



Paperback review of 'The Captain with the Whiskers'

Title	Paperback review of 'The Captain with the Whiskers'
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The Captain with the Whiskers

Benedict Kiely

Methuen £7.99

Thanks to a number of reprints, the issuing of the impressive *Collected Stories*, and, more recently, a fitting RTÉ documentary, Ben Kiely has lately been attracting new attention from newer and older readers alike. Comparing his initial experience of this novel in 1960 to reading it this time round, Tom Kilroy, in his reflective afterword, neatly emphasises the powerful tension in Kiely's fiction between a lilting form that is rooted in the oral tradition and a "harder, more sharp-edged" content. The jaunty title refers to Captain Conway Chesney whose tyrannical hold over his family is described by Owen Rodgers, the "normal son of a normal man" who, in a mix of private fantasticality and realist attention to local background, tells the tale of his own growth and his relationships with the Captain's two afflicted daughters. Famously compared by Heinrich Böll to Balzac, it is yet again clear from this reprint that Kiely writes like nobody else; his talent for Irish idylls aside, a quietly singular anarchical spirit is reflected in this brand of playful articulacy.

John Kenny