'been' that informs and colours so many writers. One of these places is childhood.

Polly Devlin, February 2012

Entry 10 EUR per person payable at the door. Sorry, no cheques. Reservation essential due to limited number of seats. The street doors close at 20:00 sharp.

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