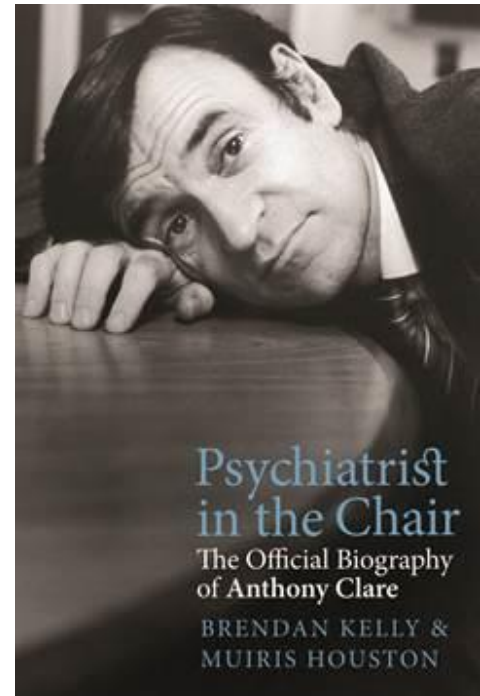


Psychiatrist in the Chair - The Official Biography of Anthony Clare

A book by Brendan Kelly & Muiris Houston

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In its introduction, Kelly and Houston's biography of Anthony Clare is very clear that the book will focus on Clare's professional life, and this is indeed the case. Clare's entire background and life until graduation from medical school in UCD is covered by the first chapter. We are given an account of his childhood in broad strokes only. Questions abound for the reader. What were his family origins before his parents? What was the reasoning behind 'Ward', his second given name? Was he really a ward of court as an infant? What were the exact circumstances of that decision? It struck me that it may have been apocryphal or indeed a family joke around his name 'Clare, A Ward.



I was intrigued with Clare the boy and in particular his apparent attachment to British culture and media. I would have liked more material on this period of his life. The role of the Jesuits in Gonzaga in molding Clare is revealed and I was reminded of James Joyce's remark when the artist Frank Budgen referred to Joyce's religion - "You allude to me as a Catholic. For the sake of precision and to get the correct contour on me, you ought to allude to me as a Jesuit."

This book portrays Clare, the UCD undergraduate, probably correctly, as a bright student with no great attachment to the (dare I write it) oppressive nature of 1960s UCD and Irish society in general. His undergraduate career is not examined in detail.

We learn little about his clinical attachments or experiences and indeed we are not told about his undergraduate psychiatry experience or where it was gained. In the second chapter however, there is an account of an encounter with Norman Moore of St Patrick's Hospital during an RTÉ broadcast which may have been decisive in Clare's choosing psychiatry.

The Observer Mace victory with Patrick Cosgrave in 1964 is given appropriate attention and we are told it may have been when he was happiest. When I attended UCD in the 1980s, that victory was still being talked about in reverential tones in the L&H. Cosgrave, a Finglas man who was in Margaret Thatcher's inner circle at one stage and also the editor of *The Spectator*, was a fascinating figure and I would have liked to know more about the dynamic between them.

This biography really came into its own in the chapters describing Clare's early career in psychiatry and in particular his training at the Maudsley in London. I got an appreciation of the academic atmosphere there in the 1970s and the relationship Clare had with Robin Murray and others. Indeed, Murray's sympathetic descriptions of his friend Clare recur a number of times through the book as do contributions from Ruth Dudley Edwards (who was married to Cosgrave) and James Lucey, Clare's successor as medical director at St Patrick's Hospital in Dublin. Clare, we are told, had a substantial role in advocating for psychiatric trainees while he was in training in London. This interest in the training of psychiatrists continued after his return to Dublin as medical director of St Patrick's Hospital.

The absolute highlight of Clare's professional life (certainly in terms of publication) was the appearance of *Psychiatry in Dissent* in 1976. Clare's wonderful book, its relationship to other important critiques of psychiatry (by Szasz and others) and its impact on a generation of psychiatrists are both well covered and perhaps the publication of this biography may lead to a renewed interest by younger doctors in Clare's most important publication. In Chapter 3 the authors properly summarises that importance as follows:

"Psychiatry in Dissent was in many ways, a perfect distillation of the strengths and character of its author; fluent, thoughtful, witty and provocative. It provided a robust riposte to Goffman, Foucault Szasz and Laing, and it restored the credibility of psychiatry in the eyes of the public and, perhaps most of all, in the eyes of psychiatrists themselves."

Clare's media career, of course, also gets considerable attention with his popular radio show *In the Psychiatrist's Chair* being the zenith of this aspect of his professional life. He had a productive relationship with the BBC and became a household name in the UK and arguably the psychiatrist to a nation. With regard to his broadcasting career, this book could have done with contextualising Clare's career at the BBC with that of his Irish colleagues in British broadcasting. From Eamonn Andrews to Graham Norton the softer Irish accents have done well on the UK airwaves, perhaps better than the UK's own regional accents and it is surely the case that his confident, educated but non-threatening south Dublin accent was an integral part of Clare's success in allowing him to place his subjects at ease during his long-running radio programme.

As usual with publications involving Professor Kelly, the accuracy of the detail is near perfect and it has become a challenge to me and others to find fault with the material presented. However, I do think Peter Sutherland might have been amused at his being described as a 'politician'. I also noticed an important omission from Clare's list of publications, a very early one that exemplified his critical mind and his ability to raise hackles. In 1962, when he was a pre-clinical medical student, Clare wrote an article for Trinity's magazine *TCD Miscellany* about the censorship of student activities in UCD. Considering the vehicle he chose for this piece, it reads rather like a letter from Berlin in the 1930s!

In the end I did get great insight into Clare's extraordinary appetite for work and his consequent tendency to overextend himself. His ability to churn out articles is well described, and the authors have included an exhaustive list of his peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed articles. The index is first class as are the references which are presented in abundance in the form of endnotes. The pivotal nature of his return to Ireland as medical director of St Patrick's is explored but, perhaps ironically, there is limited examination of Clare's own psychological life. The context of his family life permeates the book with reminiscences from his wife Jane and his children but ultimately Houston and Kelly's book remains focused on Anthony Clare's life as a psychiatrist, broadcaster and author and, in this, it is a substantial and successful addition to the written history of British and Irish psychiatry and indeed, British broadcasting.

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