

No Country for Young Men

A publication by Martin Seeds

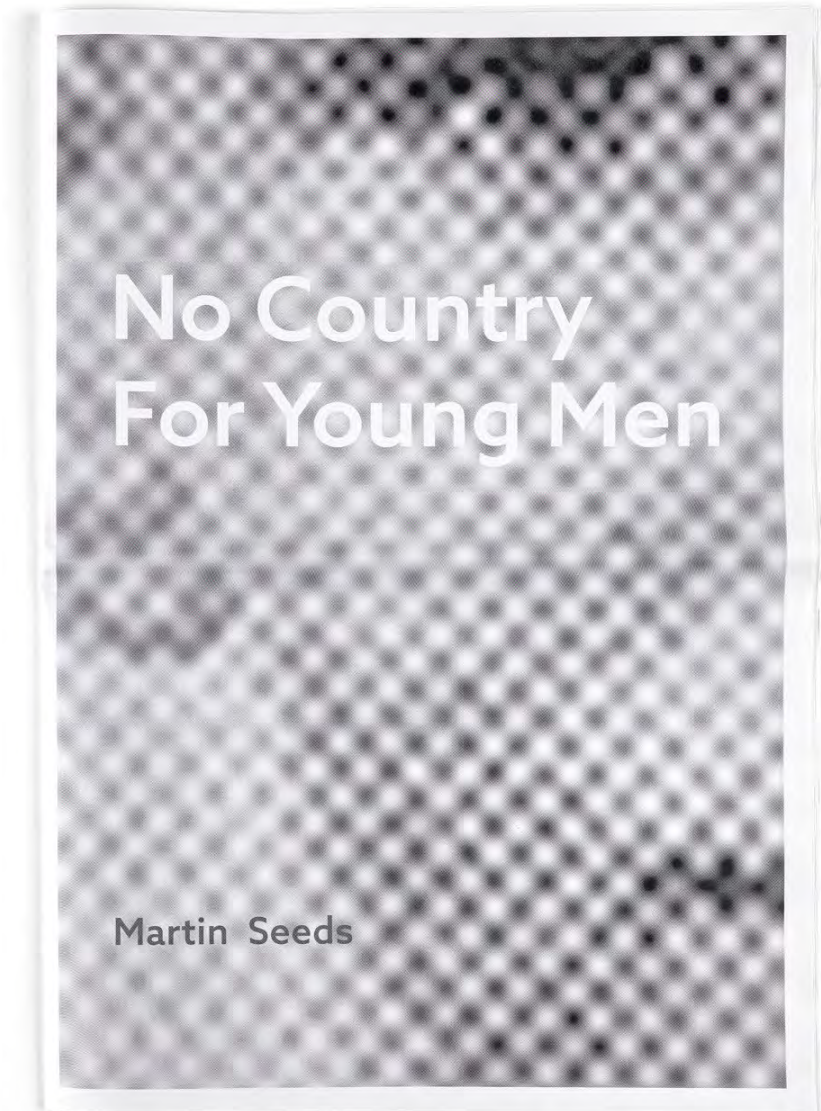
Appropriated from a Belfast School Year book circa 1965-66, these portraits depict youths on the cusp of adulthood during a time of great upheaval in the province of Northern Ireland.

The Civil Rights movement was very active in the 1960s. Protests had taken place about the unfair of voting practices, the allocation of public housing and discriminatory employment practices. There was bigoted resistance to this peaceful campaign for equality. Resistance that fanned the embers of old sectarian narratives and twisted them into a violent response. Halfway through 1966 there were sectarian murders.

No Country for young men has been titled after William Butler Yeats' poem *Sailing to Byzantium*, 1928. Yeats, the poems narrator, laments his leaving of Ireland because he feels out of place there *The young In one another's arms, birds in the trees* and other signs of youth are not the dominion of the old. The poem is layered with many meanings, one which is the destination of Byzantium. Known now as Istanbul, the city has been considered the meeting point of eastern and western cultures, identities and religions. A place historically enriched by an infusion of differences that was, because of that, the centre of European civilisation. In contrast Northern Ireland is a place historically divided by difference. Its political framework, and systems of order and control used difference to isolate and discriminate.

This work has been made in to a 36 page broadsheet newspaper with 13 images and 4 commissioned essays authored by Dr Edwin Coomasaru, Orla Fitzpatrick, Sean O'Hagan, and Fearghus Roulston.

The authors reflect upon the work from very different perspectives - a personal account of Northern Irish school days in the 1960s; the use of child imagery during the Troubles; childhood, time, and gender.



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Invisible boys

Orla Fitzpatrick

"Inserting myself into the remembered cell of a classroom, I realise again that the invisible Boy was a kind of paradox or oxymoron, simultaneously free and unfree, there and not there; his reality depended on the observer."

Caran Carson, *The Stor Factory*, London: Granta Books, 1997, p. 209

From shortly after its inception, photography has been used by prisons, hospitals and schools to record their inmates, patients and students. These institutional images, with their echoes of surveillance, subordination and control, record the group whilst simultaneously rendering the individual invisible. Carson's 'Invisible Boy' references a schoolboy prank, but it could just as well describe how the photographic exchange can be a contradictory one that alienates and disembodies those pictured. Just as schoolboy antics disrupt the authority of the teachers, Martin Seeds has liberated these uniform portraits, making the invisible boys visible again and allowing us, the observers, to examine them anew.

School portraits are a type of vernacular photograph produced in a codified and ritualistic manner whose purpose in many ways overrides any aesthetic considerations. All the boys wear the school's uniform and the black and white, frontal facing, head and shoulders portraits are all taken at the same focal length. Standardised and repetitious their seriality facilitates (like all typologies) comparison: We look for the visual connections and differences between the portraits. What are the variations in expression, hairstyle, pose and poise? Do all the boys stare directly at the photographer? Most do. Do any challenge or disrupt the photographic encounter? Most don't. There is little scope to express individuality within school photographs and the institutional gaze conspires against it.

What, if any, agency did these Belfast schoolboys have whilst being photographed? It is most probable that, within such a school setting, resistance to having one's photo taken was not possible. This is true for children's interactions with the photographic medium as a whole, whether in the family setting or in an institutional one such as school.

From afar, the pages of any school yearbook bear a similarity to a sheet of Bertillon mug shots or the anthropological studies undertaken by adherents of racial pseudo-science. Yearbooks follow a convention. Their layout conveys order and uniformity with each portrait placed on a grid, assigning an equal amount of space to each student. Each boy is photographed individually, and it is through the design of the yearbook and its captioning that they are brought into cohesive groups upon the page.

These utilitarian, quotidian images, originally performed a very particular function for a restricted audience made up of the school community and the students' families. School photographs reflect the hierarchal nature of educational institutions and whilst they give the illusion of assimilation and belonging, they can equally visualise exclusion and segregation. These photographs were part of a process which was intended to produce a collective identity amongst the students. In theory, inclusion in the yearbook connoted belonging and signified that the student was part of a larger organisation or group. However, the English school system under which schools in Northern Ireland functioned was based on a process of streaming and selection. In addition to the religious ethos under which schools operated only academically oriented children (who had succeeded in their 11-plus exam) could attend certain schools.

There is an inherent sadness in school photographs: for the ambitions that were not realised and for the eventual decline of old age. This has an added poignancy when those depicted have lived through turbulent times. Our retrospective knowledge of what was to happen in Northern Ireland colours our interaction with these images. Looking hopefully towards the future, oblivious to the turmoil that their city would face, the portraits mimic the faces of the Troubles' victims reproduced in countless newspapers. The students from 1965, are now in their sixties and seventies and even though many would go on to become doctors, teachers and accountants, all were part of a generation whose adult lives span this violent period.

In her discussion of the social worlds of the photograph and the school photograph in particular, Hirsch states that this genre "illustrates how school and its technologies makes citizens, literally shaping, inscribing, and numbering them. This is the work institutional images perform". This process of citizen making is further complicated within the context of a state such as Northern Ireland where, at the time these portraits were taken, children of minority backgrounds were not treated as equals. We cannot tell merely by looking at these young boys whether or not they will become trapped in the state's reductive vision for them.

School photographs have provided inspiration and source materials for photographers and artists such as Marlene Dumas whose reworking and over painting of conventional class photographs reflects upon authority and power within the educational setting and within apartheid era South Africa. Tomoko Sawada inserts herself into class photographs playing with concepts of identity and our inner world and outer images as projected in school photographs. Marcelo Brodsky annotated and edited a photograph of his 1967 Buenos Aires high school class revealing the fate of his fellow students under the military dictatorship in Argentina. Haunting and tender these notes reveal the banal fates of some and the terrifying loss of others. Likewise, Christian Boltanski's exhibitions and installations isolate and illuminate found photographs of Jewish schoolchildren taken in Vienna in 1931 thus compelling the viewer to contemplate the possible fates of these

children. In these instances, school photographs can become powerful emotive as well as political vehicles combatting forgetting, the erasure of violence, and the exclusion or eradication of some members from the group.¹

The emotional life of the Belfast yearbook photographs has been extended in the digital age when such images are re-circulated online for comment and discussion. This is where the artist, Martin Seeds, first encounters them in an album on Flickr. Here they were the subject for reminiscences and contemplation by former students. In the post-photography age appropriation frees the artist to re-examine and interpret archives and genres that are already in existence. Seeds does not need to handle either the photographer's negatives and prints nor the yearbook in which the images were photo-mechanically reproduced. How important is the original image? Where are they now? Was the unnamed photographer's archive preserved or destroyed? Which is the 'real' image? Notions of authorship and the very nature of the photograph can be explored and interrogated.

What happens when we remove these photographs from their seriality? The artist has re-contextualised these photographs through their enlargement and moved them from the vernacular into a new context. This reveals the essence of the half-tone process showing how the dots and shades come together to represent each face. Their amplification compels the viewer to pay more attention to the individual portrait. The artist has disrupted and reinvented the images. Viewed in isolation, the portraits have been liberated and individuality is restored to the sitters: an individuality that can so often be stolen or quashed by the state, by an educational establishment or by the photographic encounter.

1. Marianne Hirsch, 'Space, Materiality, and the Social World of the Photograph', in *Imagining Everyday Life: Engagements with Vernacular Photography*, edited by Tina M. Camp, Marianne Hirsch, Gil Hochberg, and Brian Willis, (Göttingen: Steidl, 2020), p.281.

2. Marianne Hirsch and Leo Sotner, 'School Photos and their Afterlives', in *Feeling Photography*, edited by Elspeth H. Brown and Thy Phu, (Durham: Duke University Press), pp 257-258.

Invisible boys
Orla Fitzpatrick

Orla Fitzpatrick is a librarian and photo-historian from Dublin.

Childhood, time, and gender

Dr Edwin Coomasaru

Children are deeply bound up with how we conceptualise time. Martin Seeds' series, *No Country for Young Men* (2020), takes photographs from a 1965 Belfast Catholic Boys' School yearbook – blowing them up to huge proportions and printing them on newspaper. What does it mean to look back, at these boys in 1965, and find them staring at us? How did their lives unfold after these portraits were captured, and what are they like now? And what might the work tell us about wider cultural ideas about both youth and masculinity in Northern Ireland? The portraits stare out at the viewer, as though they were gazing across decades: some with hostility, others with curiosity. The pixelated grain distorts the figures, as they teeter on the brink of abstraction or dissolution into formless patterns. To look back, in 2020, is to ask complex questions about what these pictures mean then and now. A school yearbook is both a record of identification, and an elegiac marking of time passing. If the rhymes and repetitions of these images might be suffused with a sense of loss, it is not just the loss of the childhood represented by photos of teenage boys on the cusp of adulthood – it is also because their imaged future, for both their own lives and for Northern Ireland as a whole, was about to radically change.

In 1966 a Loyalist paramilitary group declared war on the IRA and carried out three sectarian murders. Many Catholics, dispossessed by the way the state had been set up and run since partition from Ireland in 1920-21, took to the streets to march for their civil rights from 1967. With escalating paramilitary violence, the 'Troubles' erupted in 1968: a thirty-year civil war between Loyalists, Republicans, and the British state

over whether Northern Ireland should remain in the UK or form a United Ireland. In 1998 the Good Friday Agreement introduced power sharing between all political parties in Northern Ireland: a system of government that is fragile, running uninterrupted from 2007-17 – before collapsing and later resuming in 2020. For many touched by violence and its after-effects, the conflict is not over or resolved: it continues to haunt. Psychoanalysts insist that trauma disrupts how we experience time: rather than linear, the past can repeat and reoccur in the present.¹ Seeds' photo-series is all the more complex for the questions it asks about time. Queer theorists like Lee Edelman have pointed out that metaphors of childhood are often used to conceptualise the future, with talk of generations to come.²

The poster used to advertise the Good Friday Agreement referendum in 1998, for example, depicted a hetero-normative family gazing out over a sunset. Newspapers Belfast Telegraph published ads for the 'Yes' campaign with photos of babies born that year, with captions like 'Hannah Louise Davison was born in Royal Maternity Hospital yesterday ... Give her a future.' But it was not only peace campaigns which used rhetoric about infants as metaphors: paramilitary murals and visual culture (particularly Republican) also created images of new-born life as a symbol of militarism. In one Republican mural on the Falls Road painted in 1988, a mother presents a baby to a male character in a deathly reclining pose of soldierly sacrifice. On the other side of the image, a portrait of the boy – now fully grown – marches off into battle, fists clenched. The conceptual chronology of heterosexual

procreation is narrated through a distribution of gendered labour through the prism of militarism. An ex-IRA member described how the organisation saw women 'being a mum as the most important role to the struggle'.³ One Republican feminist explained the choice presented in such a context: '[e]ither we shoot them or we outbreed them!'⁴

Northern Ireland was a very conservative society – and whatever the differences, there was also profound overlap between ideas of gender and sexuality held by Protestants and Catholics. Ideas of men as soldiers and women as domestic-bound mothers, alongside widespread and intense homophobia, were all bound up in the ways in which militarism shaped society in Northern Ireland. Commonly held understandings of masculinity during the conflict were shaped by earlier rhetoric from the decade leading up to partition. A Republican prisoner during the 'Troubles' described how '[s]tories were told of the 1916 Rising ... My heroes were those men (typical of the sexist nature of my environment then) who had died glorious deaths for the Republic'.⁵ In 1913, Republican paramilitary Patrick Pearse insisted '[w]e must re-create and perpetuate in Ireland the knightly tradition ... the noble tradition ... the Christ-like tradition'.⁶ He argued that 'bloodshed is a cleansing and sanctifying thing, and the nation which regards it as the final horror has lost its manhood'.⁷ Writing a year later, Liam de Roiste – future Sinn Féin politician – demanded the Irish 'grow up and realise the dignity of manhood'.⁸ Loyalist attitudes were similar: Reverend W. Witherow gave a 1913 sermon to the East Belfast Regiment in which he likened Ulster to 'brave, unconquerable Spartans at Thermopylae'.⁹

So, what does it mean to look back at Seeds' 1965 yearbook photos of boys on the cusp of adulthood from the perspective of today? Northern Ireland is deeply haunted by its past – as the fragile and faltering peace process is testament to. But decades of feminist, queer, and anti-war activists have also brought pressure to bear on Northern Irish society. Although many progressive policies have been implemented by the UK Government in Westminster

rather than Stormont's locally devolved power sharing administration, recent changes matter. In 2019, abortion was decriminalised and same-sex marriage legalised. The 'Troubles' themselves had a deep impact on collective understandings of masculinity: experiences of trauma and violence often shattering militaristic ideals of macho stoicism and endurance. In recent years it has been reported that more men commit suicide in Northern Ireland than anywhere else in the UK.¹⁰ In Seeds' *No Country for Young Men*, we peer into the faces of children on the cusp of becoming adults in the midst of what would become a thirty-year civil war. The futures they imagined for themselves in that moment were lost, as were many lives – the cycles of violence unleashed would both feed traditional notions of manhood, and in turn profoundly undermine them.

1 Kelly Noel Smith, *Freud on Time and Timelessness* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p.97-132.
2 Lee Edelman, *No Future* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), p.11.
3 Lorraine Dowler, 'And they think I'm just a nice old lady' women and war in Belfast, Northern Ireland, *Gender Place & Culture* 5:2 (1998), pp.159-176, p.168; Kathryn Conrad, Women troubles, queer troubles: gender, sexuality, and the politics of selfhood in the construction of the Northern Irish State', in Marilyn Coher and Nancy Curtin (eds), *Reclaiming Gender: Transgressive Identities in Modern Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), pp.53-68, p.54.
4 Conrad, p.54.
5 Brendl McClenaghan, 'Letter from a gay republican: H-Block 5', in Ide O'Carroll and Eoin Collins (eds), *Lesbian and Gay Visions of Ireland: Towards a Twenty-First Century* (London: Cassell, 1995), pp.122-130, p.124-125.
6 Stamus O'Blackhall (ed.), *The Literary Writings of Patrick Pearse* (Dublin: The Mercier Press, 1979), p.40.
7 *Ibid.*, p.84.
8 Aidan Beatty, *Masculinity and Power in Irish Nationalism, 1884-1938* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p.36.
9 Jane CJ McGaughey, *Ulster's Men: Protestant Unionist Masculinities and Militarization in the North of Ireland, 1912-1922* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), p.55-56.
10 Claire McNeill, 'Relentless rise in male suicide sparks call for urgent action', *Belfast Telegraph* [Published: 19/12/2018, Accessed: 19/12/2018, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/relentless-rise-in-male-suicide-sparks-call-for-urgent-action-37639077.html>].

Childhood, time, and gender

Dr Edwin Coomasaru

Dr Edwin Coomasaru is an Associate Lecturer at The Courtauld Institute of Art, where he was awarded his AHRC-funded PhD on Northern Irish masculinity and the legacy of the 'Troubles' in visual culture. He also held the 2018-19 Sackler Postdoctoral Fellowship at The Courtauld, and recently contributed to the Barbican's 'Masculinities: Liberation through Photography' (2020) exhibition catalogue.

No country for young men?

Fearghus Roulston

The outward looks of yearbook photos – the faces which are by turn composed, inscrutable, amused, wry, fed-up, jovial, on the brink of laughter – are invitations to augury, albeit a strange kind of augury where we look for futures that have in fact already past. They compel us towards temporal calculations: 1965, 1968, 1998, 2020. They also compel us towards context, towards history and geography: Northern Ireland, Belfast, the Troubles.

Here is one route into that context. The first child killed in the Troubles was Patrick Rooney, a nine-year-old living with his family in Divis Tower, the tallest building in West Belfast's sprawling Divis Flats complex, now demolished apart from the tower itself. He was shot with a bullet from a Browning machine gun, fired at the flats from one of the armoured cars used by the Royal Ulster Constabulary or RUC, during the riots of August 1969. An RUC officer was interviewed about this murder by the Police Ombudsman in 2018 as part of the ongoing legacy enquiries, but not charged.

Between Patrick Rooney's death in 1969 and March 1998, after the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday peace agreement, 1,108 young people between the ages of 12 and 23 were killed in Northern Ireland because of the conflict, accounting for almost 30 per cent of the total number of deaths. Shooting was the most common cause of death, followed by bombs and explosions. Young men were more at risk of being killed than young women; the majority of these deaths took place in urban areas, with 58 per cent of all deaths for those under the age of 18 occurring across five Belfast postcodes. Ten of the 14 people who were murdered on Bloody Sunday in 1972 were under 22.

Particularly for young Catholics in working-class areas, harassment from the police and the army became part

of the fabric of everyday life. Streets were securitised, and the sectarian geography of the province became a mechanism for governance and policing, by state and non-state actors; something as simple as which side of the road you were walking on could be read as a signifier of belonging to one side or another. Young Catholics and young Protestants joined paramilitary organisations as well as taking part in more informal acts of territorial marking, like parading, and in acts of political protest – the Civil Rights movement, while emerging from the experiences of Catholic communities across the province, was given organisational impetus by student activists like Michael Farrell and Bernadette Devlin.

Harassment from the police and later from the British Army was often felt particularly strongly by teenagers, who were more likely to occupy or cross public space in ways that jarred with the state's desire to map and control the landscape. The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, in 1992, stated baldly that "harassment of children under 18 is endemic, is directed against children of both traditions – nationalist and unionist – and is in violation of international agreements and standards". The liminality and transgressions of adolescence could also make teenagers targets for harassment and violence from paramilitary groups within their own areas, through what is euphemistically termed 'community policing' – punishment beatings, kneecappings and other forms of violence were (and are) used to maintain control over young people in urban Northern Ireland.

With this context looming over and around the images then, it is difficult not to see them as redolent with foreclosed possibilities, dissolving like steam above the heads of young people who could not have known what the next 30 years was going to bring.

But the context and history we are compelled towards by the outward look of the photograph obscure as much as they reveal. They over-determine the images and they skew our capacity to examine what else they might contain. The danger is that archetypal images overwhelm the images in front of us and render them invisible – so, as Kate Newby argues in her work on imaginaries of childhood in the conflict, all we can see is the child-as-innocent-victim, or the child-as-threat, or the child-as-possibility. The desire to glean trauma, or violence, or deprivation from photographs of young people in Northern Ireland is on one hand a necessary intervention into a silencing whereby, especially in Britain, these experiences have left little mark on public memory; but on the other hand it is to replace one silence with another, by rendering other elements

of the lived experience of young people in conflict more difficult to listen to.

The trouble with contexts is that they give us too much and too little. It is tempting to collapse these photographs into their context and to respond to that invitation to augury with a strange kind of retrospective, compulsive, anonymised prediction – here is what probably happened, or here is what might have happened, or here is what was happening at the time. This is an understandable urge and, ultimately, not a wholly inaccurate one. Northern Ireland is a small country, and the Troubles had a wide reach. But partially resisting the urge to conjure up past futures opens up another disquieting space from which to view the photographs, in which they oscillate between visibility and invisibility, silence and noise: what's sad is that we don't know.

No country for young men?

Fearghus Roulston

Fearghus Roulston is an oral historian, currently working at the University of Brighton on a interview-based history of migration from Northern Ireland to Britain. His first book, an oral history of the punk scene in Belfast, is coming out on Manchester University Press in 2021.

"Before the darkness fell"

Sean O'Hagan

Although the boys in these found portraits are strangers to me, they also look arresting and unsettlingly familiar. Had I not been told by the artist, Martin Seeds, that his inherited subjects were Christian Brothers' pupils, I am almost certain I would have guessed it. Their faces call out to me across the years. In them, I see my younger self.

These boys are my contemporaries and I share a formative experience with them: a Christian Brothers' grammar school education. Although the CBS secondary school in Armagh never produced a yearbook during the time I was there in the mid-to-late 1960s, the walls of the main corridor were lined with school photographs, which had been taken at regular intervals by a local studio photographer with a panoramic camera. Each group portrait adhered to the same rigorously formal composition: long rows of boys, aged 11 to 16, arranged shoulder-to-shoulder, with the youngest sitting cross-legged at the front. All of them wear a version of the uniform that can be glimpsed in Seeds' inherited individual portraits: stiff blazers, nylon shirts and neatly knotted school ties.

More intriguingly, they have the same look about them, an otherness that is difficult to describe. It is not just the callowness of youth, the makeshift haircuts and pale, Northern Irish faces, but more a sense of willed composure that many of them exude as they stare into the lens. It comes, I think, from a shared sense of being part of a select group. The boys that Seeds has rescued from history for his series, *No Country for Young Men*, have not long passed the 11-plus exam and, having done so, earned their places at secondary school. In the wake of this brutally Darwinian selection process, they will have been separated from many of the friends they made at primary school: those that

failed the 11-plus and have been left behind. They are among the many ghosts that haunt these images.

As Northern Irish Catholics from mainly working class backgrounds, many of these boys will have been told from an early age that a good education was their only hope of 'betterment', to use a word beloved of my mother. Back then, in Catholic Ireland, north and south, the Christian Brothers' ranked second only to the Jesuits in the good education stakes and their reputation for discipline and doctrinal rigidity was only slightly less fearsome. Like all orthodox religious orders, the Christian Brothers viewed education as a kind of moral and spiritual indoctrination. Discipline was enforced by the cane and the leather strap, as well as various forms of humiliation disguised as character building. Fear and anxiety were givens.

Looking at these callow faces brings back to me the vague sense of foreboding that I felt the first time I donned my new grammar school uniform. Some of that unease was absorbed from the older lads I knew, who talked with grim relish of their time there, gleefully recounting the punishments and humiliations they had undergone or witnessed. "Man hands on misery to man," as the poet, Philip Larkin, put it.

Confusingly, though, the same lads often described their school days as the best time of their lives. Decades later, I found myself doing the same and simultaneously wondering why. Selective memory? The rose-tinted aura that inevitably surrounds our youth the further we travel in time from it? Or the nagging possibility that there was indeed something special about being a Christian Brothers' boy? A sense of fellowship, maybe, that was based on endurance, small acts of clandestine defiance, and an abiding sense that, despite everything, we were Christian

Brothers' boys and thus somehow elect, set apart from our contemporaries.

These found portraits, enlarged and indistinct, possess an added resonance. They are appropriated from a Belfast school yearbook from 1965, a year of violent tremors in Northern Ireland that, with hindsight, seem darkly prescient. History hangs over these young boys like a falling shadow. As they stare, unknowing, into the camera lens, trouble awaits them as surely as night follows day.

In just a few years time, the world they grew up in will begin to tilt on its axis. In 1968, the Northern Irish Civil Rights movement will begin to make its presence felt in marches and protests against the sectarian state; and the state will respond with batons, rubber bullets and arrests. In 1969, the British Army will be deployed to Northern Ireland after many nights of sectarian violence provokes an exodus of several thousand Catholics from Nationalist areas of Belfast as whole streets are razed by Loyalist mobs.

For the next three decades, the lives of many of them will be defined, distorted, and in some instances, perhaps curtailed, by the violence that swirls indiscriminately around them. Given their backgrounds, some among them will almost certainly go on to embrace the cause of violent Republicanism. Conversely, a select few may follow in the footsteps of their educators, donning the surplice and the soutane to pursue a religious vocation. I write this with the knowledge that several boys I knew made those life-altering decisions, though many more choose the gun than the cross. Both, it strikes me now, were, in their different ways, escape routes from the turbulent hormonal confusions of adolescence. Both involved

persuasive adults driven by absolute certitude recruiting vulnerable young men to a single transformative ideal. No country for young men, indeed.

In all of this, I am conscious that, for me, the unsettling power of these portraits resides to a great degree in what I bring to them: the memories they inevitably evoke and the feelings they awaken within me. For me, they are intensely personal images despite the fact that I do not know the subjects. What matters is that I recognise them, instinctively.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes famously identified the photographic punctum: the accidental detail within an image that can provoke an intensely personal response from a viewer. For me, these portraits are all punctum: the familiar expressions, the makeshift haircuts, the glimpses of taut shirt collars, knotted school ties and blazer lapels. It is this constellation of incidental, but telling, details that prick and bruise me.

Anyone with a different upbringing to mine, of course, may not find these portraits so poignant, so infused with melancholy and memory. Their poignancy is inextricably linked to a time and a place, a peripatetic moment in Northern Irish history, before the darkness fell. For Barthes, a photographic portrait's essential implied message is a brutally cruel one: "That has been." That sense of time irrevocably past and youth irretrievably gone is certainly palpable in these recovered portraits but, for me, what is even more haunting about them is the hovering question, *What will be?* What will become of these boys, their youth and their fragile aspirations, as the shadow of history falls across their lives? It is not just the past that is hauntingly present in these humble portraits, but the looming, uncertain, tumultuous future.

"Before the darkness fell"

Sean O'Hagan

Sean O'Hagan is the photography critic for the Guardian and a feature writer on arts and culture for the Observer.



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Feargus Roulston is an oral historian, currently working at the University of Brighton on a interview-based history of migration from Northern Ireland to Britain. His first book, an oral history of the punk scene in Belfast, is coming out on Manchester University Press in 2021.

Martin Seeds is an artist from Northern Ireland. In 2019 he was nominated for the 2020 Deutsche Börse Photography Prize for his solo exhibition *Violence Religion Injustice Death* at Seen Fifteen Gallery, London. In 2018 he was awarded the Danny Wilson Memorial Award Professionals Choice for the best solo exhibition at Brighton Photo Fringe. In 2017 he received a Magnum Graduate Award for his body of work titled *Assembly*.

Thank you

Joan Alexander
Thorn Bridge
Rich Cutler
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www.martinseeds.com
[@martinseeds](https://www.instagram.com/martinseeds)

For Martha