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READING IRELAND

THE LITTLE MAGAZINE

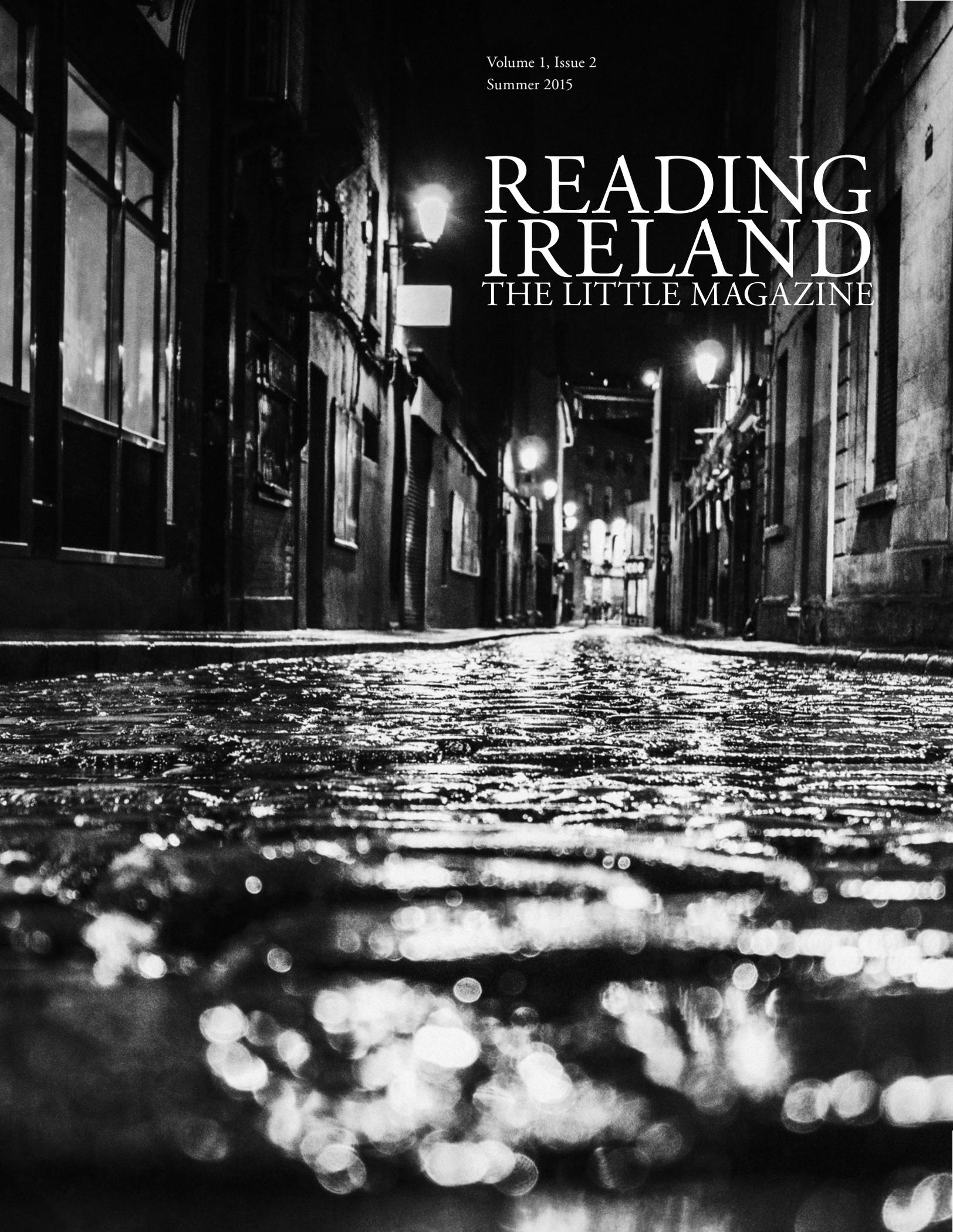


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Subscribe

Every quarter, Reading Ireland will publish an E-Journal, Reading Ireland: The Little Magazine, which will be available to subscribers for an annual fee of \$40. The magazine will be published in Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. The aim of this publication is to provide in-depth analysis of Irish literature, past and present, through a series of essays and articles written by myself and other Irish and American writers and academics, along with opening a window onto the best of contemporary Irish poetry, prose and drama. To honor the tradition of Irish Literary Magazines, each issue will also focus on a specific “Little Magazine” from the first half of the twentieth-century.

Volume 1, issue 1 which appeared in Spring 2015 is available to download at no cost under the ‘subscribe’ tab on our website, www.readingireland.net, so that you as the reader can decide if this is a publication you would like to receive on a quarterly basis.

Contributors

Editor: Adrienne Leavy

Design: Eric Montgomery giantboy.com

Introduction



Photo: Brad Reed

Welcome to the second issue of *Reading Ireland: The Little Magazine*. In this issue, our focus is on contemporary fiction, with a special emphasis on Irish crime or mystery fiction, a genre that is as popular in Ireland as it is in the United States. Best selling crime authors John Connolly and Declan Burke recently posed the following rhetorical question, “Why does the mystery novel enjoy such enduring appeal?” Their response: there is no simple answer, because in their view, the crime novel offers readers a multitude of pleasures: “It has a distinctive capacity for subtle social commentary; a concern with the disparity between law and justice; and a passion for order, however compromised.” They argue that even in the vision of the darkest crime writers, the mystery novel “provides us with a glimpse of the world as it might be, a world in which good men and women do not stand idly by and allow the worst aspects of human nature to triumph without opposition.” As they so rightly conclude, the crime novel “can touch upon all these aspects of itself while still entertaining the reader – and its provision for entertainment is not the least of its many qualities.”

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We begin with an essay on the highly successful noir fiction of Benjamin Black, the pseudonym of the critically acclaimed Irish novelist John Banville. Through his Black persona, Banville has written eight noir novels (with one more scheduled for publication later this year), most of which are set in the city of Dublin in the 1950’s. In his most recent work as Benjamin Black, *The Black-Eyed Blonde* (2014), Banville continued to expand his range in this genre by channeling the spirit of Raymond Chandler and writing a new mystery novel featuring Chandler’s beloved protagonist, Philip Marlowe.

Following this essay is an article by Louise Phillips on the rise of Irish crime fiction. Phillip’s debut novel, *Red Ribbons* (2012), was shortlisted for the Best Irish Crime Novel of the Year award in 2012. Her second novel, *The Doll’s House* (2013), won the award in 2013, and she was nominated again for her third novel, *Last Kiss* (2014). Phillips identifies several reasons why the genre is enjoying such a surge of popularity (and good

writing), in present day Ireland, and we are delighted to have one of the foremost practitioners of psychological thrillers represented in Reading Ireland.

Mystery continues to dominate with an essay by Des Kenny of the renowned Kenny's Bookshop in Galway, on Irish crime writer Ken Bruen, whom Kenny characterizes as "the Godfather of the modern Irish crime novel." Bruen is perhaps most famous for his Jack Taylor series of books, seven of which have been adapted as films. Kennys was founded in 1940 by Des and Maureen Kenny, and continues to be a family run business which this year was nominated for the Bookseller Industry Awards.

We then feature an up-to-date listing of the Irish Crime Fiction that will be published in 2015, compiled by the award winning journalist and mystery author, Declan Burke. Burke's blog, *Crime Always Pays*, is a must read for crime writing aficionados, and you will find a link to the site within. For those of you venturing down the mean streets of Irish noir for the first time, you may want to check out two anthologies that provide a sense of the dynamic state of Irish crime fiction:

Dublin Noir. Ken Bruen, editor. Akashic Books, 2006.

Belfast Noir. Adrian McKinty and Stuart Neville, editors. Akashic Books, 2014.

We next spotlight several new and recent titles by Irish crime fiction writers that you may wish to check out. There then follows a detailed review of the work of a very talented young Irish writer, Colin Barrett. It is my great pleasure to write a review of *Young Skins*, the first collection of short stories by Colin which garnered several prestigious literary prizes including the 2014 Frank O' Connor International Short Story Award, the 2014 Rooney Prize for Irish Literature and the 2014 Guardian first book award. While Colin does not write crime fiction, his sensibility would not be out of place in a crime novel, and certainly many of his perfectly realized characters are as criminally minded as their limited intellect allows.

For our focus on Little Magazines we look at *Envoy*, a monthly arts magazine edited by John Ryan that was published in Dublin from 1949-1951. It seems appropriate to bookend this issue of *Reading Ireland* with a little magazine that was published in the same time period as Benjamin Black's protagonist, Dr. Quirke, was prowling around the backstreets of "dear dirty Dublin."

1950's Noir from a 21st Century Master:

The crime novels of Benjamin Black

By Adrienne Leavy

Who is Benjamin Black?

Benjamin Black is the pen name for the critically acclaimed Irish novelist, John Banville, who has been writing crime fiction under this nom de plume for almost ten years. Born in Wexford 1945, Banville published his first book, the short story collection *Long Lankin*, at the age of twenty five, and since then he has published a novel every three years or so. His novels have won numerous awards including the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for *Doctor Copernicus* (1976), The Guardian Fiction Prize for *Kepler* (1981), and The Guinness Peat Aviation Award for *The Book of Evidence* (1989). *The Book of Evidence* was also shortlisted for the Booker Prize, an award Banville won in 2005 for his novel of childhood and memory *The Sea*. In 2013 he was awarded the Irish Pen Award and the Austrian State Prize for European Literature. Banville's fiction reflects his interest in art, philosophy and history, often weaving these themes into stories told in a highly subjective, sensuous and dreamlike style. His lyrical prose is characterized by sharp dark humor and a deep sense of irony, characteristics he uses to great effect in his genre novels. He is considered by critics to be a master stylist of the English language and a serious contender for the Nobel Prize in Literature.



Beginning with *Christine Falls* (2006), Banville has published eight crime fiction novels under the name Benjamin Black, with a new novel, *Even the Dead*, scheduled for publication later this year. In contrast to many writers who adopt a pseudonym when they want to dabble in a different writing style or genre, Banville has not made any effort to keep his true identity a secret. As time has passed the author now regards the crime writer as a separate persona, to the extent that on the website devoted to Benjamin Black (listed below), Banville conducts an interview with his alter ego.

With the exception of his third mystery, *The Lemur* (2008), and his most recent book, *The Black Eyed-Blonde* (2014), these detective novels are set in 1950's Dublin, where the incessant rain, fog, diesel fumes, cigarette smoke and general seediness and poverty all contribute to the melancholy noir atmosphere. Whereas a Banville novel can take several years to research and write, the author has admitted that his alter ego can complete a crime fiction novel with remarkable speed. In a Banville novel, language takes precedence over plot and characterization, but in a Benjamin Black book, the story and the characters are the main focus. The genre also allows the author to consciously employ a very small or limited vocabulary and a very direct method of storytelling, in contrast to the more ornate prose of his more serious literary works. Yet what makes the Benjamin Black novels so distinctive is the fact that Banville's trademark lyrical prose and atmospheric features are so successfully grafted onto the genre of crime fiction. Thus, each Black novel is not just characterized by a cleverly

constructed and well paced plot, but is also beautifully written and psychologically intricate in Banville's trademark style. Aside from the obvious fun that Banville has through letting his imagination wander off in a totally different literary direction, the author recognizes that the mystery genre allows for a similar kind of philosophical speculation and musings found in his more serious work. He describes his approach to the genre thus: "Crime fiction is a good way of addressing the question of evil. Why people do dreadful things to each other. The kind of crime fiction that I try to write doesn't tie up all the knots, isn't interested in a nicely rounded story. I'm perfectly happy to have some mystery as to people's motivations because that's how it is in life."

The Dublin Novels.

Banville's crime plots tend to all be variations on the theme of moral and political corruption, and these stories skillfully expose the oppressive political, religious and cultural environment of mid-twentieth century Ireland. In his chapter in *Ireland in the 1950s: The Lost Decade*, Banville describes the stagnation of Irish life in this period, which he attributes to "a failure of will among liberal intellectuals." The author characterizes the newly formed Republic, which rose from the ashes of the Irish Civil War, and was presided over by Eamon deValera, as a uniquely isolated country in Western Europe:

The republic which he (de Valera) founded, with the aid and encouragement of (Archbishop) John Charles McQuaid, was unique: a demilitarized totalitarian state in which the lives of the citizens were to be controlled not by a system of coercive force and secret policing, but by a kind of applied spiritual paralysis maintained by an unofficial federation between the Catholic clergy, the judiciary and the civil service. Essential to this enterprise in social engineering was the policy of intellectual isolationism which deValera imposed on the country (26).

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Other Irish writers who lived through this time period concur with Banville's assessment. Anthony Cronin writes that in the 1950s, Dublin "still presented the same aspect of past elegance and present decline that it had in 1904," and he compares the general atmosphere to the atmosphere James Joyce identified in his short story collection, *Dubliners*, – that of *paralysis*.

While not quite reaching the levels of realism that Joyce perfected in *Dubliners*, Banville still succeeds in capturing the mood and the ambience that characterized Dublin in the 1950s. Behind the middle-class shops on Grafton Street, such as Brown Thomas and Switzers, and the old world charm of The Shelbourne Hotel on St. Stephens Green, lay a network of tenement streets and seedy bars, with harsh Catholic schools controlled by the all powerful clergy. This is the environment in which the characters in the Black novels exist. The bleakness of the time period is evoked through gritty aesthetics, and detailed descriptions of the city's physical fabric. The effect for the reader is somewhat akin to watching old black and white news reel footage. Verisimilitude abounds in the small details: the cigarette brands in a period when nearly every adult seemed to smoke incessantly: *Senior Service*, *Players*, *Woodbine*, *Passing Clouds*, and *Gold Leaf*. Horses were still a regular feature on the city streets, especially the Guinness drays delivering barrels of stout to the multitude of pubs that provided one of the few alternatives to work, home and church. Real life literary characters on the Dublin scene at the time are mentioned in passing in several novels: the playwright

Brendan Behan and the poet Patrick Kavanagh, along with Gate Theatre producers, Hilton Edwards and Michael McLiammoir. The characters in the novels meet and drink in various bars and hotels, many of which are still in existence, including The Hibernian Hotel and The Gresham Hotel. The novels skillfully replicate the atmosphere described by David Pearse in *Light, Freedom and Song: A Cultural History of Modern Irish Writing*: “Drinking became a feature of cultural life in Dublin, for this was the era of the literary pub when larger-than-life writers (and newspaper editors) held court. If the age demanded anything it was to imbibe with Brendan Behan in McDaid’s, Kavanagh at the Bailey, or Bertie Smylie, the editor of *The Irish Times*, at the Palace and Pearl bars.” In addition to knocking back copious amounts of Jameson, Quirke and Detective Inspector Hackett, the policeman who accompanies him on his forays into the Dublin underworld, spend a lot of time stirring tepid tea and smoking over plates of buttered bread in Bewley’s Café on Grafton Street.

Quirke.

The protagonist in these novels is a charismatic but troubled state pathologist, Dr. Quirke, a hard drinking, solitary chain smoking doctor, more at home in the morgue than in the land of the living. Quirke, a widower, works for the Holy Family Hospital in Dublin, and embodies a variation of the crime fiction regular –an honest guy who comes in conflict with the corruption of his superiors. He is described as being “in the foothills of his forties,” a decade younger than the century. Quirke’s early years were spent in a State run orphanage, the Carricklea Industrial School run by the Christian Brothers and located in the West of Ireland. Quirke’s fatalistic assumptions about human psychology serve to underscore the noir atmosphere of these novels. Intolerant yet highly instinctive, Quirke is the ambivalent moral centre around which each of the Dublin based Black mysteries swirl. Banville describes him thus:

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Quirke has a very troubled background. He is an orphan who spent his childhood in what was called an industrial school, which is a very Dickensian place, very violent, lots of abuse of all kinds, so his childhood was extremely troubled. He doesn’t know who he is or where he came from, and I suspect that Quirke’s curiosity, his driven curiosity about other people, is tied up with his own lack of a past and his own curiosity about himself.

Quirke’s tragedy is his inability to put his unhappy past behind him: “If only he could forget Carricklea his life, he was sure, would be different, would be lighter, freer, happier. But Carricklea would not let him forget, not ever.” Inquisitive by nature, Quirke’s detached manner belies his commitment to the truth. It is this urge to uncover the dark secrets and the real cause of death of the bodies brought into his morgue that leads Quirke to follow his instincts despite his often well grounded reservations.

Yet Quirke is not just the sum of his misery. He is also handsome, sophisticated, independent, and in each of the novels, seemingly irresistible to women, with the exception of his lost love Sara, who married his adoptive brother-in-law. After Sara’s death Quirke tries to rebuild his relationship with his adult daughter, and in the process meets an actress, Isabel Galloway, with whom he has an on-again, off-again relationship over the course of several books. Wary of any long term commitment, he wanders into one night stands with several women he encounters during his investigations. Quirke is a product of his generation and

its reactionary times, and his relationships with women often mirror the conservative sexual politics of the period. Although the women he is attracted to do not conform to a stereotypical domestic ideal, the general female population is assessed by Quirke in terms of their attractiveness, their age and their availability.

Whereas the circumstances of Banville's life are often irrelevant to his literary fiction, the author has stated that he draws on his memories of being a child when creating the environment in which Quirke lives. As he explained in an interview: "Quirke lives in an apartment in Dublin which I inherited from my aunt and he moves around in that area where I was when I first moved to Dublin."

The Catholic Church.

Religion is not an important theme in Banville's literary fiction; however, the author makes it a predominant characteristic of his crime fiction work. In the 1950's the influence of the Catholic Church in Irish society and on the lives of ordinary Irish people was pervasive at every level, and Banville uses the mystery genre to address the unhealthy blurring of lines between Church and State. In several novels the abuse of children in state care and in the religious orphanages is a grim sub-text. Other aspects of the Church's dominance over Irish society are also subtly weaved into the plots. For example, in the first book, *Christine Falls* (2006), the babies of unmarried women in Ireland are spirited away to a Catholic order in Boston, who foster the children out until they are deemed old enough to enter the priesthood or a convent. This scheme is unearthed by Quirke, when he begins looking into the history of a young woman whose body ends up in the morgue where he works. The novel opens with Quirke returning to the morgue after a party only to find his brother-in-law, Dr. Malachy Griffin, tampering with the records on the young woman's corpse. In addition to introducing Mal Griffin, Quirke's charming but ineffectual adoptive brother, *Christine Falls* also introduces several other characters who also appear in the later novels: Sarah Griffin, Mal's wife and Quirke's true love. Instead of marrying Sarah, Quirke opted for her more readily available sister, Delia, who died in childbirth, leaving Quirke with a daughter Phoebe, whom he quickly fosters out to Mal and Sarah. We learn that Phoebe spent the first two decades of her life believing that Mal and Sarah were her parents. Also introduced is Mal's father, the powerful Judge Garrett Griffin, Quirke's adoptive father, and a much more sinister figure than his surface persona suggests.

Obviously, Banville has the benefit of hindsight when he writes about the abuses of the Catholic Church in Ireland, but there are other, equally disturbing revelations that come to mind when reading *A Death in Summer* (2011) the fifth book in the series. A newspaper magnate is found dead at his country estate, clutching a shotgun in his lifeless hands. But as Quirke and Inspector Hackett, discover, Richard Jewell has in fact been murdered. Quirke's investigations return him to the notorious orphanage of St. Christopher's where he once resided, and the shadowy benefactors of St. Christopher's, which included Jewell, prove to have a sinister agenda behind their veil of philanthropy. When reading this novel, one can't but help thinking about the recent sweeping child abuse scandal in England that has shaken the BBC and other respected British institutions due to revelations about a massive cover-up of a pedophile network involving senior politicians and entertainment figures.

The manner in which the church protected known pedophiles, and the extent of the Church's power over the judiciary and the press in 1950s Ireland, is the subject of *Holy Orders* (2013), one of the most recent books. When Jimmy Minor, a small time reporter, is found drowned in a Dublin canal, Quirke gets dragged into the case because of Phoebe's friendship with the deceased man. The novel depicts an Irish society where newspapers are censored, social conventions are strictly defined and appalling crimes are hushed up. One of the suspects that Quirke and Inspector Hackett pursue is Father Horan, a priest who runs a boys club in one of the tenements in Sean McDermott Street, and who is about to be transferred to a mission in Africa. Without giving away the plot, what they discover in the course of their investigations is not only how far church authorities will go to protect their own interests, but also how ordinary people still considered members of the Catholic Church to be inviolable and beyond the reach of the legal authorities.

However, the Catholic Church is not the subject of all of these novels. *The Silver Swan* (2007) and *Elegy for April* (2010), are moral tales of a different order. In *The Silver Swan*, drug addiction and morbid sexual obsession form the backdrop to this dramatic tale. When an old acquaintance approaches Quirk about his wife's apparent suicide and requests him not to perform an autopsy, Quirke recognizes trouble. What one reviewer termed "the shady, priest-ridden and blithely corrupt society of mid-twentieth-century Dublin" is laid bare in this atmospheric and moving story.

Elegy for April opens with the possible disappearance of Phoebe's friend April Latimer. Fresh from drying out in an institution, Quirke is drawn into the mystery of what happened to the young woman by his daughter, who shares her father's knack of sensing when something is not quite right. What he discovers is a web of deceit and sexual exploitation that reaches into the highest levels of government, where the reputations of the dead heroes of Ireland's troubled past are fiercely protected. Jennifer Johnston also examined this underside of Irish nationalism, where former revolutionary heroes are now in positions of power in the newly independent Ireland in *The Invisible Worm* (1991). In Johnston's novel the female protagonist, Laura Quinlan, has become emotionally crippled by her father's sexual abuse. Johnston places Laura's rape within a specific political context as her father is a former IRA man turned Senator, and Ireland is presented as being run by men like him. Quirke's interactions with the powerful and dangerous Latimer family cause him to reflect at length on the nature of power: "Yes, a queer thing, Quirke reflected, squinting at the street. Power is like oxygen, being similarly vital, everywhere pervasive, wholly intangible; he lived in its atmosphere but rarely realized that he was breathing it."

Not all of the Black novels are as gripping as *Christine Falls* or *The Silver Swan*. For example, the sixth book in the series, *Vengeance* (2012), is less compelling from the onset because Quirke and his companion, Inspector Hackett, are not introduced in the story until chapter three. At the beginning of the novel, Victor Delahaye, a prominent businessman commits suicide on a boat in front of Davy Clancy, the son of his business partner, Jack Clancy. In the first two chapters various members of the Delahaye and the Clancy families are introduced, and the balance of power in their business relationship is explained. While this information is necessary to the development of the story, which is artfully constructed, the effect is to

lessen the tension in the story. The emotional heart of any Black book is the taciturn Quirke. As a reader, one simply does not care what is happening to all these secondary characters until Quirke stumbles into their messy lives.

Quirke is not a character in every Benjamin Black novel, nor is every mystery set in 1950s Dublin, which is a pity, because how this character intellectually and emotionally reacts to the crimes he investigates is as interesting as the mysteries in which he finds himself ensnared. *The Lemur* (2008), a small novella which was originally published in serial format by the New York Times magazine, is set in contemporary New York and focuses on John Glass, a journalist turned writer. Glass has given up his career to write an authorized biography of his father-in-law, communications magnate and former CIA agent, Big Bill Mulholland. The plot thickens when Glass's shifty young researcher, a man he calls "The Lemur," turns up some unflattering information about the family, which threatens Glass's entire easy existence.

The Raymond Chandler Experiment.

With the publication of *The Black-Eyed Blonde* (2014), Banville used his Benjamin Black persona to write a Raymond Chandler sequel, complete with Chandler's famous protagonist, Philip Marlowe and the backdrop of Los Angeles. The title comes from a list of unused possible titles drawn up by Chandler. Marlowe is crime fiction's quintessential hard-boiled hero, yet like Quirke, one of his most interesting and appealing characteristics is his vulnerability. Banville sees his Marlowe as "more weary than Chandler's, more melancholy, more disenchanted; he is also, alas, less witty, but less prone to adapt an unconvincing tough-guy stance." The tone of this novel is similar to Chandler's as is his use of metaphor and simile, yet for all its stylish bravado, the book, which has been described as 'a very knowing pastiche,' somehow falls short of its ambitious premise. The very artificiality of the novel, Banville/Black writing as Chandler, undermines any emotional resonance that Chandler's flawed hero typically elicits.

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The Benjamin Black books have been hugely successful both in Ireland and England and also in the United States, so much so that the BBC recently adapted the first three books of the series into three ninety minute episodes. Titled, appropriately enough, *Quirke*, the novels were adapted for television by screenwriter Andrew Davis and playwright Conor McPherson, and features Gabriel Byrne in the title role of Dr. Quirke.

Novels published by Benjamin Black:

Christine Falls (2006)

The Silver Swan (2007)

The Lemur (2008)

Elegy for April (2010)

A Death in the Summer (2011)

Vengeance (2012)

Holy Orders (2013)

The Black-Eyed Blonde (2014)

Even the Dead (2015)

For more information on Benjamin Black visit www.benjaminblackbooks.com

Irish Crime Fiction – Emerald Noir or Emerald Diversity?

By Louise Phillips

There has been a lot of discussion of late about the rise of Irish crime fiction, and rightly so. Over the last decade we've seen a remarkable growth in Irish crime fiction writing, with more Irish writers than ever choosing the crime genre for creative expression. People have coined phrases such as Emerald Noir or Celtic Crime, to encompass this phenomenon, but it is more than the increased numbers of Irish writers now exploring the genre, it is also the wide diversity of their work, the sub-genres within it, the topics, location and settings, and the variety by which Irish crime fiction is portraying a sense of not only how we feel about the world around us, but how we choose to write about it.

Irish crime fiction was described as being a very big tent by Dr Brian Cliff, Assistant Professor in English and Director of Irish Studies at Trinity College Dublin. During the last crime fiction festival held at the college, a festival which had unprecedented numbers attending, when asked about Irish crime fiction, he said, "Irish novelists set their work as far afield as Jane Casey's London, John Connolly's America, and Conor Fitzgerald's Rome, and they do so with a broad palette from psychological crime novels to international thrillers, from socially engaging hard-boiled fiction to supernatural mysteries."

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John Connolly and many others believe that Irish crime fiction has reached its own Golden Age, not simply because of the numbers of Irish authors now writing within the field, and the diversity involved, but also because of the high quality in terms of adventurousness and critical acclaim. "It's a kind of coming of age for Irish crime fiction," says John, the creator of the highly successful Charlie Parker series.

Inevitably, with an explosion in artistic expression, covering both historical and contemporary fiction, the big question is why is Irish Crime fiction booming?

Some link the creative development to the rise and fall of the so called Celtic Tiger in Ireland, and there are good arguments to support this, not least of which is the realisation that crime fiction is so often drawn to explore society and the interactions which exist, especially when people are tested. Certainly, there has been a massive period of change in Ireland, one which has left a number of questions unanswered about Irish society. On face value, this social change may not appear to be obviously connected to the rise in Irish historical crime writing, with novelists such as Kevin Mc Carthy, Michael Russell, Anthony Quinn, Andrew Hughes, Conor Brady and Stuart Neville, writing about times past, but in many ways the rise in historical crime fiction makes sense, as it is an effective means of questioning who we are as a people, by going back and reflecting on what has gone before. And, although writers

such as Colin Bateman, John Connolly and Eoin Mc Namee's (recent winner of the Kerry Group Irish novel of the Year) work cannot be attributed to this recent part of our history and social change, the latter writers laid a strong foundation for the diversity to come.

The other element believed to have forged the way for the boom in crime writing is the existence of a more settled Ireland with the ending of the 'Troubles'. It is certainly understandable that for many writers and readers, exploring stories about fictional murders, especially those based in Ireland, when people were being killed and maimed as part of daily life, had a great number of difficulties. Crime fiction is often about escape from the day to day realities, and whilst there are numerous reasons why readers are drawn to crime fiction, a certain distance from the murky business of real life is often preferable.

Coupled with the changing political landscape in relation to Northern Ireland, there has been a swelling of population in cities, driven by the rise during the Celtic Tiger years and a period of social immigration. This growth in both numbers and population diversity, has created a new dynamic in our society, and in itself, has inevitably influenced Irish writing, and crime writing in particular. It is now possible to disappear in Ireland. During research for my current novel, *The Game Changer*, I discovered that every year several thousands of people go missing in Ireland. Most are eventually found, but what is important for the creation of crime fiction in a location such as Ireland, is that it is now possible to hide, to live in one part of Ireland, and have a different life in another. Within this newly formed illusiveness, comes a backdrop for crime fiction writing that is not only rich in cultural and geographical perceptiveness, but one where it is possible to evade justice, or have a murderer living next door.

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The changes, both socially and politically, and the greater diversity of population and environmental factors, have all undoubtedly fed into the new Irish crime fiction explosion. However, the successful rise of the genre is also tied into the sheer diversity of the work created. Put quite simply, Irish crime fiction writing has not been pigeon-holed. Rather, it has been allowed to grow despite and because of its diversity, whether it's a novel dealing with contemporary domestic situations, police procedural stories, historical, futuristic, psychological, conceptual or any other sub-genre within the genre, it has been accepted and enjoyed without the constraints sometimes attributed when a particular form of writing gains national and international popularity.

I returned to writing after raising my family, and it was within this new wave of crime fiction writing that my first novel, *RED RIBBONS*, a psychological crime thriller, was published. The story opens with the murder and abduction of two 12-year-old schoolgirls, and with both our daughters older, I found myself drawn to a tale of parental loss and love, and the fear of the bad man in our midst. Initially, I wasn't aware that I was writing a crime novel, but I soon realised I was facing my own worst fears. The novel went straight to the Irish Bestseller list, before being shortlisted for the Best Irish Crime Novel of the Year at the Irish Book Awards. The following year, I wrote *THE DOLL'S HOUSE*, a story dealing with hypnosis, regression and memory, questioning whether or not we can depend on our recall of the past, when our survival is on the line. It went on to win the Best Irish Crime Novel of 2013. My third novel, *LAST KISS* was also nominated in this category, and like the previous two books it is set predominately in modern Ireland, with some elements based in Paris and

Rome. Although all three stories are best described as psychological thrillers, they also have a strong police procedural element, a mix of first and third person narrative, and a variety of components which give them their own individuality and diversity.

In *LAST KISS*, the theme of nature versus nurture, good versus evil, was my biggest challenge to date, and it led to me to creating a female fictional killer who pushed my boundaries as a writer. This September, my fourth novel, *THE GAME CHANGER*, will be published, and like the others, it is reflective of the society we live in, a new and very diverse domain, but one with strong links to the past.

A number of years ago, I attended a talk on 'getting published', and I remember speaking to a literary agent afterwards. It was their opinion at the time, that setting a crime novel in Ireland wasn't in their words sexy enough, and that somehow Ireland as a backdrop for story telling within the crime genre didn't make the cut. In my view, that limited concept of the genre has changed, and is still evolving now with more and more diversity as it grows.

Apart from the multiplicity of work, it is also great to see so many women writers within the mix. At the Irish Book Awards last year, there were five female crime writers, myself, Liz Nugent, Jane Casey, Sinead Crowley and Tana French shortlisted for the Best Irish Crime Novel of the Year, along with fellow crime writer, Stuart Neville.

Ireland has always been a county rich in the arts, and literature is a large part of this, so with such quality and variety within the writing, and a rapidly changing society, long may Irish crime fiction writing continue to flourish, and, to do so in its own unique way.

Louise Phillips



Photo: Jennifer Phillips

Bio

Louise Phillips is an author of three bestselling psychological crime thrillers. Her debut novel *Red Ribbons* was shortlisted for the Best Irish Crime Novel of the Year 2012, and her second novel, *The Doll's House*, won the award in 2013. *Last Kiss*, her third novel has also been nominated.

Her current novel, *The Game Changer*, will be published by Hachette Books Ireland in September 2015.

This year, Louise was a judge on the Irish panel for the E U Literary Novel Award 2015. She is also a facilitator of Crime Fiction workshops at the Irish Writers' Centre and various locations throughout the country, including libraries and schools. A feature writer for the online resource site www.writing.ie and www.emuink.com, she has published articles for the Daily Mail, Woman's Way & the Irish Times.

Publications

<i>County Lines</i> (2008)	Anthology of Poetry & Prose - New Island
<i>Flavours of Home</i> (2009)	SDCC Library Publication
<i>Petals on the Bough</i> (2009)	Longford County Council
<i>Boyne Berries</i> (2011)	Literary Journal
<i>Revival</i> (2011)	Literary Journal
<i>Red Ribbons</i>	(2012)Hachette Books Ireland - ISBN-10: 1444789384
<i>The Doll's House</i> (2013)	Hachette Books Ireland - ISBN-10: 1444743066
<i>Last Kiss</i> (2014)	Hachette Books Ireland - ISBN-10: 1444789384

Nominations & Awards

2008	Short Listed - Molly Keane Memorial Award
2008	Winner in the National Writers Group Award
2009	Winner of the Jonathon Swift Award
2010	Short Listed RTE Guide/Penguin Short Story Competition
2011	Winner in the Irish Writers Centre Lonely Voice Platform
2011	Short Listed RTE Guide/Penguin Short Story Competition
2011	Shortlisted for Flash Fiction BRIDPORT UK
2012	Arts Bursary for Literature from South Dublin Council-Arts Division
2012	Shortlisted Best Irish Crime Novel of the Year (BG Energy Awards)
2013	Winner of the Best Irish Crime Novel of the Year (BG Energy Awards)
2014	Shortlisted Best Irish Crime Novel of the Year (BG Energy Awards)

Endorsements

“Louise Phillips goes from strength to strength. Last Kiss is superior and takes her writing to another, more intense level. The pace is excellent, the characters familiar and new, well drawn and believable and airs skilfully disturbing themes laid bare in Ireland.”

Irish Independent

“Phillips is superb at suspense, at conjuring up a dark menacing atmosphere...”

Sunday Independent

“Phillips deserves to be known well beyond these shores. This is not just an Irish Crime thriller-it’s among the best crime writing in the world.”

BBC Radio Ulster

“The blend of first and third-person narratives gives the story great pace...Phillips explores the dark matter of damaged sexual identity.... the abiding impression is one of the empathy Phillips evokes on behalf of her lethal but fragile anti-heroine.”

Irish Times

“Phillips is exactly the kind of writer that lovers of crime fiction will enjoy no matter where they live, and is an equal to some of the greats.”

San Francisco Book Review

“Phillips’ book is laced with tension and gradually builds to a thrilling finale. What’s particularly great about the novel is the author’s fearlessness in delving into the darker recesses of the Irish capital’

The Irish Post

“This book is superb - a chilling and original storyline about nature versus nurture.”

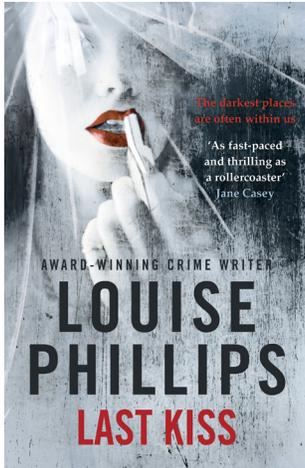
Eurocrime

“In LAST KISS, the character of the killer dominates the narrative and there’s a strong sense of menace from the start. It is something out of the ordinary.”

Crime Pieces

‘We can at last witness the rich experience of childhood and motherhood being mined in Irish literature.’

Irish Examiner



Publications: Irish Crime Fiction 2015

Declan Burke

Herewith be a brief list of Irish crime fiction titles to be published in 2015, a list I'll be updating on a regular basis throughout the year. To wit:

Gun Street Girl by Adrian McKinty (January 8)

Marked Off by Don Cameron (February 9)

TAKEN FOR DEAD by Graham Masterton (February 12)

White Church, Black Mountain by Thomas Paul Burgess (March)

The Defence by Steve Cavanagh (March 12)

The Lake by Sheena Lambert (March 19)

A Song Of Shadows by John Connolly (April 9)

Killing Ways by Alex Barclay (April 9)

The Organised Criminal by Jarlath Gregory (April 9)

I Am In Blood by Joe Murphy (April 30)

A Mad And Wonderful Thing by Mark Mulholland (May 8)

The Bones Of It by Kelly Creighton (May 15)

The Night Game by Frank Golden (May 28)

Even The Dead by Benjamin Black (May 28)

Blood Sisters by Graham Masterton (June 1)

Only We Know by Karen Perry (June 4)

After The Fire by Jane Casey (June 18)

Aloysius Tempo by Jason Johnson (June 25)

Those We Left Behind by Stuart Neville (June 26)

Are You Watching Me? by Sinead Crowley (July 2nd)

Green Hell by Ken Bruen (July 7)

Barlow By The Book by John McAllister (July 26)

Freedom's Child by Jax Miller (July 30)

Hide And Seek by Jane Casey (July 30)

Preserve The Dead by Brian McGilloway (August 6)

With Our Blessing by Jo Spain (September 3)

The Game Changer by Louise Phillips (September 3)

Death At Whitewater Church by Andrea Carter (September 3)

A Deadly Gamble by Pat Mullan (September TBC)

Dead Secret by Ava McCarthy (November 19)

The Silent Dead by Claire McGowan (November 19)

Declan Burke



Bio

Award-winning Declan Burke is a crime/mystery author, editor and journalist. His sixth novel, *The Lost and the Blind* (2014), is published by Severn House. With John Connolly, he is the co-author of *Books to Die For* (2012), a collection of essays on the greatest crime and mystery novels written by the greatest living crime and mystery authors. The book won the non-fiction crime Anthony, Macavity and Agatha Awards in 2013.

For updated articles, reviews and information on Irish crime fiction, visit Declan's blog, Crime Always Pays, at <http://crimealwayspays.blogspot.ie>

The Enigma of Ken Bruen

By Des Kenny

The story has been told before but deserves another airing. One evening, close on thirty years ago for us, herself and myself were in the Galway Arms, a good hostelry at the top of Dominick Street, Galway. There were a few other drinkers at various tables there scattered throughout the pub keeping themselves very much to themselves. The door opened and a thin, slightly edgy young man walked in carrying a basket of books, one copy of which he left on each occupied table. My first reaction was that he was of a marginal religious or political persuasion and trying to spread the gospel. My second was that it was a question of a charitable donation – probably for himself, God knows he looked like he needed it - and it was best left alone. However my bookseller curiosity got the better of me and I was perusing when he returned.

“Did you write this?”

“I did”

“Can you call in and see me in the morning?”

“And who the fuck are you?”

“Des Kenny”.

“Jaysus, I’ll be there at ten in the morning”.

And he was, making us the first Bookshop to officially stock Ken Bruen’s, Ireland’s first truly crime novelist, books.

Born in Galway in 1951, Bruen is the quintessential Galwegian. He was educated there and at Trinity College Dublin where he took a doctorate in Metaphysics. His itchy feet took him on a twenty-five year trip around the world during which he mostly taught English, re-educated himself and spent six months as the unwilling guest of a caring Brazilian government. Returning to London, he continued to teach English.

When he found himself in a tough East London school trying to teach children poetry in a language they didn’t understand, he began to write crime novels in a language they did, introducing literary figures into the text; hence you have such titles as “Her Last Call to Louis Mac Niece” and “Rilke on Black”. Thanks to the vision and money of publisher Jim Driver, these books saw the light of day.



Sadly, Jim was no distributor and because the books were so much on the edge and raw, the reading public remained largely unaware of them. In an attempt to increase his audience, Bruen hawked the books himself from pub to pub.

When in 2001, Brandon published his eleventh book, “The Guards” – the first Jack Taylor book – Bruen became an overnight success.

Although I had already read Bruen’s previously published books, it was the appearance of “The Guards” that made me realise that the man I met that fateful evening in the Galway Arms was in fact the Godfather of the modern Irish crime novel. While some crime writing did exist in Ireland up to 2001, it was fairly tame and never really lifted its head above the parapet. In Jack Taylor we have in Irish crime fiction the first really hard-nosed ex-cop who drinks whiskey as if it is going out of fashion whose sense of dress is non-existent, whose sense of humour is visceral, and whose sense of justice is instinctive although not exactly administered by the book as he deals with the darker deeds committed on the shadowy streets and lanes of Galway.

Bruen writes in machine gun fashion his words verbal bullets that rip through the veneer of the safe bourgeois catholic society in which he was reared symbolised by Taylor’s over pious mother and her close ally, the meddling sanctimonious Fr Malachy. The acerbic wit and off the wall comments present throughout all the books are somewhat reminiscent of the work of Raymond Chandler and Peter Cheyenne, both of whom incidentally had Irish ancestry. Outside of the drink and drugs, however, Taylor has one other rather unusual if not unique for a man of his calling addiction, books. No matter how drunk, or high or beaten up he is, he always has recourse to his own personal library and the narration is peppered with literary allusions and quotes from the works of the great poets and philosophers. Mixed in with the sleaze and the gore the reader is likely to find quotes from Kahlil Gibran or Thomas Merton. Now 14 years after the publication of “The Guards”, Bruen rubs shoulders with the best crime writers in the world. Ed McBain was an avid fan of his work and they became close friends. Many of his books have been made into films. “There are seven Jack Taylor movies”, he said to me proudly, “off which I have only seen six”. A script of his it at present been filmed as a series for Scandinavian television and BBC4 are to screen a dubbed version of it and he has been the recipient of many Crime Writer international awards.

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Yet for all of that, while he doesn’t hawk the books from pub to pub now, he has never really left Galway. He can still frequently be seen gliding along its streets with the inevitable backpack thrown over his shoulders almost certainly full of books which he will happily share with anybody who shows a serious interest. “Books are to be passed around”, he says, “not buried on shelves”.

Bruen rejoices in the explosion of Crime Writer’s in Ireland. “Isn’t it wonderful? There are 763 crime writers working in Ireland at the moment”, he tells me. “Isn’t it a great pity though that over 90% of them are only available on Amazon?”

It never occurs to him that his pioneer work in writing and hawking the books around during the 1970s and 1980s is one of the main foundations of and inspirations behind this whole new chapter in Irish Literature.

Des Kenny



Bio

Des Kenny was born in Galway in 1950 and was educated in Scoil Fhursa and Colaiste Iognáid before attending University College Galway. Upon graduating he obtained a grant to study at the Sorbonne where he obtained a Master's Degree in literature. After returning from Paris he entered the family business. He is a regular contributor to Books Ireland and is the author of *Kennys Choice: 101 Irish Books You Must Read* (2008), which will be reissued later this year. He is married to Anne Gilmartin and they live in Galway with their children and grandchildren.

Phone: +353 91 709367

Fax: +353 91 709351

Email: desi@kennys.ie

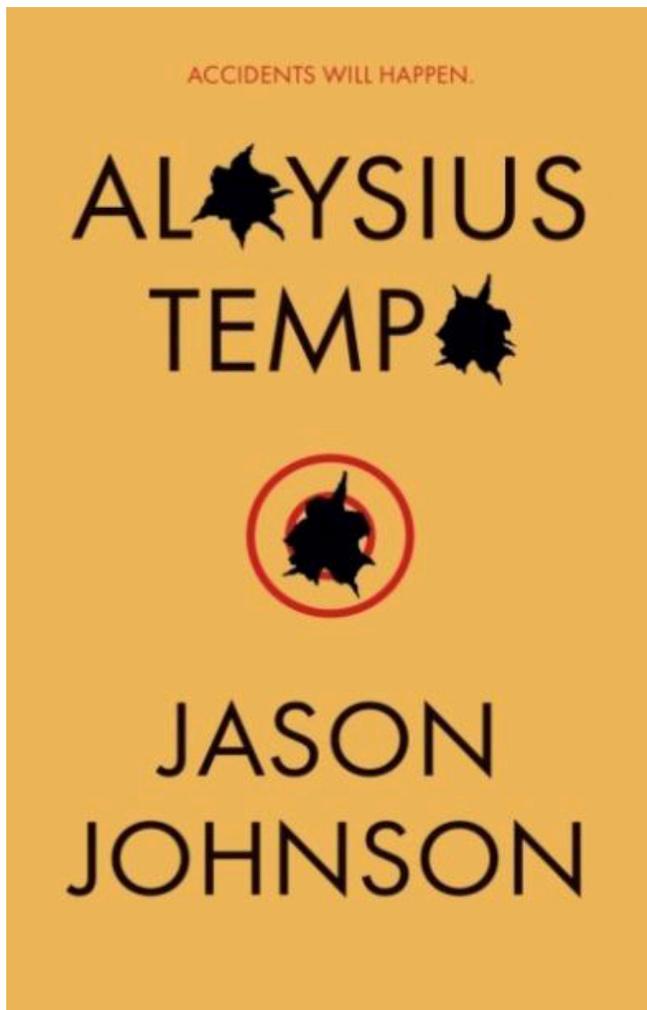
Skype: [desikenny](https://www.skype.com/name/desikenny)

Website: <http://www.kennys.ie>

Blog: <http://www.myspace.com/kennysbookshop>

Spotlight on Writers to Read

Aloysius Tempo by Jason Johnson



About the Book

It takes patience to recruit Aloysius as a government assassin, but by the time Imelda Feather, 64, bends a new passport around his penis she knows he'll kill for her.

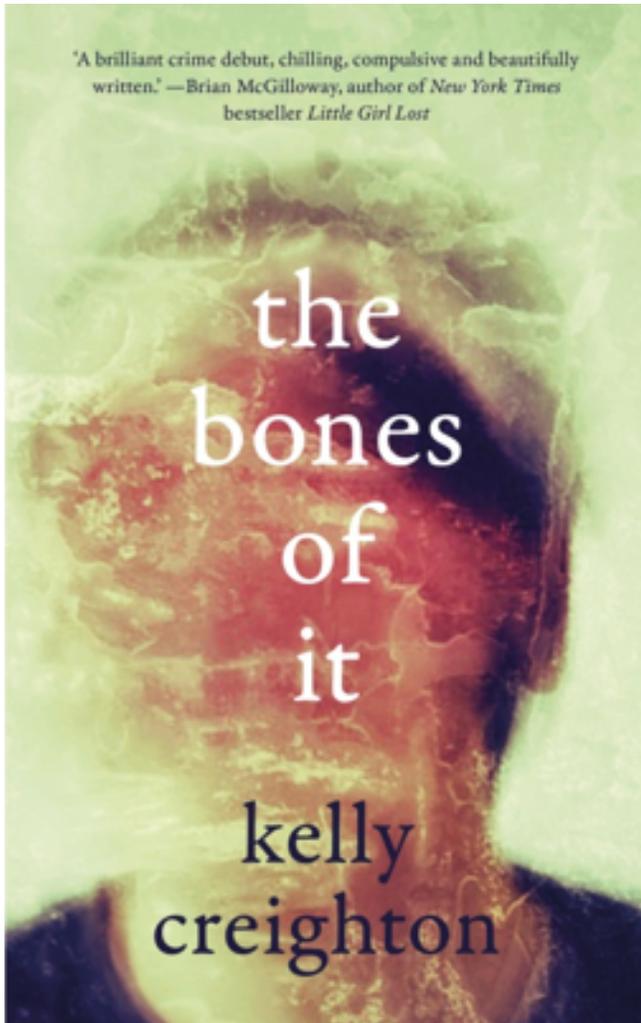
Aloysius, 40, is cautious, a freelance killer-for-hire, a maker of fatal accidents. He is the perfect man to slay four of the most hated Irish people on the planet. Based in Amsterdam, his fear when Imelda comes calling is that he will again be betrayed by those in power in Ireland. “Do you love your country?” she asks. “Do you love the rock that hits you?” he replies. A deal struck, he drowns a loan shark, impales a wicked old priest. But before securing his third target, a mesmerising female politician, he learns all is not as it seems. Aloysius reverses roles, becomes the hunted, speeds off as the novel charges towards climax. Yet he has got it wrong, must fast-fix his mess and, as the clock ticks, decide if he will or will not take out the last two on the list. The drama crashes right into the last page, to where his death is certain—just as the fight within him rises again. “You’re so fucking Machiavellian,” he tells Imelda, “a guy would need a hard hat to meet you.” “At least,” she says. As Aloysius works to build a future and shake away his past, this story, an off-road assassin thriller, sees a man begin to reconnect with the country he lost.

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About the Author

Jason Johnson is a Northern Ireland-based journalist. His debut novel, *Woundlicker* (2005), was a ferociously raw story set in fraught Belfast times. His second book, *Alina* (2006), won him a reputation for his distinctively gritty style of writing. His third book, *Sinker* (2014) built on that reputation, with the Irish Independent hailing it, “a cracking book, jolt to the senses, like a row of flaming shots.”

The Bones of It
by Kelly Creighton



About the Book

Thrown out of university, green-tea-drinking, meditation-loving Scott McAuley has no place to go but home: County Down, Northern Ireland. The only problem is, his father is there now too. Duke wasn't around when Scott was growing up. He was in prison for stabbing two Catholic kids in an alley. But thanks to the Good Friday Agreement, big Duke is out now, reformed, a counsellor.

Squeezed together into a small house – a father and son who cannot understand each other, with too little work and too much time to think about what happened to Scott's dead mother – the tension grows between the two men, who seem to have so little in common.

Penning diary entries from prison, Scott recalls what happened that year. He writes about Jasmine, his girlfriend at university, about Klaudia, back home in County Down, who he and Duke both admired. Old wounds that refuse to heal. Scott McAuley weaves a tale of lies, of paranoia, of rage.

About the Author

Kelly Creighton is an arts facilitator and the editor of *The Incubator* literary journal. She was named runner-up for the Michael McLaverty Short Story Award in 2014, and has been shortlisted for the Seamus Heaney Award for New Writing, the Fish Short Story Prize and the Cúirt New Writing Prize for fiction. She received an SIAP grant from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland in 2013. Her writing has featured in *The Stinging Fly*, *Litro* and *Cyphers*, among other places. Her poetry chapbook, *Three Primes*, was published by Lapwing. Creighton co-founded the Square Circle Writers' Group in Newtownards.

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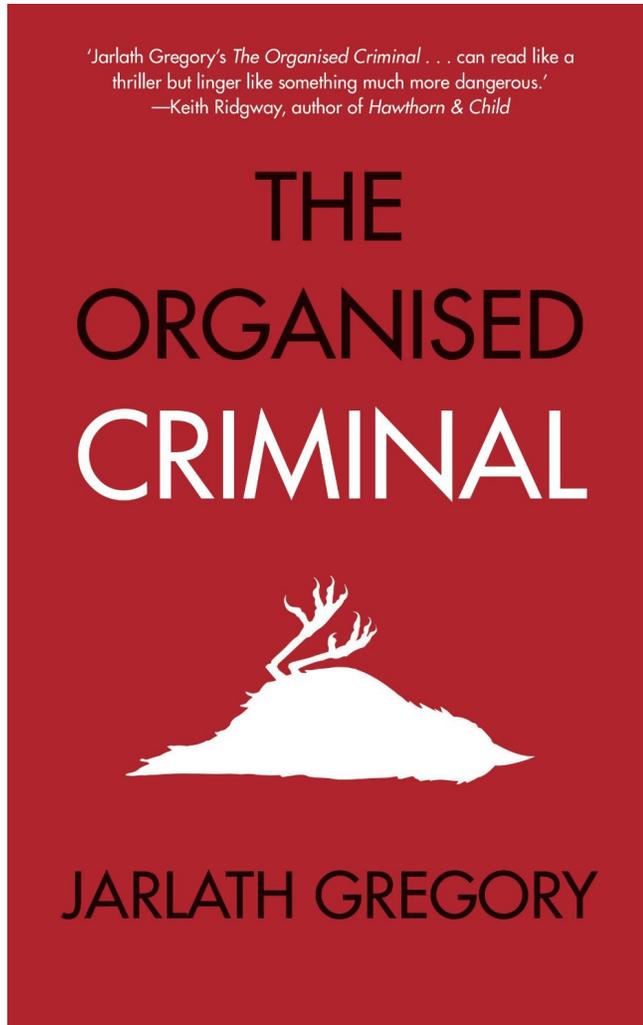
“A brilliant crime debut, chilling, compulsive and beautifully written. Fans of *The Butcher Boy* and *The Book of Evidence* will find much to love in *The Bones of It*.”

New York Times bestselling author Brian McGilloway

“The story bends with multiple twists... For Fans of Claire McGowan (who wrote *The Fall*) and Alex Barclay.”

Sinéad Gleeson, IMAGE

The Organised Criminal
by Jarlath Gregory



About the Book

The Organised Criminal is about blood, family and organised crime. Jay O'Reilly, reluctantly returning for home for his cousin's funeral, is offered a job by his father. His family's criminal activity had made Jay determined never to return. His father is a well-known smuggler with a far-reaching nefarious empire. Though Jay likes to think he's turned his back on his community, his lost-past still fascinate him. The job is deceptively simple, worryingly so, but lucrative. Despite himself, Jay is tempted, tempted by the money, tempted by the possibility of escape and a chance to make things right. Gregory's wry wit questions the ethics, conscience and loyalty of Jay, his family and his friends. Spiked with black humour throughout, Jay's feelings of loneliness, displacement, dissatisfaction and even hatred elevate this thrilling celtic noir novel and show that a job is never just a job. It becomes a story of fear, family-ties, male friendship and power. As Jay contemplates the job, he reacquaints himself with the place and the family he left, only to find that it is exactly as hard, cold and unwelcoming as he remembered. The anxieties and troubles of Northern Ireland frame Jay's story. When the truth behind his father's offer is finally revealed, Jay faces a primal struggle between familial bonds and moral obligations.

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About the Author

Jarlath Gregory grew up in Crossmaglen, County Armagh. He has previously published Snapshots (Dublin, Sitric Books, 2001); and G. A. A. Y: One Hundred Ways to Love a Beautiful Loser (Sitric Books, 2005). He lives in Dublin.

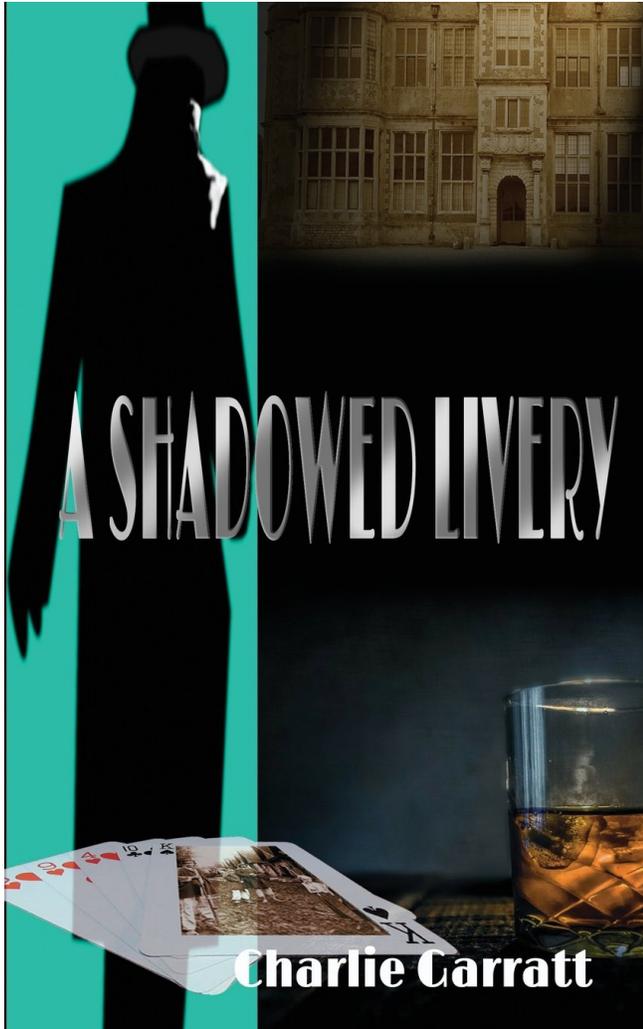
"Jarlath Gregory's *The Organised Criminal* has themes which are familiar – family, betrayal, love and death – but the setting and the characterisations and the telling of the tale make this a distinctive and fresh book, one that can read like a thriller but linger like something much more dangerous."

Keith Ridgway, author of *Hawthorn & Child*

"The Organised Criminal is a masterly novel of male friendship, family betrayal and economic corruption. By turns brutal, beautiful and funny, it's an astute exploration of an Ireland rarely seen in fiction."

Jamie O'Neill, author of *At Swim Two Boys*

A Shadowed Livery
by Charlie Garratt



About the Book

In the dying days of September 1938 the murderer of a Jewish shopkeeper is hanged in Birmingham. After witnessing the execution, Inspector James Given, who brought the killer to justice, is surprised to find he has been taken off the investigation into attacks on Jews to pursue a very different case.

Two people have been found dead in the grounds of a Warwickshire house: it seems clear that Lady Isabel Barleigh has shot her disabled son on the eve of his wedding then turned the weapon on herself. An hour later his fiancée, distraught with grief, committed suicide. The case has been all but closed; Given doesn't believe this version of events and, with the local policeman, Constable Sawyer, begins to dig further into the past of the Barleigh family.

Meanwhile, Given's own past – his very nature, hidden from all – begins to catch up with him

A complex mystery about identity, deceit, and past crimes. Inspired by a true story.

About the Author

Charlie Garratt lives in Donegal, Ireland, where he now writes, plays guitar and grows vegetables. Charlie is author and co-author of a number of books and guides on community participation, and author of a large number of short stories. He was born in Manchester and moved to Warwickshire (where *A Shadowed Livery* is set), at the age of 18 where he trained as a telecommunications engineer. Increasing involvement in his local community led to a change of career and over thirty years in the field of community development across the United Kingdom and Donegal before moving to Ireland in 2006.

As Close As You'll Ever Be
(Cairn Press, 2012)
(short story collection)

by Seamus Scanlon



Scanlon's irreverent eviscerations of the pieties of Irish nationalism are darkly comic, disturbing and curiously affecting. He is a writer to watch. Declan Hughes (Digging For Fire)

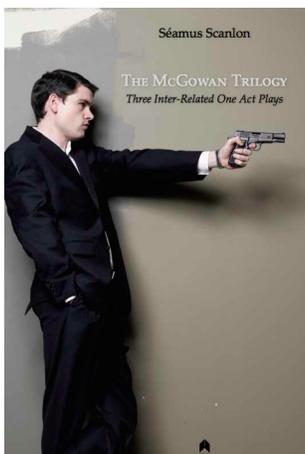
A trio of plays that begins with comedy and irreverence and ends with pathos and loss, Seamus Scanlon's The McGowan Trilogy is surprising, original and hugely enjoyable. Christian O'Reilly (Chapatti)

Scanlon is a bloody fine storyteller and a truly imposing writer. DANCING AT LUNACY's fierce and unflinching combination of tragedy, absurdity and wit set him apart. Peter A. Quinn (Poor Banished Children of Eve)

Dancing At Lunacy is psychotic vaudeville from the pen of a punk rock Pinter, is a gory, hilarious fairground ride to the dark side. Paul Duane (Barbaric Genius)

The McGowan Trilogy
(Arlen House, 2014)
(Three plays plus short story)

by Seamus Scanlon



This collection is an ode to human truth found in violent desperation. Highly recommended. Starred Review. Library Journal

The collection is brief, brutal and on occasion beautiful. Irish Echo

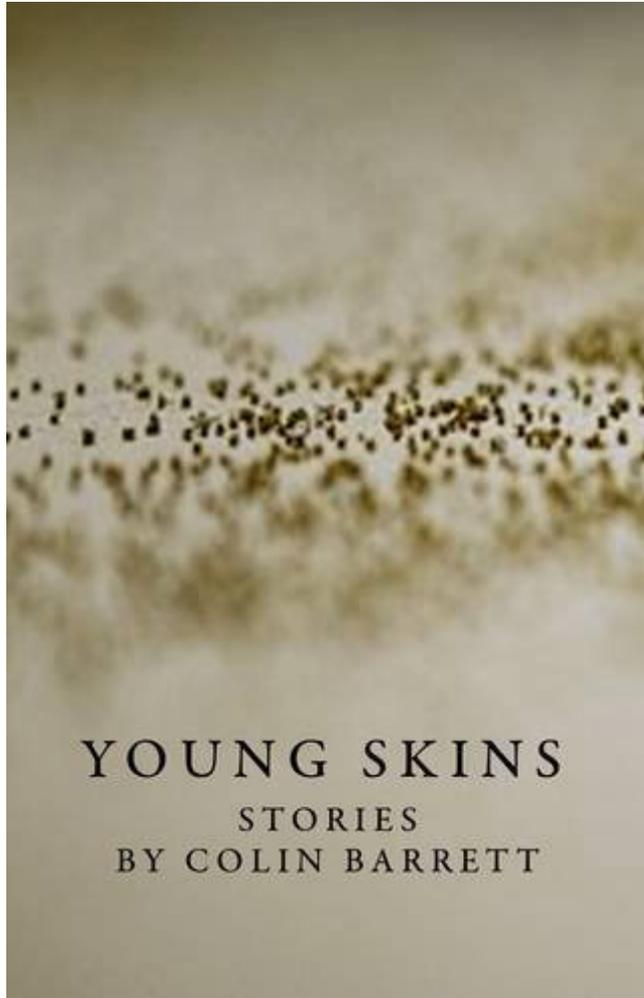
They are beautifully written shocks of insight and cruelty. Irish Examiner USA

Book Review

Young Skins by Colin Barrett.

ISBN978-1-906539-27-6

Reviewed by Adrienne Leavy



Colin Barrett's debut collection of short stories *Young Skins* was published in 2013 by The Stinging Fly Press to tremendous critical acclaim. A vivid chronicle of young minds going nowhere, the collection won the 2014 Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, the 2014 Rooney Prize for Irish Literature and the 2014 Guardian first book award. After one read through, the reader will feel impelled to immediately begin again and re-read these stories; a testament to Barrett's skill as a writer.

With *Young Skins*, Barrett demonstrates why the short story is as relevant today as it was when James Joyce first perfected the form in his 1914 collection *Dubliners*. Like Joyce, Barrett writes movingly and lyrically about ordinary people trapped in the depressing circumstances of their lives with little or no possibility of escape. Whereas Joyce set his stories in Dublin, a city he grew up in and knew intimately, Barrett, who is from the West of Ireland, transposed his real home town into the fictional County Mayo town of Glanbeigh. Another master of the short story who comes to mind when reading this extraordinary debut collection is John McGahern. McGahern also set his stories in a small world geographically, comprising the West counties of Sligo, Roscommon, and Leitrim, and the city of Dublin to a lesser degree.

Barrett's stories, six short ones and a lengthy tale that could be a novella, explore the lives of various young men and women, "belligerently indolent youngsters," who are passively adrift in contemporary post-boom Ireland. On most days, many of them are found struggling through "the double daze of residual hangover and incipient dope high." Those who make it out are contemptuously referred to as "brainboxes" who go to college in "brainbox land." Despite their lack of ambition and ambiguous moral compasses (there is a lot of gratuitous sex, which no-one seems to enjoy), the figures in these stories are regarded sympathetically in that they have little control over the cycles of ignorance

and poverty that has curtailed their options in life. Writing about McGarhen's work in *Writing the Irish West: Ecologies and Traditions*, Eamonn Wall discusses the author's interest in the "vacuums in the moral life of the West," and his comments on McGahern's stories are equally applicable to the small town life presented in *Young Skins*:

Postcolonial Ireland, at ground level and beneath the radar of ideology, is a largely dysfunctional space. The rural West, long idealized by Nationalists and writers for the purity of thought and action of its inhabitants, is doubly so. It is, in many instances in these stories, paralyzed and cut adrift from human kindness.

Many references are made to "the geriatrics pickling on their stools" in the front bars of each of the various pubs the characters wander in and out of, seemingly oblivious that they too are destined to end up the same way. In Quillian's pub, "the irrelevantly elderly lined the bar, most of them fat men with dead wives, hefting pints into their bloated, drink-cudgelled faces." In another story, the elders are described as "the town's senior pissheads, intent on drinking their way through their pension money by a respectable hour." Meanwhile, the mothers in the town while away their empty lives in front of the television, drinking at home instead of in the pub.

Although the young adults in Glanbeigh are represented as people with limited lives, the language and vocabulary of these tightly plotted stories is sophisticated and inventive. A barroom hanger-on doesn't merely persuade a young girl to buy him a drink; instead this character, an expert bar-grift, "has inveigled her into buying him a drink." Another figure, slumped morosely in the rear of a car, is pictured as being "heaped like a flung coat in the far corner of the rear." Barrett has a poet's understanding of the power of imagery and the importance of economy. He also has a keen sense of the fine line between humor and tragedy, and studiously avoids any tinge of sentimentality, even when describing the pathos of Bat, the damaged character in "Stand Your Skin." A sensitive soul even before he was the victim of a senseless attack by the town's local psychopath, Bat hides from the world behind his unfashionably long hair, alcohol and midnight motorcycle rides into the Mayo countryside where no-one will bother him.

The collection opens with "The Clancy Kid," and the narrator, Jimmy, immediately tells you all you need to know about this forgotten town: "A roundabout off a national road, an industrial estate, a five-screen Cineplex, a century of pubs packed inside the square mile of the town's limits." Jimmy lurks with his sidekick, Tug, a large and childlike figure who is unpredictable and prone to fits of rage, especially when he forgets to take his medication. Yet he is also genuinely concerned about a young boy from a nearby town who disappeared on a school excursion to Dublin. In their own way they look out for each other without moralizing, for as Jimmy realizes so much of friendship is "the saying of nothing in place of something."

Barrett's skill as an observant chronicler of small town life is evident in "Bait," the second story, which opens with the narrator and his cousin, Matteen Judge, driving around town. The two lads head into town to Quillian's bar, which has a notice board containing "a flock of expired circulars advertizing manure storage solutions and faith-healing sessions tacked to it." Matteen plays pool for money and his cousin, who understands his place in the hierarchy of their relationship, collects the winnings: "Efficient deference was my singular mode of expression. I had never sought a status beyond that of a sidekick or flunky, and in this way had achieved a subtle indispensability." When he is sent on an errand by Matteen, to track some girls who have stolen their winnings, he realizes the drawbacks of being "an adhesive creep," as he is subject to a vicious attack by a group of young women.

Another story, "The Moon," features a protagonist who is as trapped by paralysis as many of the characters in *Dubliners*. Val, who works as a bouncer, cannot envision a world beyond the walls of the small town and the seedy nightclub around which his life revolves. Martina, a girl with whom he is having a casual affair when she is on break from university in Galway, astutely observes, "Galway's not that far. . . but it might as well be the moon for people like you." The story ends with the lonely figure of Val sitting in his kitchen at 4:00 a.m., texting Martina that "he was looking forward to seeing her the next time she made it back from the moon." Elsewhere, in a different tale, a recovering addict drifts closer to the oblivion he'd hoped to avoid by returning to his home town. The novella that centers the collection, "Calm With Horses," revolves around the slowly unfolding tragedy of Arm and his friend Dymrna's doomed small time criminal

empire. This particular story deserves a more thorough analysis beyond the brief of this review, so we will return to it later. In the final story, “Kindly Forget My Existence,” two estranged friends, Doran and Eli, hide themselves away in a darkened pub, reluctant to attend the funeral of a woman they both loved. The mental and linguistic chess these Barrett has these characters engage in is all the more remarkable because of its mutability.

In reviewing this collection for *Short Story Ireland*, Andrew McEneff sums up part of the compelling attraction of these stories:

Far down the country and off the national roads there are still places in this country where there is nowhere to go and nothing to do, where life frustrates itself in stasis and one’s potential is never realized. This is what *Young Skins* and Colin Barrett is saying: that there is nothing at all romantic about being part of a lost generation. A generation without a will for authentic self-determination is one racing toward an early living grave of quietude, loneliness and regret.

With tremendous confidence and precision Barrett’s stories reflect the reality of contemporary Irish culture for a generation of dysfunctional Irish youth post Celtic Tiger. His stories are fresh, illuminating and substantive, and, like his literary forbearers Joyce and McGahern, they reflect the “moral history” of a specific aspect of Irish life, in this case small town Ireland in the early twenty-first century.

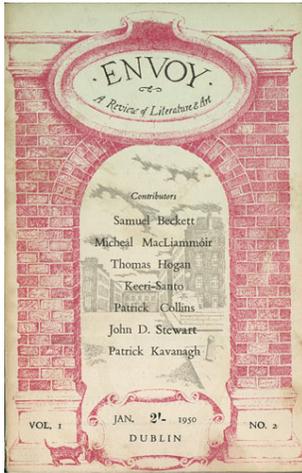
Envoy: A Review of Literature and Art. 1949-1951

First published in December 1949, *Envoy* was the brainchild of writer and artist John Ryan, and the poet and diplomat Valentin Iremonger. The impetus behind the magazine was an attempt to fill what they perceived as a literary gap in Irish culture. The Foreword to the first issue announced that “*Envoy*, by its arrival, brings to a close a two year period during which the reading public of this island have had no monthly magazine wholly devoted to literature and the arts.” Determined to put literature first, *Envoy* was less concerned with issues of Irish nationalism or cultural politics, and instead, cast itself in a self consciously European mode, mixing local appeal and a dash of international contributions. *Envoy* commenced with a detailed editorial plan which Ryan and his assistant editors (Iremonger and J.K. Hillman), outlined in their introduction to the first issue: the periodical would come to the aid of Irish culture “by serving abroad as envoy of Irish writing and at home as envoy of the best of international writing.” An ambitious aesthetic platform was spelled out in the second issue, which despite the editors’ avowed inclination towards European literature, curiously confined itself to Irish authors. Broadly speaking, there were three specific areas that the magazine hoped to focus on:

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1. A series of critical assessments on the main Irish literary figures of the first fifty years of the twentieth century, which would be “written by writers who are young enough not to remember personally the authors they are dealing with.” In the editors’ opinion, the Irish literary landscape lacked any objective critics, other than “John Eglinton, the only critic of any stature which the Revival produced,” and in their view, this series was an attempt to “belatedly” fill the gap.
2. A series called “The Irish Contribution, which would include essays on “Swift, Goldsmith, Congreve, Farquhar, Wilde, Moore, Yeats, Shaw, Joyce, O’Casey and Synge.”
3. A critical review of the poets and writers of modern Gaelic literature, “from the time of Geoffrey Keating onwards.” This latter series was necessitated, in the editors’ opinion, because no sound assessment of their work had been undertaken, and by virtue of the fact “the exigencies of the movement for the revival of the Gaelic language have tended to acclaim all Gaelic writers as major figures, and to describe everything written in Gaelic as literature.” Distancing themselves from the early Revivalist aesthetic, they continued, “this is obvious nonsense, and we hope that the articles in *Envoy* will do much towards giving us a more realistic approach to the wealth of material that is available in the language.”

Each issue included at least one story from a distinguished array of Irish writers including Brendan Behan, Brian O’ Nolan, Padrig Colum, Brendan Kiely, Mary Lavin, Séan Ó Faoláin and Francis Stuart. Samuel Beckett also had a short lived relationship with the magazine, as



the second issue featured an extract from his novel *Watt*. In keeping with the emphasis on including commentary on European and international literature, essays ranged from “German Prose fiction of To-Day,” to “The Novels of Albert Camus,” and “The significance of F. Scott Fitzgerald.”

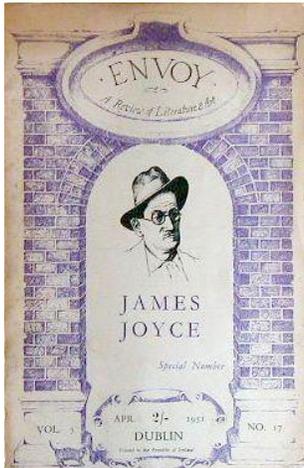
Demonstrating an admirable lack of political chauvinism or regional bias, poetry editor Valentin Iremonger was instrumental in publishing a wide variety of contemporary young Irish poets from both Northern and Southern Ireland. The roster including Anthony Cronin, John Hewitt, Roy McFadden, Pearse Hutchinson, Patrick Kavanagh, John Montague and Richard Murphy. Iremonger also looked beyond the borders of Irish poetry to include essays on international poetry. Thus, we find Pearse Hutchinson writing on modern American poetry with a focus on Walt Whitman, another essay on Spanish poetry and an appraisal of Gertrude Stein.

Envoy’s distinctive focus on art was directly attributable to Ryan, who was first and foremost a painter. Subtitled, *A Review of Literature and Art*, the periodical was, in the assessment of Terence Brown, “the first of the essentially literary publications to attempt an assessment of the visual arts in the postindependence period.” Over half of the issues contained lengthy critical appraisals of a diverse range of Irish painters such as Daniel O’ Neill, George Campbell, Louis le Brocqy, Colin Middleton, Nano Reed, Turloe Connolly, Patrick Swift and the sculptor Hilary Heron. These appreciations were usually accompanied by several black & white reproductions of the artist’s work, which many of Envoy’s readers would not otherwise have seen. Other aspects of art addressed in the periodical were modern German painting, modern British painting and the religious art of medieval Ireland.

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Another important facet of the magazine was the inclusion of a regular column or “Diary” written by Patrick Kavanagh. Although Kavanagh’s ‘Diary’ column initially captured the essence of Envoy’s cultural outlook, it became, with the passage of time, a vehicle for Kavanagh to pick fights and settle old scores. In several issues he uses his column to vent his scorn on other contemporary poets, most notably, Austin Clarke, John Hewitt and Louis McNeice, all of whose work Kavanagh considered inferior to his own. Other moving targets included the Abbey Theatre, the Catholic Church’s involvement in the Arts, Radio Éireann, the Irish club in London and the regular clientele of The Pearl Bar. Less measured opinion pieces than frequently very funny belligerent rants, Kavanagh displayed his not inconsiderable gifts as an acerbic satirist in these columns, which paved the way for his own publication, *Kavanagh’s Weekly*. He also was responsible for most of the letters to the editor that the magazine received.

Kavanagh also published some of his own poetry in Envoy, and these poems acquire an added layer of significance when read in the context of one of his ‘Diary’ articles as opposed to encountering the poems within the context of Kavanagh’s collected Poems. Kavanagh’s biographer, Antoinette Quinn, considers the poet’s Envoy years to be a time of rebirth for the troubled poet, arguing that “in less than two years of its existence his poetics underwent the crucial reorientation that made all his later poetry possible.” Quinn attributes this change in direction in part to the support of the young artistic and intellectual circle of friends he made at Envoy, who “nerved him to renew the verse hostilities begun in ‘The Paddiad’ against the proponents of Celtic verse and to attack his circle’s other common enemy,



Dublin's philistine bourgeoisie." As Quinn points out, much of Kavanagh's satiric verse from this period was first published in *Envoy*, which provided the poet with a public forum that helped facilitate his change in direction from rural realism to contemporary urban poetry.

The April 1951 issue (no. 17) was a special issue devoted to James Joyce, with interesting critical articles by Brian O' Nolan, Denis Johnston, Andrew Cass, Naill Montgomery, Joseph Hone and W.B. Stanford. Kavanagh's 'Diary' piece, an appreciation of Joyce, is one of his more measured. He begins by admitting that he "read *Ulysses* for the first time seven years ago," and in typical Kavanagh fashion, proceeds to give Joyce a backhand compliment by noting that "since then it has become my second-favourite bedside book." However, in this instance, Kavanagh was more interested in satirizing the burgeoning Joyce industry in academia rather than the novelist. Two additional items of interest in this issue are a number of unpublished letters of Joyce to various people, including his aunt Josephine in Dublin and Harriet Weaver, Joyce's early patron and editor of *The Egoist*, which serialized *Ulysses*. These letters, which reveal some of Joyce's thoughts on the draft chapters of *Ulysses*, also reveal an artist financially strapped and plagued by recurring eye problems. The final item of interest is a group of photographs of Joyce taken in the 1930s.

Browne points out that "Envoy was the first Irish periodical to attempt a full-scale critical response to Joyce's work since the *Irish Statesman* ceased publication." It may have been due to space considerations, but one wonders why the editors did not include the marvelous series of black & white photographs of Dublin that were published in November 1950 (issue 12), under the title "Joyce's Dublin." These photographs, which were reproduced by permission of the Irish Tourist Board, show six of the geographic locations weaved into the fabric of *Ulysses*, namely: St. Stephen's Green; The Quays looking toward the Four Courts; The Irish House; Sandymount Strand; Eccles Street; and St. Patrick's Cathedral. Notwithstanding Nolan's satirical portrait of Joyce in this issue, most writers of the time (including Nolan), who railed against the claustrophobia of the culture looked to Joyce as their exemplar. This is evident in their actions as well as their writing. A photo taken on Sandymount Strand on Bloomsday (June 16th) 1954, depicts a number of the contributors of *Envoy* gathered to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the date on which Joyce's *Ulysses* is set. The photograph



shows John Ryan, Anthony Cronin, Brian Nolan, Patrick Kavanagh, and Joyce's cousin, Tom Joyce. In what is now considered the first attempt to celebrate Bloomsday in Ireland, the group's intention was to visit as many of the Ulysses sites as possible, starting with the Martello Tower in Sandycove, and proceeding by Pony Trap into the city centre and its various pubs.

Envoy lasted for just over a year and a half, publishing its final issue, number 20, in July 1951. Part of the reason for the short lived nature of the periodical was the existence of a trade embargo by the British Board of Trade that banned the importation of Irish books and periodicals into the United Kingdom. In his first editorial Ryan drew attention to the fact that Envoy's best overseas market was closed to the periodical; however, by issue 5 (April 1950), the Board of Trade's embargo on Irish periodicals entering Great Britain had been revoked. As Frank Shovlin notes, "throughout its run, Envoy is conscious of the strains and complexities of Ireland's new relationship with Britain, a consciousness no doubt aided by the presence of a senior Irish civil servant, Valentin Iremonger, on its editorial board." At the time of his involvement with Envoy, Iremonger was private secretary to Seán McBride, the Minister for the Department of External Affairs. The journal also exhibits a certain pride in the transition of the twenty-six counties into a Republic in 1949, something its youthful contributors viewed as a sign of Ireland becoming more aligned with the rest of Europe and the world.

In contrast to the earlier generation of Revivalists, the writers at Envoy were not opposed to London-based or metropolitan modernism. Rather, as Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker point out, in the battle to define a national cultural identity, the enemy was often perceived as residing within the island, rather than in imperialist Britain:

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The Irish 'little magazines' and other publications friendly to literary innovation and the making of a new national culture set themselves less against British domination than against a repressive hegemonic culture and morality in Ireland. The battle here is more an internal one, between an avant-gardist impulse or the more moderate call for a more liberal artistic and cultural regime, which could claim W.B. Yeats, James Joyce, and Beckett as its own, and an isolationist and conservative national ideology opposed to the modern or new on essentially moralizing grounds.

Less politically minded than its long running contemporary, *The Bell*, Envoy was, in the opinion of Brian Fallon, "less 'public-spirited' but probably better adjusted to the tone and mentality of the Dublin literary cliques of the day." Both the entrenched conservative values of Irish society and the belligerent literary cliques that gathered in various Dublin bars during the 1950s are aptly described by Anthony Cronin in his essay on the decade of the 1950s for *Magnum Ireland*:

John Ryan founded a literary magazine, Envoy, whose headquarters were McDaid's 'Lounge Bar' in Henry Street, already a pub where confluences, bohemian, anarchist and déclassé met. Writers were gathered there, including Patrick Kavanagh, Myles na Gopaleen, Brendan Behan, myself. Here, with the aid of alcohol, irreverence and irony, pieties and conformism, including literary conformism, could be kept at bay. Though a fashion has grown up of speaking as if Ireland in the 1950s had fallen under the twin

tyrannies of De Valera and the Church, neither Catholicism nor patriotism, some of us felt, were particularly the enemy. The enemy, thought those of us who dissented, was the Irish people, who had somehow brought this down, this suffocating conformity and stasis, sometimes even masquerading as liberalism and progress, upon themselves.

Tom Clyde believes that the magazine “would have had much greater impact had it been quarterly and so needed less ‘padding’; the economics would also have been much easier, as is acknowledged in the closing editorial.” Shovlin captures the impact of this little magazine when he summed up his review of *Envoy* thus: “despite the journals’ undoubted self-pity and aggression, in its greater European outlook, its commitment to the visual arts, and its invigoration of the post-war Irish cultural scene as a stagnant time, it remains a brave and memorial project.”

Further Reading

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