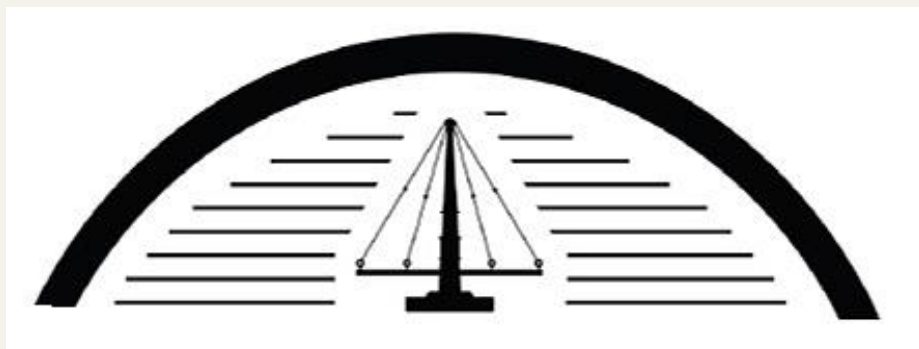


The Bystander

First published by Macdonald, 1957.

Randolph Stow (1957) in his novel *The Bystander*, tells the fortunes of the descendants of the characters from *A Haunted Land*, 45 years on. The Land is still haunted, the farms are crumbling, the characters barren. An interesting quirk of this novel is that any one of the characters could be the “bystander” of the title. As is typical in Stow’s writing, everything goes spectacularly wrong. One of the main characters is mentally disabled, which is also a theme of recurrent interest for Stow.



THE BYSTANDER

The story in *The Bystander* is less diffuse and episodic than in *A Haunted Land*. Focused on the triangular relationship between Patrick, Keithy and Diana Ravirs, it is better articulated and more surely handled. The characters are more complex and more responsible for their actions, and there is less dependence on psychological determinism and arbitrary fate. As a result *The Bystander* is more dramatic, more suspenseful and more emotionally compelling than its predecessor. While it is a bleak and bitter book, in some ways more pessimistic than *A Haunted Land*, it also has relaxed and humorous moments which qualify and humanise the starkness of its vision.

From the book: *Strange Country (A Study of Randolph Stow)* by Anthony J Hassall

Stow himself has dismissed his early works, (*The Haunted Land*, *The Bystander*), no longer wanting to be associated with them. I can see why. While the prose is clear, fluid and more than competent, it does not glitter like graphite, as does in his later works. They are also more conventionally and hazily structured. I'm glad I've read it, and it's interesting to see the same characters and themes reoccurring.

www.thelittlebookroom.wordpress.com/2007/05/05/the-bystander/

