

Tales from Rainwater Pond

By Billy Roche
(Pillar Press)

I'M NOT a fan of short stories for many reasons, mostly because they often don't have enough room to do justice to their subject. But Billy Roche's *Tales from Rainwater Pond* may have changed my mind a little.

The time is late 1970s Ireland, and the Rainwater Pond of the title is a focal point of a small rural village whose inhabitants are floundering in its hidden depths. They do not seem to have any dreams, any adventurous spirit or any desire to move beyond the norm. Each story pries into aspects of their lives, trapped within their circumstances.

'Haberdashery' and 'Northern Lights' depict what happens when you are no longer in love with your choices for the long haul. The life that never blossoms is starkly apparent both in 'Tommy Day' and 'Maggie Angre', whose loss of a brother is so keen that she never had any closure.

The issue of disability is dealt with in 'One is not a number', where the protagonist is made to feel every weight of his afflictions – ignored, taunted, discouraged from his ambitions. The negative effect is manifested as he grows older and turns on those around him in increasingly cold-blooded ways.



Billy Roche, I think, wants to use *Rainwater Pond* to explore the subject of what I'd call the other side of life – those aspects beneath the surface that go unmentioned; the sadness, darkness and loneliness that are never too far away, even when they are obscured by the greater scheme of things.

If there's only one question the stories here ask, it's how and why people become lonely, and what informs their decision to remain lonely and embrace the darkness that comes with it without any visible effort at changing their circumstances.

I couldn't help wondering, though, why these people seem not to be aware of their position – or am I seeing it from a different per-

spective?

At the same time, his characters – though well developed and credible – behave in such a delinquent manner in their speech and their actions that it's hard to believe at times.

But maybe because of the author's associations with the theatre, this exaggeration is deliberately designed to elicit laughter in the reader at the risk of your conscience saying you shouldn't.

All in all, *Tales from Rainwater Pond* is quite a collection.



Ifedinma Dimbo, originally from Nigeria, is the author of *She Was Foolish?* More

details about her work and the Irish Writers' Exchange can be found at irishwritersexchange.com