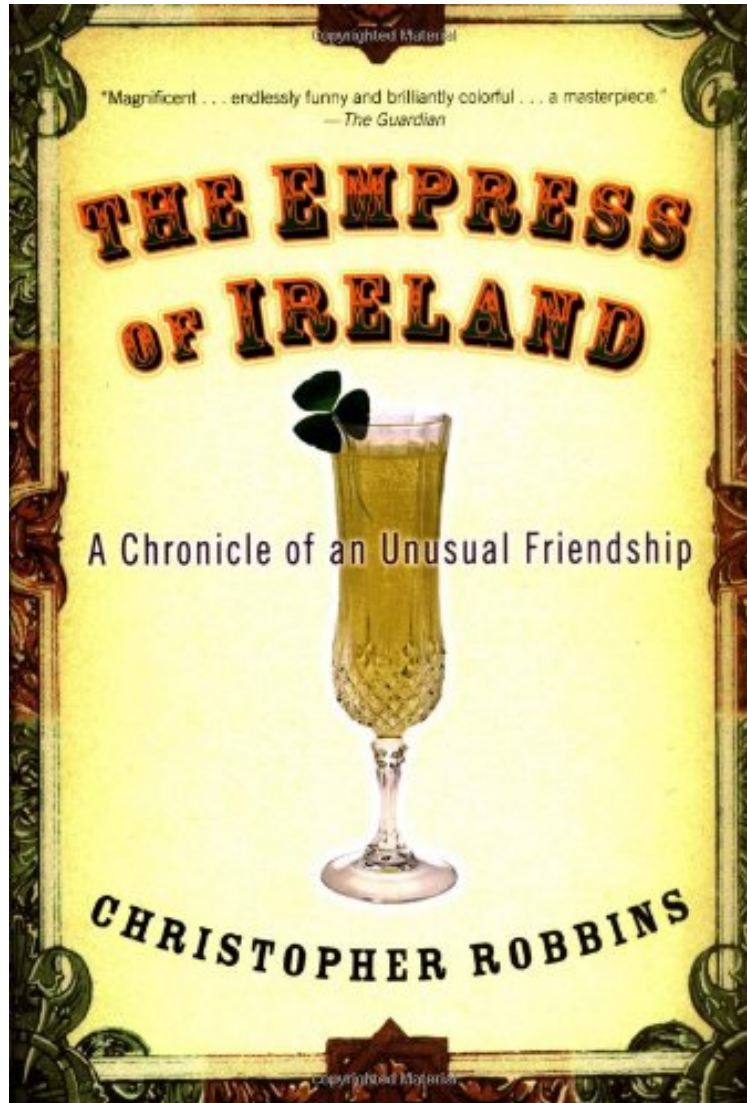


(Mobile pdf) The Empress of Ireland: A Chronicle of an Unusual Friendship

The Empress of Ireland: A Chronicle of an Unusual Friendship

Christopher Robbins

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#2541138 in Books DA CAPO PRESS 2005-04-27Ingredients: Example IngredientsOriginal language:EnglishPDF # 1 1.02 x 5.52 x 8.30l, .93 #File Name: 1560257091400 pages | File size: 47.Mb

Christopher Robbins : The Empress of Ireland: A Chronicle of an Unusual Friendship before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Empress of Ireland: A Chronicle of an Unusual Friendship:

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. An inspired and inspiring memoir.By I. SondelBrian Desmond Hurst was a soldier (a veteran of the Gallipoli campaign), a film director (his best remembered effort being the Alistair Sim version of "A Christmas Carol"), and, in the end, equal parts dreamer, grifter and raconteur.We meet up with Hurst well into his twilight years. Journalist Christopher Robbins is sent to meet the openly gay (and still quite frisky) Hurst,

who is searching for a fresh young talent to pen a screenplay about the events leading up to the birth of Christ. A chance encounter of the luckiest sort. Together they travel to Morocco, Ireland and Malta. The friendship that develops, and is so lovingly documented in these pages, is obviously life changing for Robbins. Hurst understood well the business of living in the moment; and though he may have been a bit of a schemer, he opened up a new world of discovery, adventure and infinite possibilities for Robbins. The years pass, the script gets written and bandied about, but the film is never produced (neither is Hurst's promised autobiography). What remained were the author's copious notes detailing, not only their shared adventures, but many of Hurst's ribald and hilarious stories reported seemingly verbatim. The man was the Irish Scheherazade. Along the way we are introduced to a rogues' gallery of eccentric characters, some royal, some famous, some criminal, some perverted, but all colorful and brilliantly remembered. This volume is often laugh out loud funny. However, Hurst's memories of growing up poor in Ireland, of his family struggles, and the absolute horror of his war experiences, are told with a poignant and shattering clarity. This has proven to be one of those rare books for me. I never wanted it to end. There aren't enough superlatives in the dictionary to adequately describe this uniquely rendered memoir. Once read, I defy anyone to forget Brian Desmond Hurst or "The Empress of Ireland."

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars
By Dave I loved this book. What a great story.
5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A Boswell and Johnson Well Matched
By Kevin Killian I love it. Until I opened the book the name of Brian Desmond Hurst would have rung only the dimmest of bells, but apparently he was a figure of renown in the British film world of the 1940s and 1950s, and had a hand in dozens of films, most of them unreleased this side of the Atlantic, and you get the picture he was no Carol Reed over there. (He did discover Roger Moore.) But he was the funniest raconteur you'll ever read about, and we are lucky that young Christopher Robbins was right there catching all the quips and the bonhomie, and that he wasn't too shocked by the older man's rapacious homosexuality to write it all down for posterity. I haven't laughed out loud reading a book all year, and this one had me doubled over, nearly in pain. On every page you'll find something to cherish, and something to remember. Some parts have the glory of utter bad taste. Teasing Michael Redgrave about his penchant for bondage (of a particularly painful sort), Desmond Hurst explains to Christopher, "There are a few in jokes about Sir Michael in our circle. 'Sir Michael Redgrave, I'll be bound!' and 'Sir Michael is unable to come to the phone now, he's all tied up.' Do you understand?" Christopher though straight-identified shares his patron's love of gossip and scandal. Besides naming names, Robbins also plays discreet and shrouds some of his best stories as blind items. He doesn't reveal the identity of the popular star with a drug problem that made him impossible to work with, but he gives you lots of clues. The name "Richard Dreyfuss" springs to mind. Beyond the fun and the frivolity, there's a lot of heart in the book. Hurst's memories went way back, to childhood in Belfast, the city where much of the Titanic was built. "Brian's father proudly took him to see the great ship launched. 'When the news came back of the ship's sinking, a tidal wave of grief struck Belfast. There was not a street in either North or South Belfast that didn't have a house in it with the blinds down, because there were some four hundred technicians from the town on that maiden voyage.'" And just a little while later, World War I was launched, and Brian was sent to Gallipoli, the most heartbreaking of all WWI battles. His clear-eyed and incredibly detailed memories form the best account I've ever read of that awful siege. Late in the book is a sort of defense of Hurst's films; Robbins makes a case for the best of the war films, but the truth is, he is an unlikely figure to be re-examined. *THEIRS IS THE GLORY* sounds like a truly odd movie: it's the story of the Battle of Arnhem (later immortalized as *A BRIDGE TOO FAR*) made shortly after World War II as a "docu-drama," in which every actor you see on the screen, and every technician you don't see behind the screen, had to have fought at Arnhem. Could it really be good? I guess it's possible. History has a way of finding the good inside the bad, and happily Christopher Robbins shares that propensity.

Christopher Robbins was a down-at-the-heels freelance journalist in London when a "friend" an expat American drug dealer who masqueraded as a count linked him up with an elderly gay Irishman, purportedly the "greatest Irish filmmaker ever" which turned out to be the case. Brian Desmond Hurst had made some thirty films in his eighty years (including *A Christmas Carol*, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, *Dangerous Moonlight*, *Simba*, and *Playboy of the Western World*), and was on close terms with people such as John Ford, Laurence Olivier, Noel Coward, Sean O'Casey, Vanessa Redgrave, and a slew of other notables. Hurst immediately hired the young journalist to write the screenplay for his final work, a biblical epic about the birth of Christ, dubbed "The Box Office Blockbuster" and subsequently his autobiography "The Big Bestseller." No reader can fail to become spellbound and laugh-out-loud by the wit, warmth of heart, sense of mischief, Celtic charm, and vast appetite for life present in *The Empress of Ireland*.

From Publishers Weekly
Brian Desmond Hurst (1900-1986) hadn't made a movie in nearly a decade when Robbins met him in the early '70s, but the director was able to persuade the struggling young journalist to write an epic screenplay about the birth of Christ. The film was destined to remain in perpetual development and confound Robbins's expectations at every turn (a brief encounter with Sir Michael Redgrave, for example, turned out not to be about casting the role of Herod, but about soliciting Robbins's help in discreetly paying off a male prostitute blackmailing the famous actor). By this point, it becomes readily apparent to readers that the real story here is about the unlikely

bond Robbins developed with Hurst, an old-school queen who barreled through life with an engaging combination of flamboyance and guardedness. Anecdotes haphazardly follow one another, held together by the force of Hurst's personality (and Robbins's willingness to mock his own youthful sexual insecurity). For the most part, it's all one extended lark, although Hurst pulls back the curtain of self-invention in moving interludes to reveal the truth about his Irish childhood and the brutal suffering on the battlefields of Gallipoli. Though this title may primarily be of interest to gay readers, anyone who loved *Withnail & I* will be entertained by Robbins's comic misadventures. (May) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From *Booklist* Producer-director Bruce Desmond Hurst was once famous for such film classics as the Alistair Sim Christmas Carol. When Robbins met him, there was more bunk than spunk in the man John Ford had called "his cousin." Hurst contracted Robbins for the screenplay of a biblical film about events preceding the Nativity. Robbins' heartfelt memoir recounts the wild, unmoored life he and Hurst lived as they toiled--throwing parties in London, traveling to Morocco for the boys, drinking copious amounts of champagne, and feting one potential backer after another. The project was never made, and its real purpose, Robbins concluded, was to give Hurst, who hadn't made a film in years, reason for living. Meanwhile, the process helped transform Robbins from a neophyte freelancer, barely getting by, into a seasoned veteran who knew how to use his gifts to make a good living. His warm, hilarious, immensely readable report on the experience, with the charming, manipulative, witty, annoying, hilarious, sexually free, utterly amoral, luxury-loving, unabashed-humbug Hurst in the spotlight, is hard to put down. Jack Helbig Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved "His warm, hilarious, immensely readable report... is hard to put down."