

Book Review

Hitler and Mars Bars

By Dianne Ascroft
(Trafford Publishing)

IN OCTOBER 1945, a German branch of the Save the Children Society was formed in concern for the country's young, left destitute in a war-ravaged land. The Irish were among the first to offer aid, and other European powers followed suit.

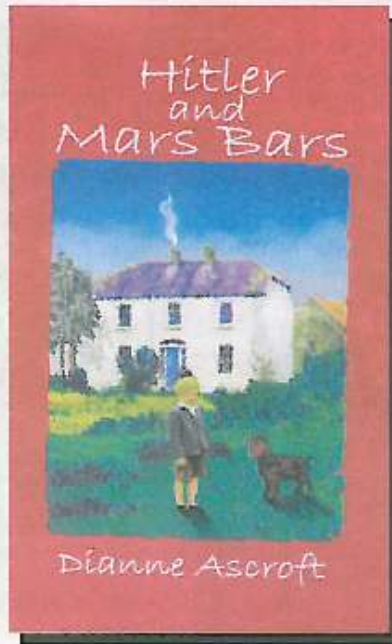
The Irish Red Cross co-operated with the Save the Children Society in a programme called Operation Shamrock, which brought German children to Ireland while their home country attempted to get back on its feet.

Between March 1946 and April 1947 over 400 German children arrived in Ireland, and in 1949 the majority were returned home to Germany. But some remained as they had nothing to go back to.

These events so intrigued author Dianne Ascroft that she reached into her imagination to put a human face on this remarkable story – through a boy named Erich.

The book keeps company with Erich from the age of five in Bredenscheid, Germany in March 1945 to when he is 15 in Belfast in January 1955.

During these 10 years, Erich suf-



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fers much hardship and change.

Not only does he have to contend with the regular obstacles that confront a child growing up, but is burdened by alienation, frustration, anger and lack of support from his adopted Irish family.

A lot of care has gone into creating this story, and I must commend Ascroft for the diligence shown to both her subject and craft. The book is tightly written, and the characters very much believable.

The evocative language is seemingly effortless; one has an easy time going with the flow and living the lives of the characters.

However, at points it seems Ascroft gets a little carried away by the information she has gathered while researching the subject, and thus the historical bedrock upon which the story is laid sometimes sticks out, tripping this reader up a little.

Also, I believe Erich's particular life journey would have been much less easygoing and full of greater horrors than what Ascroft imagines. I think that Erich would have turned into quite a ruthless and depressed young child, severely damaged by the constant turmoil in his life, and lack of love and family.

But Ascroft is much more positive in her outlook than this old cynic, and sees this child as having a generous nature which carries him through.



Jeanette Rehnstrom is a freelance journalist who writes two exclusive columns for Gay Community News every month. More information about her work and the Irish Writers' Exchange can be found at irishwritersexchange.com

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