



Errislannan: Scenes from a Painter's Life

Alannah Heather

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Errislannan, or Flannan's peninsula, juts out into the North Atlantic on Europe's western extremity south of Clifden, Connemara, Co. Galway. The home of Alannah Heather, it gave shape to her life, and to this book. The Heathers were minor Protestant gentry and estate-owners who occupied Errislannan Manor for five generations from the 1790s to the 1960s. The author tells their story, using family diaries and letters salvaged from a coach-house loft before the auction, and enlarges upon it in this remarkable self-portrait, articulating a childhood and landscape peopled by cottagers and fisherfolk, islanders and evangelicals, and a richly eccentric body of relatives. Their history reveals Ireland's in microcosm - touching upon the Great Famine and subsequent diaspora, the 1916 Rising and civil war, the Alcock and Brown landing on Derrygimlagh bog, and the more intimate dramas of unrequited love, bereavement and isolation, in a perpetual cycle of exile and repatriation. Aslant of an Anglo-Irish upbringing, Alannah Heather's career as an artist took her to the Slade and London in the 1920s, to St Ives on her marriage in the 1940s, and to Sark in the Channel Islands, with painterly excursions to Bruges and Budapest during the 1930s, returning time and again like a salmon to its beloved spawning-ground in Connemara. The voice in Errislannan is immediate, affectionate and unobtruding - the narrative, illuminated by shards of memory, restores a personal and collective past. It is a singular journey of self discovery, and an enduring masterwork, resonant as its subject's canvases. 'A delightful book, full of beauty and emotion ... wonderful reading.' - Gemma Hussey, Irish Independent 'A splendid book.' - In Time's Eye, The Irish Times

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