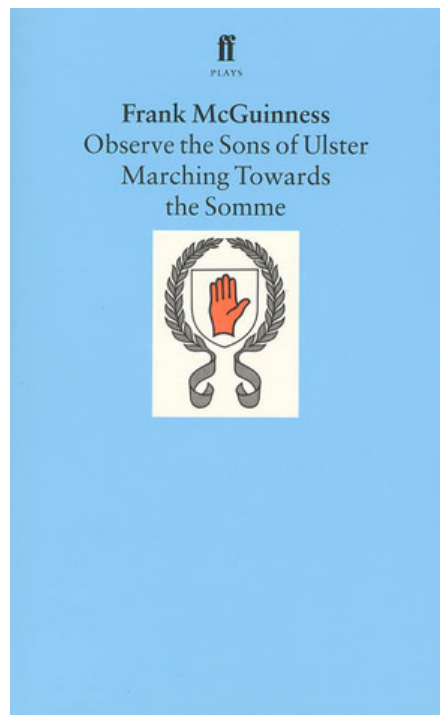




Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme

Frank McGuinness

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'This powerful and subtle play... follows the experience of eight men who volunteer to serve in the 36th (Ulster) Division at the beginning of the First World War. It reaches a climax at the start of the terrible battle of the Somme on July 1, 1916, the actual anniversary of the battle of the Boyne in 1690. The Somme, where the Ulster Division suffered heavy casualties, has, like the Boyne, come to have a sacred place in the Loyalist Protestant mind. It marks the Union sealed with blood. It stands for the ultimate test of Ulster's loyalty; a blood-sacrifice to match any made by Irish nationalists.' *Times Literary Supplement*

Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme was revived by the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, in 1994 as part of an acknowledgement of the peace process. The production was subsequently taken to the Edinburgh Festival in 1995 and opened at the Royal Shakespeare Company's Barbican Theatre, London, in March 1996.

Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme Details

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Author : Frank McGuinness

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océane (une.bibliotheque) says

(review to come)

Caitriona says

Strange young men in a strange war.

Emily says

McGuinness does an excellent job of re-visioning a WWI drama: instead of a focus on the battles, etc. the audience is left with only eight young men who are fighting for Ulster; who understand that they will die for Ulster. Done in four parts, McGuinness hooks the audience immediately with Kenneth Pyper seemingly alone on stage yet soon revealing he is haunted by the seven men he fought alongside; Pyper was the only survivor. The most beautiful part in my opinion is Part 3 where the men are paired off -- we see them bonding and connecting with the other half of the pair, we see them arguing and challenging each other as well. It is the beautiful juxtaposition of characters, of war and humanity, of peace and struggle. It was moving and I would love to see this performed on stage.

Rachel Terry says

Eight young Protestant men in their twenties and early thirties enlist to fight for their country. In the beginning they joke around and tease each other about their differences and their backgrounds, but as death creeps closer, they begin to question their motives and realize that it's too late to go back. At the beginning, and old embittered Pyper greets the ghosts of his comrades and....yikes!

Lou (BooksAreAWayOfLife) says

2.5 Stars

Another play for my dissertation. It was a really good source... the play is just incredibly... depressing. It's an Anti-war play from the perspective of a Company of men, with one of them surviving the war and remembering what happened, and his mates. I didn't particularly enjoy reading the play, but I could imagine the play to be really moving if was performed.

Joanna Philip says

One of the most moving and powerful pieces of drama I have encountered in a while. I saw this in the theatre with fantastic actors who commanded the utter attention of the audience through superb character performance and stunning interpretation of the work. I then bought the play myself to read as the theatre had left me curious and wanting more...

The play is set in WW1 in the lead up to the Battle of the Somme where over one million soldiers lost their lives. However, instead of being a play based around the actual physical battle, it focuses on the lives of eight soldiers from Ulster, from when they join up until the front line.

The characters are explored tenderly yet with great emotion by the play write, and it is difficult not to find yourself completely immersed in their world. While the play touches on themes such as the Catholic/Protestant conflict in Ireland, Homosexuality, the meaning of life, and the morality of war, it is clear from the start that the real drama is the emotional and spiritual journey of the main characters.

An absolutely first class play. I recommend it heartily, and if you get the chance to see it live, as I did, you should take it.

Stephanie says

Tonight I watched the play, and it was *powerful*. About love and morality, faith and friendship - the things that pull us through the worst of it all, how we are changed by all of it. I've been skimming different sections of the book to relive the strength of the play ever since the play let out - in fact, in the *intermission* I was reading the opening bits, to hear them again in my mind. The actors did a brilliant job in the show, a moving performance all around.

I even went in and *willingly* underlined a couple of passages that I found particularly moving. I don't think I have *ever*, under my own free will and initiative, underlined a book. Not even in the pencil I did it in tonight.

ELDER PYPER: I will not talk, I will not listen to you. Invention gives that slaughter shape. That scale of horror has no shape, as you in your darkness have no shape. Your actions that day were not, they are not acceptable. You have no right to excuse that suffering, parading it for the benefit of others.

ELDER PYPER: Those I belonged to, those I have not forgotten, the irreplaceable ones, they kept their nerve, and they died. I survived. No, survival was not my lot. Darkness, for eternity, is not survival.

(P.S. JULIE!! It was either at the quote of Crawford or of Moore/Millen below which made me think of the Auxiliary Animorphs - yes, specifically of them *in the middle of watching this play*. Hrm, I am inclined to think it was more Moore/Millen where I thought it...)

CRAWFORD: What am I? I'll tell you. I'm a soldier that risks his neck for no cause other than the men he's fighting with. I've seen enough to see through empires and kings and countries. I know the only side worth supporting is your own sweet self. I'll support you because if it comes to the crunch I hope you'll support me. That's all I know. That's all I feel.

MCILWAINE: The whole of Ulster will be lost. We're not making a sacrifice. Jesus, you've seen this war. We are the sacrifice.

MOORE: Who leads you?

MILLEN: Top brass. I do as I'm told. I make no complaints. If they order me to put my hand in the fire, for the sake of what I believe in, I'd do it willingly. You have to do that as well, Moore. That's the only way you'll come back alive.

PYPER: Dance.

Robert O Mahony says

Great concept, iffy execution

Di S says

Read this for a literature course I'm taking. I don't read a lot of drama and it took a while for me to get into the flow of the character interchanges. Very gritty and poignant though and I'm now glad to have read it.

Padraic says

An Irish-Catholic from the South reflects sorrowfully on young Ulster Protestants being offered up to Mars. Read along with Sebastian Barry's [A Long Long Way](#).

Jessica says

A great play highlighting the struggles of the Irish Regiments in WW1 and the horrors of the Somme. McGuinness' writing makes it well worth the read, even if you have very little interest in war literature.

Kristina says

I love drama, I really do, but this piece was one of the most boring plays I've ever read. My opinion might change if I saw it performed on stage...
