



Journal of the Short Story in English

Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

53 | Autumn 2009

The Short Stories of John MacGahern

Preface

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Édition électronique

URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/991>

ISSN : 1969-6108

Éditeur

Presses universitaires de Rennes

Édition imprimée

Date de publication : 1 décembre 2009

ISSN : 0294-04442

Référence électronique

John MacGahern, « Preface », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [En ligne], 53 | Autumn 2009, mis en ligne le 01 décembre 2010, consulté le 03 décembre 2020. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/jsse/991>

Ce document a été généré automatiquement le 3 décembre 2020.

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Preface

John McGahern

PREFACE ¹

- ¹ These stories grew in the mind and in the many workings of the material, but often began from as little as the sound of a chainsaw working in the evening, an overheard conversation about the price of cattle, thistledown floating by the open doors of bars on Grafton Street on a warm autumn day, an old gold watch spilling out of a sheet where it had been hidden and forgotten about for years. Others began as different stories, only to be replaced by something completely unforeseen at the beginning of the work. The most difficult were drawn directly from life. Unless they were reinvented, reimagined, and somehow dislocated from their origins, they never seemed to work. The imagination demands that life be told slant because of its need of distance.
- ² Two such stories were 'The Key' and 'The Stroat'. Over the years I rewrote them several times, but was never satisfied but still would not let them go. I was too attached to the material. I stubbornly refused to obey the primary rule that if a writer finds himself too fond of a rhythm or an image or phrase, or even a long passage, he should get rid of it. When I came to write *Memoir*, I saw immediately that the central parts of both 'The Key' and 'The Stroat' were essential to the description of the life we lived with my father in the barracks, from which they should never have been lifted. No matter what violences or dislocations were attempted, obdurately what they were.
- ³ Among its many other obligations fiction has to be believable. Life does have to suffer such constraint, and much of what takes place is believable only because it happens. Fiction has to be true to a central vision of life.
- ⁴ 'Creatures of the Earth' and 'Love of the World' are new stories.