

# FANATIC HEART

My friend, Billy Roche, once attended a workshop given by future Nobel Prize winner, Brian Friel. Friel was adamant that every Irish playwright must address the Northern situation. Since Billy had no firsthand experience, he didn't honestly feel he could tackle the subject. Friel would accept no excuses.

Although his position is extreme, I have come to understand Friel's point. The Irish nation, both unionist and nationalist, is still reacting to the partitioning of the country over 70 years ago. Friel's belief is that each generation must accept responsibility for this travesty. With that in mind, I have tried to distill my own small knowledge and experience into this song. Mr. Yeats, generous as ever, supplied the title.

As a child, I spent summers on the porous Donegal/Derry border. On trips to Derry City, the violent history oozed from the "sacred" walls, while the pageantry and color of the Orange Parades seemed almost pagan. Bigotry was rampant and quite respectable; I was a stranger in my own country and a despised one at that.

Years later and continents away, Paul Hill, Gerry Conlon and Paddy Armstrong came bounding into my life. Barely months out of Her Majesty's prisons, they had spent 15 years incarcerated for a crime they didn't commit. We became friends and I was privileged to observe these three very different men at close quarters. Their dignity and strength of character left an indelible impression.

And how do you write about the North and leave out the Rev. Ian Paisley. St. Paul to some, the antichrist to others, but always the canny politician, in step with his constituents. What irony that this divisive man should supply the closing words that sum up the brittleness of my protagonist.

Fanatic Heart is non-sectarian. Just as I recognize nationalist aspirations for total economic and civil rights, so can I also empathize with unionist reluctance to be swallowed up in a 32 county Catholic theocracy. However, there can be no peace in the North of Ireland, until people see the advantage in talking to one another. And there will be no serious talking until the British stop propping up this artificial statelet, with its pathetic history of repression and inhumanity.

Finally, Fanatic Heart is about an Ulsterman, a simple human being, trying to retain his dignity and sanity in a world spinning way beyond his control.