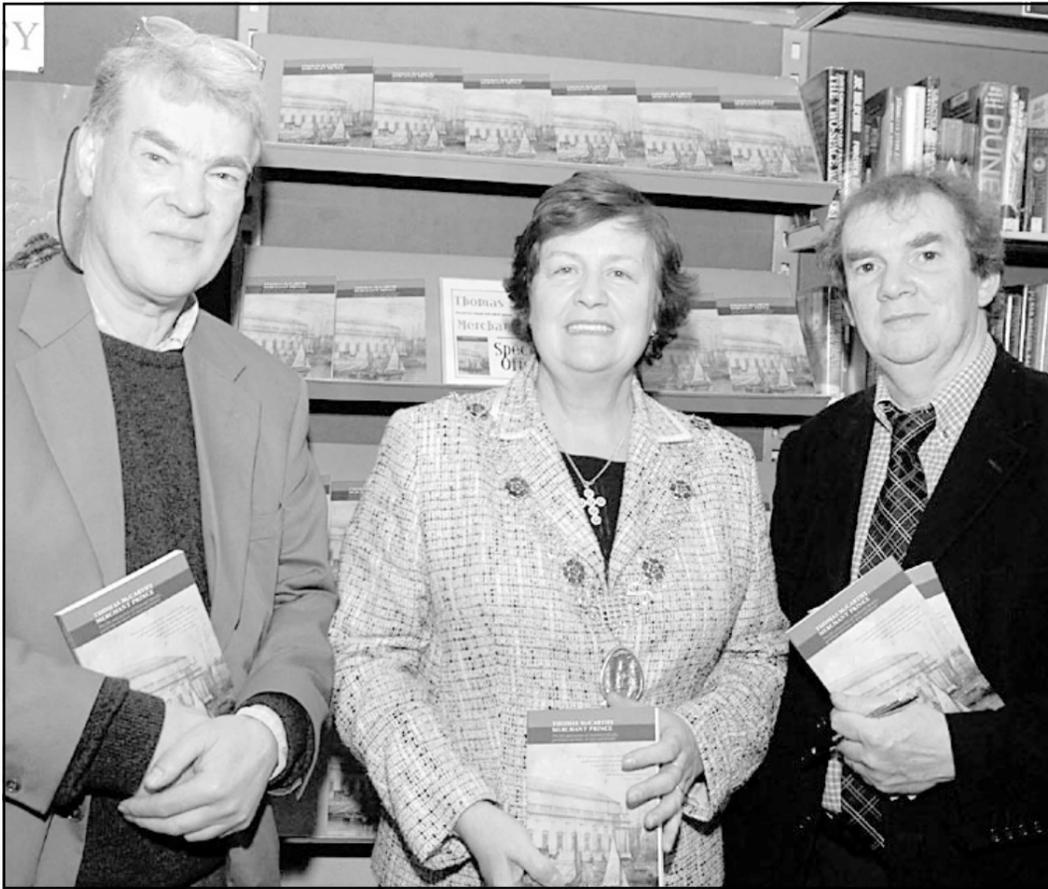


ECHONEWS

work is featured on radio this week

# book bug



**BOOK LAUNCH: Publisher Peter Jay, Anvil Press, Deputy Lord Mayor Cllr Mary Shields and author Tom McCarthy at the launch of his book Merchant Prince at Cork City Library.** Picture: Larry Cummins

and librarian at Cork City library since 1977 hibernated for a considerable period between the years 1972 and 1979.

"It was my nest in the woods," he recalls.

It was the house he returned to each weekend while studying English and archaeology in Cork — his own family lived three miles down the road and he went there to leave in his laundry and be fed and also over a long period helping the owner reclaim and restore the neglected gardens.

The latter project was a 'great' project, one which gave him a life-long love of gardening.

He was both caretaker and resident in the house, all the time learning his craft as a writer, acclimatising himself to the solitary nature of the task he had chosen.

"It was a training in isolation, a training in loneliness but not an unhappy one, a very fruitful one."

It was a key period in the formation of his character as a writer, a time during which he not only wrote but immersed himself in the influences of other writers including poet TS Eliot and Greek poet Giorgos Seferis, Yeats, Evelyn Waugh, Elizabeth Bowen and Harold Nicholson.

"I lived my life at the time in soul companionship with great literature."

By this time he was well and truly infected by the writing bug. "Writ-

ing is a form of disease, an infection which is very hard to throw off once it establishes itself."

And he quotes the lines of Patrick Kavanagh: "A man dabbles in poetry and finds it is his life."

Writing, for Tom, is a craft, combined with a studied elegance of words, a process in which events which impact on the writer, the happenings in the world, are transformed into an understanding of the world.

It is a 'response remade' to what is happening around him.

At UCC he was tutored by John Montague (*The Dead Kingdom* and *Death Of A Chieftain*) and Sean Lucey, both enormously helpful and major influences, he says.

His own hope was to become a full-time writer, but he realised after two years of writing in his Cappoquin 'nest' that it wasn't possible to earn a living this way.

In 1977 he joined the library service in Cork and apart from periods lecturing in the US and his secondment to the City of Culture project, has been there since.

His work is highly admired — Nobel Laureate winner Seamus Heaney recently wrote to tell him how much he enjoyed *Nathaniel Murphy* — and challenging in terms of his unique style and his willingness to tackle what others would consider dangerous subjects.

In the mid '80s he found himself face-to-face with Republican pris-

oners at Portlaoise jail, who were incensed that he referred to their use of the black flag during the hunger strike disaster in a poem he wrote as 'fascist.'

They sent for him, wanted to know what he meant. They could understand why most people would refer to them as terrorists, although they didn't agree with the tag, but they wouldn't allow anyone refer to them as fascist.

"It was a very vigorous and honest disagreement," he recalls of the discussion he had with them during a short term teaching contract he had with the prison, through the Department of Justice.

"My view is that anybody who reserves the right to kill someone whom they disagree with if they lose an argument is fascist."

His time as assistant director of Cork City of Culture has been hugely rewarding and challenging, he says. The huge spin-off benefits in terms of visitors numbers to the city will continue for years to come, he predicts. He also praises the 'great' team he has worked with on the project.

He is looking forward to returning to the City Library in the new year, meeting up with his old colleagues and having more time for his writing.

● *The Life and Opinions of Nathaniel Murphy is the Book On One on RTE radio all this week at 11.10pm.*

## O'Shea on Monday



robert.oshea@eecho.ie

### Proper etiquette in today's society

**ROBERT O'SHEA**  
*on the subject of manners and how important they are*

THAT I have grown up to be a polite young man with impeccable manners is, I guess, down to good parenting.

Whenever some adult would hand me something such as a present or a gift of money, my mother would give me a nudge and say: "What's the magic word?"

"Abracadabra," I'd answer because that was the kind of impish young gentleman they had moulded me into and the gift would usually on cue vanish once we got home.

Several applications of the wooden spoon and three years in a Swiss finishing school later had the desired effect and I emerged at 18 with the courteous personality that is known across the county today.

Manners are the subject of a new book by English author Lynne Truss called *Talk to the Hand*.

I have not read her book but it does not matter because I am simply using it as a topical reference so I can write some stuff about manners myself.

Rudeness seems to be endemic among young people these days, though, admittedly, they may not have received opportunities or severe beatings with a kitchen implement I did.

It would seem to me Truss is on to a loser if she hopes her book can make an impact on the lard heads who populate our streets these days; I honestly cannot remember the last time somebody said, "Have a nice day!" or "Beg your pardon" to me.

Affirmative action is the only solution, I say.

The height of rudeness is not holding a door open for someone who is trailing behind you. I always make sure I do it and it is not just chivalry, I do it for everyone: men, women, people who are hogging the telephone kiosk on a cold day.

The best thing to do to embarrass someone who fails to do likewise, is this: They enter (or exit), oblivious to your existence and Whoooooosh! the door is sailing back towards you. Now bang the door hard with your hand, fall backward (practice this a few times at home to avoid injury) and hold your nose (fake blood should be hidden in your sleeve). This should put a stop to their tricks in future.

Another thing that frustrates me greatly is when you meet someone (usually the location is a stairs) and they won't let you by. You feint one way; they do likewise. Ha! Ha! Sorry. Next, you both go the other way. Ha! Ha! Sorry again (let me past you bastard). There you both are, shimmying from side to side, smiling like dopes at each other for up to five seconds.

The best thing to do is shake hands with your aggressor and admit defeat.

There is one situation for which I am unsure of what the etiquette is: if you meet the doctor who delivered you, can you smack their bottom or not?

This brings me to my own bottom.

**RELEVANT CLOSING ANECDOTE**  
I have never been one to moon. But I have found I am garnering a reputation for it and I just want to assure you,

by relaying the following story, that my mooning was not premeditated. (For those unaware, "to moon" is the act of removing one's trousers to reveal the backside. In my case it would be "to unintentionally moon." I know I've split the infinitive there, but this was a traumatic experience, so forgive me.)

I recently went to the opera. And as it was my first, I decided I would dress up smartly. I donned nice cream chinos, a sports jacket and freshly ironed shirt. I was running a little late. I had planned to amble at my leisure to the Opera House, but realised I'd have to take my bike. The problem was it was raining. My bike has no mud guards so I meandered around the puddles on the way to town; but, I quickly realised that due to the downpour, there was rainwater firing up off the back wheel and on to the seat of my trousers.

When I arrived in town I cycled into a sheltered area where I often park my bike. I locked it and then felt my ass. There was severe dampness. I wanted to see if the area could be rescued by my sports jacket covering it so I decided I'd better take a look. There was no one around and there were no mirrors available, so I would have to pull down the pants and inspect myself. I did so. There was a wet patch (slightly brown) lining down the middle of the seat of my chinos, I observed, as I bent over and looked between my legs. Nothing too conspicuous though.

**There is one statement false in the above paragraph.**

Have any of you twigged it?  
Yes, it is where I wrote: "There was no one around."

As I peered between my legs I saw there was somebody around. A woman, 20 yards away, in perhaps her 30s was staring at my bottom with a look on her face that seemed to say: "I'm staring at someone's bottom."

I quickly pulled up my pants. I decided there was only one decent thing I could do to address the situation: pretend to be drunk.

"Gaarrrrrrrr! My mother was a saint," I roared and pretended to stumble around the place like someone deeply inebriated. I closed my eyes, hoped for the best and she beat a hasty retreat.

Where do manners come into this? Well let's say you are trying to get to your seat in the middle of the row at the opera and have to pass several people. They scoot up their legs as you try to get by, politely saying "excuse me" and "thank you" as you go until you reach a particular woman. My question of etiquette is, and I hope Lynne Truss has covered this, as you scoot past sideways, should you show her your ass again or your crotch?

**Thank you for reading today's column. Please read another soon.**