TIM STARR: AN IRISH ZELIG

TIM STARR seems first to have made his appearance in Dublin sometime around 1956. His origins may have been a small brewery in east Cork, which foundered due to lack of quality control. Muttering about something called ‘The Plough’, he was a founder member of the Cromwell Club, who flitted among the roofs and belfries of an ancient foundation near Dame Street. Around 1958, when legendary Rugby referee J. “Our ball” West came to Trinity, Tim Starr seems to have gone underground, replaced by his half brother Trevor. Trevor West is known to have commandeered his legendary Bunch of Keys, and usurped his private pathways between the chimneys: many years later, under the pseudonym of Wood, Tim Starr apparently made a disastrous attempt to regain possession of them. In another manifestation, known as ‘Clogher’, Starr may have been responsible for the early morning disappearance of many hundreds of milk bottles; some of these were recycled in paper bags, rained down on upper crust Englishmen trying to pass through the ‘Dardanelles’. He is known to have haunted the Engineering Lecture theatres, and may have been responsible for the early demise of one of the more fragile Faculty.
Tim Starr reappears from time to time under a number of aliases: the initials K, M and S recur. In Cambridge in England, in the early sixties, a mysterious ‘Timothy Murphy’ was perporting to give tutorials, while brewing a private language of runic symbols, and perfecting the famous ‘Starr-tex’ typesetting system: to this day West refuses to lay hands on a computer. There was also the ghostly figure of Olangunju, who went back to the Dark Continent: he may have reappeared with the unlikely sobriquet of ‘Sharkey’. In fact West seems to have written a number of papers with Starr, several under the pseudonym of ‘Murphy’, and one with the rather obvious ‘Smyth’, who gives an address from deep in the heart of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Another alias is the inscrutable ‘Stampfli’. Was Tim Starr the mysterious ‘fifth beatle’, whose distinctive touch so enlivens the pages of the Pitman monograph on Riesz and Fredholm theory? He may be credited with the foundations of ‘K-theory’, ‘K-K theory’ and a shadowy ‘group’ known in Wyoming as ‘K-K-K’: under an even more unlikely alias ‘Kaashoek’ he wrote an economic tract with West which led directly to the devaluation of the Mexican peso. Starr seems to have had several criminal records: he cut his teeth with the notorious Larry Kelley gang in Dublin in the early fifties, and may have been known
as ‘the Colonel’ in the West coast mafia of the late six-
ties. In Wyoming he was known as The Count, and on the streets of Belfast simply as ‘Gusty’.

When West returned to Dublin Starr was there, under the guise of a Poet, to help him wreak havoc with the social lives of the undergraduates. Armed with the legendary Bunch of Keys, repossessed from the malodorous Wood, and versed in the mysterious rooftop pathways, empty milk bottles and full paper bags fell like hailstones on the more aristocratic accents. This phase of their collaboration seems to have ended in a quarrel over an American actress, who made accusations of an unspecified nature against Zelig and her children: to this day however Starr continues to give one lecture a year to the Engineers on the arcane subject of ‘my verses’.

The rumours of West’s impending marriage seem to have unsettled Starr: after a brief and disastrous foray into the Mexican economy he appears to have gone back to a Life of Crime, being called in Dublin after that arcane Mexican chocolate used to accompany Chicken, or indeed Penguin. In a disturbing sequel he has reappeared again in the United States, with an unhealthy interest in womens’ clothing.
PUBLICATIONS OF T. STARR


