

## The Last Pool of Darkness: The Connemara Trilogy

**Tim Robinson**

Milkweed Editions (Nov 7, 2023)

Softcover \$20.00 (384pp)

978-1-57131-374-4

Combining detailed descriptions of Connemara's history, folklore, artistry, geology, and nature, Tim Robinson's *The Last Pool of Darkness* is a sprawling, joyful romp along Ireland's western coastline.

The second volume in a trilogy, the book includes careful descriptions of the Connemara region's natural features, such as the exposed quartzite along a Cleggan Head promontory; predatory ground beetles on boggy grazing land; deposits of zeolites and coralline algae on rugged beaches; and Omev Island's choughs (small, red-beaked crows unique to Ireland's western dunes). An evocative description of the region's geology addresses the emergence of this wave-washed coast during the Silurian and Ordovician periods, as well as glacial impacts from the latest Ice Age during Pleistocene.

Accessible to locals and enthusiastic travelers, the prose is upbeat, clear, and engaging, if Robinson's "grain-by-grain hoarding of detail" and prancing shifts between stories require keen attention. Indeed, natural history is only one of his several themes; the book also covers several hundred years of human history and legends. There are accounts of visits to the region by famous writers—including W. B. Yeats and Ludwig Wittgenstein—and rollicking stories about local legends like Festy Mortimer, a fisherman and boat builder who reared a family of ten; the "ample and earth-rooted" Bina McLoughlin, known as the Queen of the Connemara; and Dorothy Cross, the mermaid (and artist) of Mullaghglass. Told in the gossipy tone of a confidante, there are adventure stories about sea captains, balladeers, priests, farmers, and artists, as well as seances, drownings, unsolved murders, the potato blight, and islands that disappear in the mist.

Sweeping and authoritative, *The Last Pool of Darkness* is an astonishing, immersive view of the people and places of Ireland's Connemara region.

KRISTEN RABE (November / December 2023)

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