**This is the Country**  
William Wall  
Sceptre £7.99

As in *The Map of Tenderness* (2002), Wall again moves stealthily through the sometimes foreign country that is contemporary Ireland, using the theme of the domestic unit as his dark guiding star. With an inventively variant pace worthy of *Jazz*, the young narrator’s girlfriend, we are taken into a countryside whose potential as a peaceful antithesis to the chaos of a childhood and youth on a Corporation estate is threatened by the violence, sadness and vagrancy that here seem unavoidable legacies for the drugged-out and disenfranchised. Without ever approaching the easy mood of an idyll, the narrator’s ultimately tragic story is brilliant on the ways in which the contentment of gainful work and the warm normalcy of his domestic unit with Jazz and child are held up as talismans against the harm threatened by society in general and certain thugs in particular. Wall successfully broaches perhaps the greatest challenge in a socially conscientious first-person novel: writing articulately about those who may be inarticulate.

**John Kenny**