

# Caryddwen's Cauldron

By Paul Hilton

"*Caryddwen's Cauldron*, seeming to owe more to the school of magic realism than to any other literary genre, is a novel of quest and restoration which brings the world of Celtic mythology into hilarious and spectacular interaction with the corrupt present of business tycoons, international power politics, media manipulation, muddle-headed idealism, tortuous bureaucracy and decadent language. Five daughters from 'the oldest family in Britain' are engaged, along with a number of their male friends, in a search for the missing sixth, which is in essence the same search as that for the missing piece of the legendary receptacle of the book's title, for the absence of which all things are falling apart. They are helped by one Finbar Direach, a survivor of the Tuatha de Danaan, in their struggle against the forces of evil personified by the leisure industry tycoon Myles Overton, behind whom lurks the demonic figure of the sinister Leatherwing. In the tongue-only-half-in-cheek tone which Paul Hilton hits perfectly, we are warned that the 'great conflicts between Gothic and Celtic, linear and cyclic, theist and animist, modernizer and traditionalist, are still being fought. That the battlefield is the human heart, and the greatest heroes may not even be aware they are fighting.'

"This is a tone of voice which manages at the same time to take nothing seriously and to take everything seriously. Parodies of Celtic heroic and mythological texts of which Flann O'Brien would be proud, and clever manipulations of their repetitive structures, point up mordantly the vapidness of contemporary speech. Hilton grabs hold of every fashionable cliché going and shakes it by the scruff of the neck. The satire of business and marketing lingos is relentless and savage. While the characters are by design cardboard cut-outs and their talk ludicrously empty, off-handed observations of remarkable psychological acuity are scattered liberally throughout the text in such a way as to broach serious ideas and issues with a deft lightness of touch, and parody and satire are transcended through the coherence of the overall design. Hilton's use of language is fresh and accomplished, studded with arresting images.

"The narrative, which is racy and attractive and possessed of the best of the old-fashioned storytelling virtues, ranges from the Sussex Downs to the Corryvreckan whirlpool, from the London sewer system to the Aral Sea. But it is less its geographical than its mental and imaginative agility which gives this novel its freedom and power. Its emancipation from the conventions of linear, naturalistic narration gives a wide-ranging, highly literate and erudite mind the scope to do all kinds of unusual and unexpected things which delight the sympathetic reader."

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