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In the Shadow of the Ombú Tree

Hugh Fitzgerald Ryan

Chaos Press, €11.95x

This is a story about calf love, adult love, disillusionment and contentment. It is a tale of innocence, blind bravery, but above all else, about the dignity of man, or, in this instance, a woman. The woman in question is Catherine Doyle of Wexford who, in 1864 and when still at school, takes a shine to young John Cardiff and runs away with him to Uruguay. Thereafter they manage as best they can in a hostile environment. How they cope with this challenge is the essence of this fascinating story. Six children later they return home to Ireland to much changed circumstances. This is a tender tale, told in beautiful, unforced prose which vividly evokes the dirt, hardship and beauty of Uruguay. There is also occasional gentle humour. The author in reality is writing about his great-grandparents; the result is a beautiful work of fiction from a vivid imagination.

Owen Dawson