

The 10th Annual

FRANK O'CONNOR INTERNATIONAL SHORT STORY FESTIVAL 2009

*W*elcome. Cork is the place to come for the world's oldest, annual, dedicated, short story festival now in its tenth year. In Cork we have a special love of the short story because of our city and county's association with so many masters of the form including Daniel Corkery, Sean O'Faolain, Frank O'Connor, Elizabeth Bowen and William Trevor. The Munster Literature Centre, with the crucial help of funding from Cork City Council is delighted to be able to raise our city's profile in the world through this festival and also through the annual Cork City-Frank O'Connor Short Story Award, the richest literary prize for the form which is now in its fifth year.

Since the festival began we have featured modern masters from at home and abroad including the likes of Segun Afolabi, Cónal Creedon, Nisha da Cunha, Anne Enright, Richard Ford, Alasdair Gray, Bret Anthony Johnston, Miranda July, Claire Keegan, Etgar Keret, Jhumpa Lahiri, James Lasdun, Mary Leland, Eugene McCabe, Mike McCormick, Bernard MacLaverty, David Marcus, David Means, Rebecca Miller, Rick Moody, Eilis Ní Dhuibhne, Julia O'Faolain, James Plunkett, Dan Rhodes, Ludmila Ulitskaya, Samrat Upadhyay, William Wall, Yiyun Li Wang Zhousheng and many others.

This year, we have five continents represented in our international lineup. We welcome back writers who have appeared before, not only former O'Connor Award shortlistees such as Grimshaw and O Ceallaigh, but writers such as Titley and Doyle who participated in our very first festival in 2000.

We will have workshops on getting started on the short story, and an advanced workshop for writers already published.

We will present the Sean O'Faolain Prize and the Cork City-Frank O'Connor Short Story Award.

Aside from all the readings, discussions, workshops and awards there's always plenty of crack with the after event socialising over a pint at the festival club with live music and more readings.

Patrick Cotter
Director, The Munster Literature Centre
www.munsterlit.ie

Grant Aided by
Cork City Council



Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí

Jon Boilard

Reading Saturday 19th September 11pm

Workshop Saturday 19th September 10am



from
Small Deaths

I drive drunk and the streets of the Tenderloin District are black as cats. Early bird transvestite hookers wave. The puzzle of unlit alleys smells like ass. The curb rises up and punctures the rusted underbelly of my El Camino. So I park there. Then a yellow cab almost runs me down. Then a bouncer turns me away with the unconditional shove reserved for unwelcome people. Then I make it to the bar in the next place without even catching the name. Maybe on the corner of Leavenworth. I sit on a stool next to a guy who looks like Willie Nelson. He tells me to stop eyeballing him. A shot of Bushmills chases a pint of Guinness chases a Jack & Coke. I say some things and the Mexican prick pouring drinks says he's heard enough out of me. Then I'm outside where the rain is gone but the fog is a familiar old blanket.

Then they buzz me in and look me up and down, trying to figure out if I'm a cop of some kind. The girl says something to the man in Chinese and he disappears and she says, Okay. She tells me what we can do and how much it will cost. She has a pretty face but teeth like corn nuts.

Her name is Ruby.

Back there, I say.

No no never back there.

Fine.

Okay you pay now.

I give her three twenties. She leaves and comes back with change, takes me to a room.

Jon Boilard was born and raised in Western New England. He has been living and writing in the San Francisco area since 1986. His stories have been published in literary journals in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Asia. One was nominated for a Pushcart Prize, another won the Sean O'Faolain Award and several others have earned individual small press honors. His stories have been published widely in the United States and in *Southword* and *the Stinging Fly* on this side of the Atlantic. www.jonboilard.com

"Jon Boilard's stories unfold with the narrative restraint and imagistic splendor of poetry. Spare and bittersweet and lovely."

- Wendy Hagenmaier,
Editor, *Zoetrope*

"Jon Boilard mixes style and substance perfectly. His crisp, unadorned prose style blends well with his sharp vision of the contemporary world; its streets, its back alleys, its beautifully ugly characters. Plus he laces his writing with humour, making his work human and accessible."

- Matthew Firth, Editor, *Front&Centre*

"Jon Boilard writes with the intensity of Barry Gifford and the heart of Raymond Carver, yet he tells stories that are entirely his own. This is moving and impressive work—as lyrical as it is powerful, as beautiful as it is captivating. I'm an ardent, almost rabid fan."

- Bret Anthony Johnston
Author, *Corpus Christi*

Michael J. Farrell

Reading Wednesday 16th September 8pm



from
Life in the Universe

Michael J. Farrell was born in 1935 and grew up in County Longford not far from the Shannon. This is his first collection of stories. One reason it has taken so long is because he was a priest for some years, during which time he edited the annual literary reviews, *Everyman* and *Aquarius* (he has just edited a book of the highlights from these, *Creative Commotion*, for the Liffey Press). Farrell spent his middle years in the practice of journalism in the USA where he was an editor at the National Catholic Reporter. He also edited and contributed to books, while reviewing others for, among many, the Los Angeles Times. His novel *Papabile* won the Thorpe Menn Award in 1998. Since retiring to East Galway in 2003, his stories have appeared in *Let's Be Alone Together* (The Stinging Fly Press, 2008) and *The Faber Book of Best New Irish Short Stories*, 2006-2007, while another was runner-up for the RTE Francis McManus Award in 2006.

'This is a great collection. The stories surprise, and are full of surprises. They are funny, provocative, clever, charming, and quite brilliantly written.'
—Roddy Doyle

Write what you know, they used to say at the writers' group. But how was a writer to know what he knew? He wrote about the UFO until it became unreal and no longer existed. Mylie told him yarns about a dead hangman between the wars and about the shenanigans of the LDF during the Emergency. He wrote about a local saint who had a stained-glass window in the church in Church Street, until Mylie informed him the saint had been discontinued in a Vatican purge. That's ironic for sure, Clarence mused, but not a bit funny. Each time he ran out of ideas he would hear the drummer boy, pa rum pa pum pum on his drum. It's not memory remembers, he'd then say to himself, it's imagination.

He arose every morning at dawn. He wrote to Brona that getting up was no longer a problem.

He read in a book that what you look at hard enough will look back at you. The more he wrote about Brona, the more she looked back at him. Gradually he brought her to life until she eventually talked to him—she and the babies, whose names were Una and Ebana, were gone a year and more.

Petina Gappah

Shortlisted for the Cork City - Frank O'Connor Award

Interview Thursday 17th September 4pm

Reading Thursday 17th September 9pm



from
An Elegy for Easterly

In the golden triangle your children speak only English, English sentences that all begin 'Mummy I want...', 'Mummy can you buy me...', 'Mummy where is daddy?' Daddy is often not there, he is out doing the deals and playing the golf that ensures that you continue to live in the golden triangle. You say this to the children, but your son is old enough to know that golf is not played in the pitch blackness of the night. You stop his questions with a shout. He turns and locks himself in his room.

You breathe out your remorse at yelling at your son but you cannot tell him the truth. That you share your husband with another woman.

Imbadiki, she is called. That is not her real name; that only means she inhabits the small house while you live in the big one in the heart of the golden triangle. Her name is Sophia. She is twenty-five years younger than your husband. You know this because you had your husband followed. Not that he even tried to hide it. No man can be expected to be faithful, he has said often enough. It is not nature's intention. He said the same thing to you when you met in secret away from the eyes of his first wife.

And as you gasped beneath him, above him and beside him, as he put his hands on your haunches and drew you to him, you agreed, no man could be expected to be faithful, yes, you said, oh yes, you said, just like that, you said, right there. You are fifteen years younger than he is, and your wife before you was five years younger than he was. You go to the gym, where you have a girl who plucks the hair out of your eyebrows, and the hair from under your arms, and the hair from your pubis. You pay someone to scrub your feet and to pummel you with hot stones.

Petina Gappah is a Zimbabwean writer with law degrees from Cambridge, Graz University, and the University of Zimbabwe. Her short fiction and essays have been published in eight countries. She lives with her son Kush in Geneva, where she works as counsel in an international organisation that provides legal aid on international trade law to developing countries. Her story collection, *An Elegy for Easterly* is published by Faber in April 2009. She is currently completing *The Book of Memory*, her first novel. Both books will also be published in Finland, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden. www.petinagappah.com

"More and more I have come to admire resilience," begins the epigraph, a poem by Jane Hirshfield. Yet sometimes laughter is the only form of resilience Petina Gappah's characters can manage, and it is the frequent humour in these stories that makes them remarkable, even if their outcomes can be tragic. Often satirical, occasionally lyrical, they are a delight."

- *The Observer*

"Though Gappah's characters run the gamut of class from super-wealthy to destitute, she is at her best in her depiction of ordinary people, their ambitions and dreams of a better life even as everything around them crumbles. Through humour and compassion, she depicts that most quintessential of African characteristics: the ability to laugh at life, for fear of crying."

- *The Guardian*

Extract from interview on:

<http://www.african-writing.com/seven/petina-gappah.htm>

AW: Thinking back now, was there a moment in the middle of a certain writing when you knew you were a writer? What was that story in which you found your voice as it were?

PG: I would say that moment came in March 2007, at the Caine Prize workshop at Crater Lake. I was working on a story, *An Elegy for Easterly*, that I knew broke every rule about point of view and the short story, etc, but I also knew that I would have to write it that way, or not at all. I imagined the story as a film where the camera jerked and moved and shifted the viewer's perspective in startling ways. I was not at all sure that it would work, but I just knew that I had to write it that way. When my turn came to read to the others, I read a passage, written in the third person plural, that I had been particularly nervous about. There was this moment after I finished, where time sort of stopped, and in that moment was this stunned silence before anyone said anything, and in that moment, I knew that my instincts had been right. That moment after my reading, was the beginning of self-belief.

AW: Do you find yourself drawn to certain subject matters and territories? Zimbabwe and political ineptitude for instance? The Martha Mupengos [*An Elegy for Easterly*] of the world? If we define 'vision' in these narrow terms, could you plead guilty to having it? How would you define the territory of your current engagement and passions?

PG: I have been writing about Zimbabwe and Zimbabweans because it is the subject closest to me at the moment, I have been moving between rage and helplessness as I have watched my country implode. My stories were my small way of saying something that was important to me about Zimbabwe. The novel I am currently writing is also set in Zimbabwe, but the Zimbabwe of the recent past, while my next novel takes in the relationship of Africa with the world. I can't say more, or else I will jinx it. I am also planning a series of stories set in Geneva. I don't know that there is any broad thing or theme linking all these written and un-

written works. Paul Auster, one of my favourite writers, grapples with questions of identity through characters who are usually adrift in their societies - outsiders looking in.

I am not sure that any of my characters have such a common bond as yet. If there is one question I try to deal with in my writing, it would be the same question I grapple with in my life, namely, how to deal with loneliness, which is the essence of being human, loneliness which leads to a need to be rooted, and that yearning for rootedness that sometimes leads to the most sublime life-altering moments - having a baby, falling in love; or to the most catastrophic results - love affairs that end horribly, friendships that harden into enmity, family relationships that become ugly and twisted. Since you are so insistent that I find a broader vision, let me put it as broadly as this: I am trying to make sense of what it means to be us, what it means to be - as Ian McEwan said in a recent interview, "untrustworthy, venal, sweet, lovely humans".

AW: Are you a natural humorist? Is the process of writing humorously felicity or grief for you? Do the words come out with the right sauce of humour? Or do you have to agonize over your pages to ensure that your readers can fly through them?

PG: I think the world is pretty funny, so it takes no effort for me to write things that I think will make people laugh. My favourite story, *The Mupandawana Dancing Champion*, won a Zimbabwean award for comic-writing, and I must say that achievement will probably mean more to me than any other. If I truly had the courage of my convictions, I would be a full-blown comic novelist. Actually, make that a stand-up comedian. But the thing about comedy is that it is so individual, it is almost impossible to find a formula that can make everyone laugh. I recognise my limitations as a humorist: all I can do, in a story like *The Mupandawana Dancing Champion*, is write what I think is funny, and if others respond, that is brilliant. Clearly, it would be foolish to expect that everyone laugh, it is simply not possible. I had a gotcha! moment when I did a recording at the Guardian in mid-January. I read *The Mupandawana Dancing Champion* for their podcast series, and as I was reading, I could hear the sound engineer chuckling in the background. It was a wonderful feeling.

Charlotte Grimshaw

Shortlisted for the Cork City - Frank O'Connor Award

Reading Friday 18th September 9pm



Charlotte Grimshaw is a fiction writer. Her first novel was described as 'New Zealand noir,' and her later books continue to draw from a range of genres and dramatic situations. Grimshaw has contributed short fiction to anthologies, was awarded the 2006 Bank of New Zealand Katherine Mansfield Award, and published her first short story collection in 2007. Titled *Opportunity*, this collection was short-listed for the world's richest short fiction prize, the Cork City - Frank O'Connor Short Story Award. She is short-listed again this year for her collection *Singularity*.

"atmospheric, intelligent, and seductively strange... leads you into a slow-burning nightmare."

- Sarah Dunant

Charlotte Grimshaw's *Opportunity* is one of the most gripping books of short stories I've ever read...Grimshaw's imagination and vision is astonishing. Her prose is spare and amazingly expressive. *Opportunity* is a book to read compulsively and re-read for its subtlety, penetration and sheer brilliance. Writers' Radio, Radio Adelaide

A writer with impressive command of style and subject...Do take the opportunity to read *Opportunity*. It's riddling and rewarding. Appreciate its skill. Acknowledge its depth. *The New Zealand Herald*

from

Singularity

Karen slept restlessly beside him. He was hot and uncomfortable, scratchy with sunburn and dry-mouthed from the wine. He dozed. Everything was out of alignment, jagged, spoiled. Something was breaking up inside him. He had lost faith or conviction; a force had been unleashed that would break up everything they had. Karen believed passionately in the family. She thought everything was fine; she couldn't see it coming, but it was coming, whatever it was. The falling apart, the breaking down. The fearful, disjointed thoughts ran through his head until he slept.

He woke later and heard the gate creak open next door. He went through to the connecting room and found Elke in her togs, about to get into the pool. She looked up at him with a blank, hard stare, as though they had discussed this already and agreed. He couldn't be bothered speaking.

She slid into the water, and he followed her, swimming in his boxer shorts. They swam without talking, in the cool silence. The spiky plants hung over the water, making shadows like spears. There were strong scents of tropical flowers and damp earth. The water danced and shimmered in the dim lights from the hotel corridor. The cool streams swirled around his body. He thought of all the night hours he'd spent with the strange little girl; her silence that seemed to hold in it understanding, her self-contained, unchild-like ways.

She swam close and put her hands on his shoulders. She moved her thighs slowly. He felt her breath on his face. He closed his eyes and they floated in the silence. He lifted up her hard little body and set her down with a bump on the edge of the pool. He got out and pushed her ahead of him into the room. He put a towel on her and dried her off, then turned away while she put her pyjamas on. He tucked her into bed.

'Don't tell Karen we did this.'

She looked up at him.

'I mean... ' He sighed and rubbed his hands over his face. The water was cold on his shoulders, trickling down his back. He was suddenly chilled. 'Don't tell Karen I let you swim in the pool.'

The Prize

by Charlotte Griomshaw

first published in the New Zealand Listener November 2007

Cork diary
September 18-19

I set off from Auckland on flights paid for by the The Munster Literature Centre: Sydney-Bangkok-London, no stopover. On to Cork the next day. Flying non-stop you enter that zone outside time: a kind of trance sets in.

My sister, who lives in Queen's Park, picks me up at Heathrow. Outside, familiar grey, dreamy English light. London full of green leaves, autumn not set in yet.

My sister has house guests. She tells me she thinks one of them is going insane. In the night I wake up: jet lag. I decide to take a sleeping pill. After taking it I hear rustling outside my door. I remember the insane person. But I've taken a pill. How will I fight him off? This is alarming, also hilarious. It strikes me that in every situation I have two reactions, one "pure", the other detached, standing aside, often laughing – this detached part is the source of writing. Everything goes black.

September 20

Ireland is said to be awash with euros. The Aer Lingus plane is certainly the newest and flashiest I've been on in hours. The Irish air hostesses both look like my beloved sister. I've never been to Ireland before, but, genetically speaking, I am on my way home.

Cork is small and pretty, built along the banks of the River Lee. A city with a strong literary tradition – its founding by St Finbarre was an offshoot of monasticism, Ireland's first literary culture. Cork was the home of Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser. From *The Faerie Queene: The spreading Lee, that like an island fayre, Encloseth Cork with its divided flood.*

Frank O'Connor was born in Cork in 1903. His large body of work includes novels, literary criticism and biography, but he's best known for his short stories. The Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, for which my collection, *Opportunity*, has been shortlisted, is the richest prize for a collection in the world, with an award of 35,000 euros. There are five other finalists: Miranda July and Manuel Munoz, from the US; Olaf Olafsson of Iceland; Simon Robson from the UK; and Etgar Keret of Israel.

Checked into the Hotel Metropole: old and grand, with a view over the rooftops. At 8.00pm, on the way to the Triskel Arts Centre for my reading, I noted that there was no one about. "Don't worry," I was told, "we're on Irish time." Sure enough, the place was full in the end. Local custom dictates that everything runs 20 minutes late. Already I was warming to the gentlemanly pace of the Irish, their spontaneity and humour, their seriousness about the arts.

The reading over, we repaired to the Metropole, a bar where I was to spend each evening with Patrick Cotter, a poet and head of the Munster Literature Centre; Kevin Barry, a Dublin writer; and Gerry Murphy, a Cork poet, along with the shortlisted writers, and many others. There was talk about the fact that Alice Munro and David Malouf, who had been on the long list, were not on the shortlist. Patrick Cotter was at pains to say that the prize was for an individual collection, not a body of work. As a fan of Alice Munro, I had wanted her to be on the short list so that I could meet her.

September 21

A power failure at the Arts Centre. Manuel Muñoz was obliged to read in an alleyway. We sat in a long line of chairs, as if on a bus. His reading was excellent; afterwards he spoke about his childhood as the son of impoverished Californian fruit pickers. He had been a cherished youngest child, sweetly naive. At a university enrolment fair, he approached the Harvard stand, expecting no obstacle. Asked what school he'd been to, he was firmly directed elsewhere. But the woman at the Columbia stand overheard him being sent packing and said, "I'll get you a Columbia application, and a Harvard one too."

He graduated from Harvard. A clever, charming person and a serious writer, I thought. He is gay. His parents can't read his writing in English. As a child, he told me later, he worked laying out grapes for drying into raisins. "Sun-Maid," I said, remembering my school lunches. "That's right," he said. "I lived by the Sun-Maid plant." Years ago, little Manuel Muñoz laboured under the Californian sun, making my play-lunch snacks.

More drinks. Gerry Murphy, the poet, is the most sharp and entertaining company. Once he had a stalker, he tells me, who followed him about quoting his poems. He tells me stories about a trip some Irish poets made to India (this becomes known as "the Bombay Débauché".) A glitch meant he had to share a bed with Patrick Cotter. Patrick's iPod made little chinging sounds all through the night. When Patrick woke up screaming, Gerry leapt from the bed shouting, "I've done nothing!"

At 8.30pm, Miranda July reads with Etgar Keret. July's performance is fey, all "atmosphere". Keret reads a child's-eye story about a piggy bank. Possibly because of jet-lag, neither has the clarity of Muñoz. "None of what I write is conscious," Keret says. July firmly agrees with this. I find this a puzzling notion. Beside me, Gerry Murphy seems to radiate mirth. Dangerous company, the Irish. I am spending a lot of time laughing.

Patrick Cotter warns us that Eileen Battersby will be writing in the *Irish Times* the next day about the Frank O'Connor shortlist. She is famously literary, savage and critical. Prepare to die, Patrick says.

September 22

In Cork they paint their houses vibrant colours. It's picturesque up the back of the town, with the narrow, colourful streets and stone walls. I explored, avoiding the *Irish Times*. In the end I didn't need to: everyone on the shortlist got a right kicking except for me and the Icelander: "None is inspiring except Grimshaw and Olafsson."

Olafsson read that evening, a spare, wintry Scandinavian tale. Then Simon Robson: a very British story about school and a disabled boy. Later, two of the awards judges: American Rick Moody, whose story

about dementia had every sentence beginning with "She forgot . . ." (This kept him going for a long time; you can imagine how many things a dementia patient forgets); and another judge, Segun Afolabi, read a striking, grim tale.

Afterwards Afolabi approached me and said intensely, "I wanted to tell you how much I loved your stories. I wanted to make sure I told you this." And so I learned that I hadn't won. Because, I immediately reasoned, he wouldn't have needed to tell me this if I'd got the prize.

September 23

So, although it was a large and overwhelming occasion, I didn't actually feel suspense. Before it, I amused myself by telling Afolabi that he'd spilled the beans. He looked disconcerted. The Lord Mayor of Cork spoke. Images of the writers were projected, one by one, onto a vast screen, reading from their collection. There was a brilliant short film of O'Connor's *The Drunkard*. And then the prize was announced. Since I was out, I was hoping for Muñoz, but the winner was Miranda July.

Then back to the bar, and a last night. July – a size zero, Joan Didion-style character – refused champagne and even fizzy water (too exciting for her system) and celebrated with still water.

Finally, late, fond farewells. Everything had been generously laid on. We'd been given a grand time. And as for the other shortlisted writers: being thrown together in that way was fascinating. Perhaps it was a version of Stockholm Syndrome, but I'd ended up liking them very much.

Jack Harte

Reading Thursday 17th September 7pm



Jack Harte was born in Co Sligo and lives in Dublin. Most recent of his three story collections is *From Under Gogol's Nose* (2004), which also appeared in Russian, Hindi, and Bulgarian. His novel, *In the Wake of the Bagger*, was selected for Des Kenny's guidebook, *101 Irish Books you Must Read*. He is chairperson of the Irish Writers' Centre.

"Harte is a genuine master, moving from tales that recall Aesop and La Fontaine to the Latin American surrealists. ..(He)demonstrates how the story may reach into the deepest fortresses of the human soul. Here is an Ancient Mariner taking the reader by the ear and leading him into strange territories where he suddenly recognises himself and is astounded. We are all called to be witnesses – to love, pain, the horrors of war, the failure of the imagination."

- *The Irish Independent*

from
From Under Gogol's Nose

I had an affair many years ago with a girl called Deirdre. It was one of those sultry affairs, passionate but full of unease and uncertainty. One evening I was waiting for Deirdre in a coffee shop on the North Circular Road just a few streets from the Psychiatric Hospital where she worked. It was the same place in which we usually met. In fact our evenings together were entirely predictable, in an unpredictable sort of way; it was as if we were acting out a drama for which the scenario had been written already, yet each performance, being live, generated its own tensions and its own suspense – hence that feeling of uncertainty I mentioned. As a man of the world, you will understand exactly what I mean. You too have often been racked by the same dilemma: Will she? Won't she? At my place? At hers? In the end she always did, but not until I was stretched to a fibre with expectancy. And yet she wasn't the tantalising type, definitely not that type. I think her uncertainty may have been the result of an inward struggle against the voluptuousness of her own nature. The struggle was pointless, as she always came to realise, eventually, thankfully.

But his particular evening was to be different, very different. I waited for her in that deserted café, sitting among formica tables under garish Italian tourist-posters, breathing-in the steamy odour of pasta, planning my seduction strategy, indulging in lustful thoughts.

When she arrived I was immediately struck by the seriousness of her expression: her face was slightly drawn, her eyes meditative. It was disconcerting. Her habitual mood was one of gaiety and joy; she was almost profligate in the diffusion of her emotional warmth. Furthermore, her mood was buoyant; never before had I seen that bright face of hers totally submerged in the gloom of the moment. What could be the matter?

Liesl Jacobs

Reading Thursday 17th September 9pm



Liesl Jobson is a South African writer. She won the 2005 POWA Women's Writing Poetry Competition, and her collection of prose poems and flash fiction, *100 Papers* (Botso, 2008) received the 2006 Ernst van Heerden Creative Writing Award from the University of the Witwatersrand, where she graduated from the MA (Creative Writing) programme with distinction. She works as a journalist for the South African daily literary website, *BOOK SA*, and edits the South African domain of Poetry International. She plays bassoon and contrabassoon when there is nobody else to do so.

"Reading *100 Papers* is like examining a hundred gemstones: each piece is clean-cut, polished, and glitters. ... [Liesl Jobson] writes with an intensity which takes one to the edge of reason, where the real questioning begins and definite answers are hard to find."

- *Flash: The International Short-Short Story Magazine*

"Jobson's *100 Papers* is a visceral and voyeuristic anthology of ordinary moments exposed, laid bare and magnified into engrossing prose poems and microfiction—deeply South African flashes of life, seconds of inspired clarity breaking through the commonplace... all created from finely considered observations, the hundred papers contain a seed of quiet optimism."

- *New Contrast*

from
100 Papers

Halfway through a wilted radish that burns my tongue and withers my resolve, the penny drops through the slot of the divine fantabular. Picky eaters all over the diner regain their senses, call for management and complain about the troops of mediocrity blooming on every spoon.

Halfway through a conversation with Mr Grunt, I see under a lettuce frond the floor of my heart, replicated in the patterned leaf, a bind and grump, bump and grind, and when that mediocre management comes calling, they ask about my yearning for yams. There is no Yum, no mum, no maybe no more. No oh ho? No ho ho, no yes please, no no. So?

Halfway home through the eve of my fortieth, lust gusts up through my ovaries, whistling woohoo and yeehi and whyevernot? So I dial Mr Yum and call up Miss Knot. They swing me from the ceiling tree, manage my fetish, backside, backslided, praying and pricking. No bump, but a bang, no grind but a gang, they floor me and thaw me, they more and more me.

Halfway through the fight of the night, Mr Grim, Mr Gaunt, Mr Glum all take flight. Bring your carrots and cucumbers, your beans and your marrow. Drop your pennies, drop my panties, under-rod your jockeys, boy. They say, Salad days are over; we've another restaurant to run, so eat out or suck up, swallow or spit;

get a fresh dish for loopy fruit, and do remember to pop your pills.

Halfway to bed through a post-party sigh I say, Stay Mr Yum.

Don't go yet Miss Knot. It's that fired up the tired time with my backside roped tender, radishes showing, cherry still glowing. Rise up for the feast, squeeze the orange, turf dead ducks. I say, Spoon me, don't spleen me, it's time for the fill up, no foul up, nor fuck up, just eat me and please me, knead me, please need me.

Shih-Li Kow

Shortlisted for the Cork City - Frank O'Connor Award
Reading Thursday 17th September 7pm



Shih-Li Kow was born in Kuala Lumpur and was educated for the most part in schools in Malaysia. Her stories have been published in the anthologies, *News from Home* and *Silverfish New Writing 7*. Shih-Li Kow holds a degree in chemical engineering and worked as an industrial engineer in a multinational consumer products company for more than ten years. She is currently in retail. She resides in Kuala Lumpur with her extended family and son, Jack.

“Ripples demonstrates Kow’s uncanny ability to channel the voices of a large number of characters, even those whose lives are far removed, by age, sex and circumstances, from her own life-experience. The best pieces in the collection display Kow as an intelligent and subtle short story writer, with a firm grip on her craft. She is an excellent prose stylist, and there’s musicality in her writing that makes it seem effortless.”

— Sharon Bakar, *Sunday Star*

... If you were getting tired of fiction, this is the place to have your faith renewed in the beauty and the terror of the imaginary.

Amir Muhammad, *The Malay Mail*

from
Ripples & Other Stories

Grandma Pathy swallowed a cat, whole, yesterday. It was a black and grey tabby with gold flecked green eyes. She had picked it up by the tail and opened her mouth to the sky like a well. Her jaw extended, like a pulled out drawer, and the cat went in head first, sliding down her gullet into her belly. The tip of the tail slipped between her lips like the last bit of rope unravelled by a bucket tumbling into a well.

Her retractable jaw came back in, settling into her jowls as her features rearranged themselves into the familiar shape of a slightly deflated balloon. The look of perpetual surprise returned to her face. Red knew that Grandman Pathy’s eyebrows froze high on her forehead, not from the many incredulities she bore witness to but from a habit of trying to lift her spectacles further up her nose without touching them. Her hands were always busy; in flour, in earth or with needle and thread.

A burp came up as the tabby displaced a volume of air from Grandma Pathy’s belly. With a sibilant sip of breath, her lips closed again. She sighed in satisfaction and rubbed her hands down her pendulous breasts to the many folds of her stomach.

“Aaah, Red honey, that was so very good,” she smiled. Her voice rasped like skin rubbing on skin. She stroked Red’s head, affectionately scratching a finger behind his ear.

from
The Silverfish Blog

I had just left the office when Patrick Cotter, Director of The Munster Literature Centre, called on Monday. Phek Chin took the call and politely told the gentleman that I could not be contacted because I had already gone home. Gone home? It is only eleven o'clock here, he said. Whereupon, Phek Chin inquired where he was calling from. Ireland! And ... He was just calling to tell Mr Raman Krishnan that his writer, Shih-Li Kow, has been short-listed for the Frank O'Connor award!

The silence that followed must have been deafening. Phek Chin was petrified. She was speechless. She was afraid to say anything lest she sounded like a blithering idiot. (Oi!!! she protests to me, loudly.) But he assured her that it was a perfectly normal reaction and that he had been confronted by it several times before. He made her promise to tell me about it, as soon as possible, and gave her his email.

She says she was still frozen in shock for a while after she put down the phone, not knowing what to do or think. Finally, after recovering some of her senses, she called my house (I was not there yet as I had some errands to run), then my wife's mobile and my house again, and managed to leave a message for me. Then, when I called her it was my turn to be gob-smacked.

Apparently, Shih-Li came in a while later that evening and Phek Chin made her sit down before telling her. Are you sure? It can't be, lah. Maybe it is a hoax, Aiyoh, I am going to pengsan ... and so on and so

forth. Anyway, Phek Chin and I walked around the whole day, the next day, grinning from ear to ear, as if we had been smoking something. I cannot begin to imagine what Shih-Li must feel, but we are so incredibly happy for her.

I first met Shih-Li almost three years ago at the third Silverfish Writing Programme. News from Home was published about one year after she finished the Programme, and Ripples, another year later. She is unpretentious, she is level-headed, and she is prolific -- such a wonderful writer to work with. As I worked on Ripples, I felt that her work was very good -- a sort of prize-winning good, if you know what I mean -- and I was determined to nominate her for an award, any award. But still, when I received the news that she was short-listed for the Frank O'Connor (I mean the Frank O'Conner), it left me in a state of shock, in a daze -- though in a nice way.

Well, now she has to be in Cork, Ireland on the 20th of September for the awards presentation at the end of the Frank O'Connor Short Story Festival, which starts on the 16th of that month. Win or lose, it does not matter any more. She has already won. Malaysian writing has already won. Malaysian readers have won.

Let us bask in the warmth for a while more, then we shall resume prowling the streets for more hidden gems that we can polish. Congratulations again, Shih-Li Kow. You have blazed the trail.

Raman Krishnan
Publisher
Silverfish Books
Malaysia.

Mary Morrissey

Reading Friday 18th September 9pm
Workshop Saturday 19th 11am



from
A Lazy Eye

Mary Morrissey is the author of two novels, *Mother of Pearl* and *The Pretender* and a collection of short stories, *A Lazy Eye*. She has recently completed a third novel called *The Family Silver*, based on the life of Sean O'Casey sister's Bella and is at work on a second collection of linked short stories, tentatively titled *Diaspora*.

She works as a journalist and teacher of creative writing, most recently as the Jenny McKean Moore Writer in Washington at George Washington University.

"Assured and deliberate, these 15 sharp, crafted stories explore the painful inner world of the hurt and the vulnerable. Several chronicle the quiet revenges perpetrated by the invisible - who, while suffering in silence, are not totally passive. Morrissey is a calm, intelligent writer whose elegant prose is brilliantly served by understatement. The guilty remain oblivious of their crimes, while the innocent are haunted by blamelessness. A young babysitter finds her kindness to a couple about to have their second child cruelly ridiculed; revenge is exacted in an act of sudden violence. Making a strange pact with God, a distraught daughter trades another patient's life in exchange for her father. Uncompromising, brutally honest and funny, these are blackly exciting, human tales from an original voice."

© Eileen Battersby 1996 The Irish Times

She didn't understand, really. She had seen the battle-scarred streets of the old town. There were tattered flags and banners still hanging from the porticoes and drapes across balconies with great black exclamations on them, or sometimes a clenched fist. On gable walls, once loud murals faded away into muteness under the sun's unflinching gaze. There were rubble-strewn gaps in the streets. Stray bricks nestled in the dry gutters. Sometimes Judith imagined she could get the faint whiff of something charred still smouldering away quietly. But the politics of it were beyond her. She found she had developed a wilful immunity to the low-lying misery around her. And yet, when she looked into Pacheas's eyes that morning she saw for an instant a core of hunger there that she couldn't ignore. It was like looking at pictures of starving refugees. There was a kind of hollow, innocent blamefulness there that tugged at her heart and made her feel both guilty and powerless, a seductive combination.

She abandoned her wariness.

Nuala Ní Chonchúir

Book Launch Friday 18th September 4pm



Nuala Ní Chonchúir lives in Galway. Her third short fiction collection, *Nude*, will be published by Salt in September 2009 and launched at this festival; her poetry pamphlet *Portrait of the Artist with a Red Car* will be published by Templar Poetry in October 2009. Nuala was chosen by *The Irish Times* as a writer to watch in 2009; she has won many short fiction prizes including the Cúirt New Writing Prize, RTÉ radio's Francis MacManus Award, the inaugural Jonathan Swift Award and the Cecil Day Lewis Award. She was recently shortlisted for the European Prize for Literature. www.nualanichonchuir.com

'Nakedness rather than sex is the theme of Nuala Ní Chonchúir's *Nude*, nakedness and hiding linked like natural opposites, the delicacy of encounters and then the blunt proposition, the subterfuge and the revelation. Over it all is an elegant simplicity of language, a quilt of metaphor. Art and beauty are the threads that hold it together and ravel the lives of her characters. A beautiful collection of stories about beauty.'

- William Wall, author of Man Booker longlisted novel, *This Is The Country*

from
Nude

I knew Dana was dead, as surely as I knew anything. And although I had weaned myself off the idea of her – of us – I felt panicked at the thought of never seeing her again. I sat down, my mind pulling backwards to Dana and our pact: when one of us died, we had said, the light bulbs in the other's house would blow. All of them, spectacularly. We had made this deal as twelve-year-olds, cooped in the hut we had built in her garden, high on each other's salt and clay smell, our mouths raw from a long 'session'.

'Are you up for a session?' Dana would say, standing at my parents' hall door; I would nod and follow her to the hut. There we would huddle and kiss, locking lips and licking the insides of each others mouths, stopping and starting to perfect some flick or linger of the tongue. Dana made it clear, after each session, that we were not boyfriend-girlfriend.

'It's practice,' she would say, 'for when we meet someone to love.'

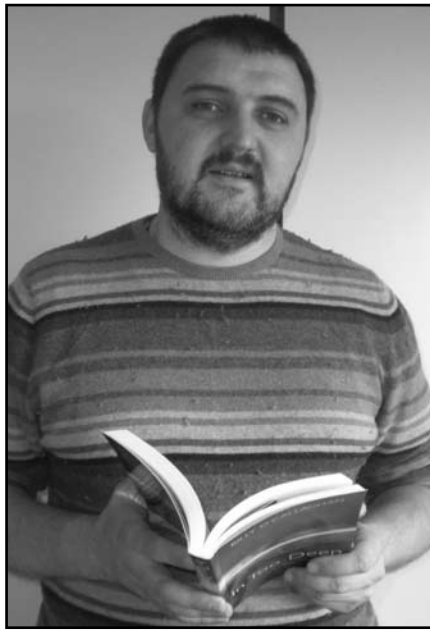
Dana was an adult-in-waiting, impatient to slough off her child's skin and become a real person; I followed behind.

But I don't want to get quagmired in childhood memories; whole seasons and geographies are rearranged in my head, with the truth a wispish version of itself. Now she is dead and I would rather talk about Dana as I knew her last; the Dana who became my lover



Billy O'Callaghan

Reading Friday 18th September 7pm



from
In Too Deep

He slept for an hour, maybe two, a tossed, broken sort of sleep that was about as good as it got for him anymore. Spokes of pale light made it through the window from the poolside down below, and he lay back in the strange hotel bed and wondered how many lovers had held one another under these sheets. Images flickered through his mind, but they were nothing new, the edges of their terror tempered by familiarity. He knew what was real and what was not, because what was real was worse.

It was wrong to pray for death; he knew that without having to be told. In the hospital, they had tried to have a chaplain speak with him, hoping that something good might come of it, but what could any priest or rabbi have said that would make things better? The chaplain had been a young man of probably mid- to late-twenties, tall and stoop-shouldered, unaccountably nervous in his mannerisms. He had spoken in a slightly rote way about God's reasons being a mystery, but his voice was reedy and full of grace notes, and a lot of what he said felt like lip service. 'Faith is easier to keep when the hand being dealt is a pat one,' he said, just before he left, which was about the only thing really worth saving from his twenty-minute visit.

Billy O'Callaghan is from Cork. He has won the 2005 George Birmingham Short Story Award, the 2006 Lunch Hour Stories Prize and the 2007 Molly Keane Creative Writing Award. He has published two collections of stories with the Mercier Press, *In Exile* (2006) and *In Too Deep* (2009).

"O'Callaghan writes evocatively of a way of life that has become memory rather than reality.... he demonstrates an affinity with people and place which is tender, but never trite, and invariably rewards the reader with a surprising twist."

-*The Irish Times*

"Billy O'Callaghan's writing evokes a sense of longing for place and the familiar...His characters are rendered with a lyrical stoicism that lends dignity to all our struggles."

- Suzanne McConnell - *Bellevue Literary Review*

Philip Ó Ceallaigh

Shortlisted for the Cork City - Frank O'Connor Award

Interview Wednesday 16th 4pm

Reading Wednesday 16th September 8pm



Philip Ó Ceallaigh has lived and worked at a variety of jobs in Ireland, Spain, Russia, the United States, Kosovo and Georgia. He has lived mostly in Bucharest since 2000 where among other things he translates English subtitles for Romanian films. He has won the Glen Dimplex Award and the Rooney Prize for his first short story collection *Notes from A Turkish Whorehouse* which was also shortlisted for the Frank O'Connor Award in 2006. He has been shortlisted again in this year for his second collection *The Pleasant Light of Day*.

"These stories are vivid and visceral, clever and affecting, sometimes quite funny, sometimes anarchic, but never less than admirable for the brimming confidence of their composition."

- Eve Patten, *The Irish Times*

"When Philip Ó Ceallaigh's first collection of stories burst on the reading public, it had a fairly electrifying effect. The likelihood was that after *Notes from a Turkish Whorehouse*, his second collection might disappoint; and a dip would have been acceptable from such a disturbingly unique voice. But *The Pleasant Light of Day* merely confirms his reputation.

That, in itself, is phenomenal: to have become a respected fixture with only two books is, to say the least, unusual." -Emer O'Kelly, *The Irish Independent*

from

The Pleasant Light of Day

A young man came to the lounge and pumped my hand. This radiant human being was so pleased to meet me that I felt ashamed, like a member of a race stunted by bitterness and negativity. He had great teeth too.

He took me into a room and we sat down and he turned on the tape recorder. He was sure I understood, it was policy. Used to be the journalist brought the tape recorder, I joked. I had none.

Well, I began, it was common knowledge around town that people were being kidnapped, in operations involving the Georgian Interior Ministry and the CIA, and had disappeared. Those that had not already been shot.

His smile was modified as he inserted the official stick up his embassy ass. He was very sorry, but if I wished to schedule an interview about security cooperation with Georgia, for some later date, he would see what he could do.

'There's a woman here in Tbilisi, three kids, who wonders where her husband is. I asked an Interior Ministry source what he was wanted for and he suggested, off the record, that I ask you.'

This did not provoke him to comment either. Nor would he say anything about the detention without charge of Georgian citizens by the Georgian state on the basis of information supplied by, and possibly requests made by, the United States. No comment on the supply of weapons and training to Georgian security forces. He wasn't prepared to comment on security matters or counter-terrorism operations. Embassy policy at this sensitive time. I asked if the sensitive time referred to the oil pipeline and he said no, the sensitivity was due to the fight against global terror. Al Qaeda was present in the Pankisi Gorge.

A subtle way of seeing

-Joseph O'Connor delights in the unusual talent on display in a short story collection

Notes from a Turkish Whorehouse, the 2005 debut collection of short stories from Philip O'Ceallaigh, garnered deservedly strong reviews and a handful of prizes. Its follow-up, *The Pleasant Light of Day*, will extend and deepen his already considerable reputation as an artist of extraordinary gifts. He is assiduous with words, a writer of craft and vision, and refreshingly so sparing with similes and self-announcing images that to read him is to be reminded of the power of plain prose to break into territories of the imagination. When he does use a metaphor, it bursts off the page. ("The hoofed beast of jealous panic ran through him.") Of the dozen stories here, perhaps 10 are so perfectly achieved and exhilaratingly confident that you feel O'Ceallaigh is developing a form all his own.

There's a focus on telling it as it is, not on saying what it's like. In "Uprooted", a story unusual for being located in his native Ireland, "Gulls quiver on the wind, swoop, rise again, wheeling in the updraught." The wind is "picking up the crashing swell at the cliffs of Inis Meáin, propelling it halfway across that island as salt rain."

In "Walking Away", a strange and compelling piece set shortly after a funeral, the narrator resists facile or inherited assumptions of the meaningful. "What foolishness, to speak of beyond, when we hardly know what we have here, on this earth, right before our eyes." What can be seen is always important in these vivid, measured stories. This is an author who looks at things carefully, annihilates the clichés. John McGahern wrote that any artist needs first a way of seeing. Philip O'Ceallaigh has one.

This is a world where sexuality is tough, a contested ground, and the comings and goings of his hungry-hearted characters rarely yield a sense of communion. And in "My Secret War" he unfolds a nightmarish vision of suburban American life: "In the evenings, after the kids are in bed, me and Martha might drink a bottle of beer on the porch, listening to the crickets. A flag flies over our tranquil lawn, for our brave men and women in the service ... Evil lies in every human heart, awaiting the faltering of our vigilance. There is no need to say much to Martha because she knows already."

A resident of Bucharest, he conjures east-European cities with shimmering precision; these metropolises of trams and urban insularities and recently vacated pedestals. But the stories that have rural settings are brilliantly achieved

too. In "High Country", a hauntingly beautiful piece, a man hikes alone into the countryside beyond a provincial town, the resulting spell of self-confrontation unfolded with such exactitude and delicacy that you feel you've walked through the same rainstorm. Revelations are few and epiphanies fewer. The trekker in the story is not quite sure of destinations but tells himself "the time patiently taken was what you offered up, trusting that the moment would come." It's a thought that often arises on the journey through this exquisite collection, for this is work that invites slow rereading, not in order to understand it, but so as to glimpse again the consolation of the world being described.

The standard is extremely high, which is one of the reasons why "The Alchemist", an only intermittently funny satire of the work of the Brazilian inspirational writer Paulo Coelho, might have been better omitted. Fish in a barrel sometimes need to be shot, but the 32-page death they receive from O'Ceallaigh comes to feel dismayingly drawn-out. There is also a slightly cluttering intertextuality, tropes from one story materialising in another. (O'Ceallaigh's first book is referenced in the opening story, with a title so thinly disguised as to demand immediate recognition.) When the playfulness works, as it sometimes does, the result is an attractive complicating of the textures of the stories, a sense that they are linked like the verses of a song or the overlapping circles of a Venn diagram. This is a writer who is pushing hard at the boundaries of the form. If it doesn't always come off, you admire his courage and purpose, his avowal that there are still things undone that words might do, in a genre that might yet come to be important for our times. "In Another Country", the longest story, and thematically a central one, is a masterpiece that earns every line of its 53 pages. The prose is graceful and poised yet supercharged with the edginess that makes the events it describes unforgettable.

All in all, this is a profoundly impressive and haunting suite of stories, remarkable for being only the second collection from an author who is already touched by greatness. In one of them, a character kneels on a riverbank, "where the water was deeper than in other places and he could see the clean stones on the riverbed". It's what O'Ceallaigh's writing achieves, a clarification, a revealing, a pointing to realities so fundamental and unchanging that most of the time they go unnoticed. He is a scintillating talent and this is work of immense strength, but also of light and elusive hopefulness.

-The Guardian, Saturday 14 March 2009

ZZ Packer

Reading Saturday 19th September 9pm



ZZ Packer is a recipient of a Whiting Writers' Award and a Rona Jaffe Foundation Writers' Award and was selected for the *New Yorker's* debut fiction issue in 2002. A graduate of Yale she was a Jones lecturer at Stanford University. A long-term resident of San Francisco, she currently lives in Austin, Texas. She has published one collection of stories entitled *Drinking Coffee Elsewhere*.

"I don't think I can remember where I last encountered a debut collection that so justified its existence, that buzzed with so much credibility and attitude.... You finish the book with a mad sense that, in writing, anything is possible."

- Julie Myerson, *The Guardian*

"If Toni Morrison has given black America back its history, ZZ Packer will shed light on its contemporary life. Serious and contentious, she never loses hold of the craft and delight of storytelling."

- Diana Evans *The (London) Independent*

"Brilliant prose. Unforgettable characters."

-Marie Claire

from

Drinking Coffee Elsewhere

The bar we end up in is called The Haven, and it's nowhere near where we left the car. Before we left the March, I asked Ray Bivens Jr. how felt knowing that he'd come nearly seven hundred miles and hadn't sold a single bird. He didn't speak to me on the Metro ride to the bar, not even when the birds started embarrassing us on the subway.

The bartender looks at the birds and shakes his head as if his patrons never cease to amuse him.

Even though he's sitting in the place he loves most, Ray Bivens Jr. still seems mad at me. So do the birds. None of them are speaking, just making noises in their throats as though they're plotting something. I ask the bartender if the birds are safe outside; if someone will steal them.

"Not if it's something that needs feeding," the bartender says.

"Speaking of feeding," my father says, "I'm going to get some Funyuns. Want any?" He says this more to the bartender than to me, but I shake my head though all I've eaten are the bean pies and honey. The bartender spray-guns a 7 Up in a glass for me without my even asking, then resumes conversation with the trio of men at the end of the counter. One man has a goiter. One has processed waves that look like cake frosting. While those two seem to be smiling and arguing at the same time, the third man says nothing, smoking his cigarette as though it's part of his search for enlightenment.

Sude

2009 MLC Writer in Residence
Reading Saturday 19th September 7pm



from
The Grudge

Sude is the pen name of Wang Yi, a native of Shanghai. Even though she is still in her twenties she has already published six collections of short stories and two novels since her first book *Touch My Mind* was published in 2002. She has studied at the Ist Lu Xun Literature School and the Writers' Master Class organised by the Shanghai Writers' Association. She has participated in a writers' camp in Taiwan.

Sude is the 2009 writer in residence at the Munster Literature Centre - part of an exciting development which also sees two Cork writers take up residency in Shanghai (Cork's twin/sister city) this Autumn.

Sude will present workshopped translations of her stories in *Southword* and at the Frank O'Connor Short Story Festival

Yan Qing's daughter Xian Ni was sitting on the balcony, bathed in the warm sunlight, crocheting. Near her feet was a basket holding balls of blackish green lambs' wool which she had picked up from her mother's store around noon. The collar of her light fleece sweater was pulled up to cover her mouth. The pursed lips behind the collar gave her face a look of struggle. The look was deceptive. Actually she had learned every move that her mother had to teach. She had even inherited Yan Qing's habit of holding the wool with the basket and tying up the bamboo crochet hooks with a plastic band. When she had been a little girl, Yan Qing used to scare her with those hooks. "Don't run around when mum's doing crochet work," she would say, "See those hooks? They can blind you." Then she would tie the ends of the hooks with that plastic band, chuckling. It appeared that Xian Ni was not going to grasp the function of that band anyway. But she did believe that posture was more important than anything. When you have the right posture, you can succeed in whatever you take up.

Alan Titley

Reading Saturday 19th September 9pm



Alan Titley is a novelist, short story writer, playwright and scholar. Born in Cork in 1947 he was educated at Coláiste Chríost Rí (Cork), St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra. He is head of the Department of Modern Irish at UCC. He has published many novels and short story collections in Irish - a distillation of three of his story collections is contained in the English 'versions' of *Parabolas* (Lagan Press 2005).

A play, *Tagann Godot*, a sequel to Beckett's *En Attendant Godot* was produced by the Abbey in 1990. He has had radio plays produced both by BBC and RTE and has written documentary films for TV. His principal scholarly work is *An tÚrscéal Gaeilge* (1991) a comprehensive and critical examination of the Irish novel. Selected critical/cultural essays were published as *Chun Doirne: Rogha Aistí* (1996). He also writes regularly for the *Irish Times*. Titley read at the very first Frank O'Connor International Short Story Festival in 2000.

from
Parabolas: Stories & Fables

The Poet Who Died And Went To Hell

A POET DIED.

This in itself is a rare and unusual occurrence because poets are normally thought to be immortal. It was even suggested that this poet committed suicide because he wrote a bad poem.

He was raised up to the gates of heaven so that he might be judged and that his bad poem could be weighed against the other good works of his life.

'I'm very sorry,' Peter of the Gates said, since he had read what the critics and reviewers had to say, 'you can't come in here. And anyway the joint is overflowing with poets. You have to go to the other place. They actually need some poets to keep the whole crew of theologians, theosophists and lawyers and liars amused.'

Even though the poet was undoubtedly disappointed he had some experience of being rejected.

He had never received a bursary from the arts council, nor given readings before the president, nor gone on reading junkets away and abroad.

'Look, just suppose,' he said to Peter, keeping his tears back because he knew he would need them in the other place, 'just suppose I did get in, could you tell me how would I spend the day, what do you do to pass the time within the pearly gates?

'O, that's not a difficult question,' said Peter. 'You would spend your time listening to poetry being read. Paul and Paula and Theo and Phil and Seamus and Ciarán and Nuala and Derek and TS and RS and Ted and Alfred and William and silly Willy, they're all here.'

'Well, good for them,' he said, and off he went with his tail, or whatever, between his legs.

When he reached the sulphur gates the welcoming party was waiting for him dressed in police uniform.

'Look, before I come in,' he said, the poet said, 'would you mind telling me how I will spend the day, what do you do to pass the time within the sulphur gates?'

'O, that's not a difficult question to answer,' said a devil, devilishly. 'You will spend the day listening to poetry being read.'

'Well, isn't that just deadly,' said the poet. 'There is nothing I prefer more than to listen to poetry being read from the crack of dawn to the drawing down and dying of the light. What poetry will I listen to?'

'Your own, of course,' was the reply, 'for all eternity.'

Wells Tower

Shortlisted for the Cork City - Frank O'Connor Award
Reading Saturday 19th September 7pm



Wells Tower's short stories and journalism have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Magazine*, *McSweeney's*, *The Paris Review*, *The Anchor Book of New American Short Stories*, *The Washington Post Magazine*, and elsewhere. He received two Pushcart Prizes and the Plimpton Prize from *The Paris Review*. He divides his time between Chapel Hill, North Carolina and Brooklyn, New York.

Tower's prose is muscular and poetic with an almost vertiginous momentum and his characters teeter on the brink of emotional collapse ... This is a collection that, for once, lives up to the hype. Watch out for Wells'

- Lucy Atkins, *Sunday Times*

'He has the short story writer's knack of great beginnings, first lines that tell you all you need to know, and fix a character's fate ... Tower routinely brings combustible materials together ... and has fun watching them ignite'

-Tim Adams *Observer*

Wells Tower, half-surgeon, half-magician, extracts that dark, damp, rotten stuff and holds it to the light for us all to see ... The prose is built on tough American foundations, rooted down through Carver and Hemingway to Twain, but the voice is sensitive, surprising, Tower's own. Each word is deployed exactly. Each off-field exchange has a witty ring of truth. The sentences are so good you want to cut them out'

-Tom Gatti, *The Times*

from

Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned

I woke a little after three, thirsty as a poisoned rat, but I lay paralysed in superstition that staggering to the sink would banish sleep for good. My heart raced. I thought of my performance on the porch, then of a good thick noose creaking as it swung. I thought of Amanda, and my two ex-wives. I thought of my first car, whose engine seized because I didn't change the timing belt at 100,000 miles. I thought of how, two nights ago, I'd lost thirty dollars to George in a cribbage game. I thought of how, in the aftermath of my father's death, for reasons I couldn't recall, I stopped wearing underwear, and of a day in junior high when the cold rivet in a chair alerted me to a hole in the seat of my pants. I thought of everyone I owed money to, and everyone who owed me money. I thought of Stephen and me and the children we'd so far failed to produce, and how in the diminishing likelihood that I did find someone to smuggle my genetic material into, by the time our little one could tie his shoes, his father would be a florid fifty-tear-old who would suck the innocence and joy from his child as greedily as a desert wanderer savaging a found orange.

Extract from
Wells Tower interview with New
York Observer

<http://www.observer.com/2009/books/wells-tower-fiction-writer-looking-joy>

“Being a human being isn’t just all misery and despair. There’s a lot of available joy out there, even if we don’t often find it. I think that fiction should find opportunities for joy.”

Sitting in his sunny apartment in Greenpoint about six weeks ago, the short story writer Wells Tower was explaining why he’s not that into books that relentlessly punish their characters in the service of illustrating the brutality of life on earth.

“The real struggle, I think, is getting to a place where you can be believably generous to a character, where you can show somebody fumbling for redemption in a way that’s believable and not stupid,” Mr. Tower said, his shoulders square and his hands playing with each other on the kitchen table. “I think what people really want is fiction that in some tiny way makes their life more meaningful and makes the world seem like a richer place. The world is awfully short on joy and richness, and I think to some extent it’s the fiction writer’s job to salvage some of that and to give it to us in ways that we can believe in.”

Despite its title, Mr. Tower manages to salvage rather a lot in *Everything Ravaged, Everything Burned*, the collection of short stories he has just published with Farrar, Straus and Giroux. The book is a triumph of a debut—not just believably generous, but revelatory in its rendering of all the different kinds of hurt that a human being can sustain in the course of a life. The characters that populate *Everything Ravaged* experience humiliation, loneliness, and anger in all their varieties, and their wounds are described by Mr. Tower with unflinching affection and tenderness. These are stories about people, mostly men, succumbing to their weaknesses-- resentful sons, first husbands, angry brothers, all of them somehow guilty or deformed but all trying, clumsily, to either make someone happy or be in love or just for once not feel really disappointed.

Incredibly, the book opens with the first short story Mr. Tower ever wrote, the delicate and impeccably paced “The Brown Coast.” It was composed during the author’s first year in the Columbia fiction program and published, against all odds, in the spring 2002 issue of *The Paris Review* after someone there discovered it in the slush pile. (“Down Through the Valley,” which Mr. Tower submitted to the Paris Review at the same time as “The Brown Coast,” was actually published first, in the fall of 2001).

Like most of Mr. Tower’s work, including the long-form journalism he’s written over the past five years for *The Washington Post Magazine* and *Harper’s*, “The Brown Coast” is full of magnificent descriptions and imagery that recast the material world in completely unfamiliar—and yet intuitive—terms. A man sleeps on the floor, “quietly honking in his slumber.” Another takes a drink of champagne and vodka and recoils as a “sour heat” blooms in his belly. A half-hearted extramarital affair is said to have had “no joy in it, just a two-week spate of drab skirmishes in a basement apartment that smelled heavily of cat musk.” Reading stuff like this, you realize nothing—no experience, no feeling, no sound, no smell--has been described for the last time.

Prior to his enrollment in the Columbia MFA program in the fall of 2000, Mr. Tower, now 35, had spent much of his adult life playing guitar in a punk band called Hellbender,

which formed in 1991 when he was a senior in high school and persevered for six years even as all three members shipped off to different colleges. Named after the giant species of salamander, Hellbender also included Mr. Tower’s lifelong best friend Harrison Haynes, now a painter and the drummer in the rock band Les Savy Fav, and a guy named Al Burian, now best known for his celebrated zine, *Burn Collector*. Starting in 1993, Mr. Tower and Mr. Burian published a zine together called *Foodbox*. This served as the primary outlet for Mr. Tower’s writerly inclinations until he got a job at the University of North Carolina Urban Planning Department and convinced his boss there to let him write the monthly newsletter. As he put it, “I was just dying to do something where I got to write sentences.”

Opportunities for this in North Carolina were slim, but Mr. Tower flew to the one beacon of light in the vicinity like a mosquito, and got himself hired at *DoubleTake*, the now defunct but beloved literature and photography magazine run out of the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke. “I just went over and gave them my resume and pleaded with them to give me any sort of job,” Mr. Tower said. “They gave me a job as night manager, which entailed going over there and locking up and watering the plants. From there I started writing some of their press releases.

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Printed on beautiful, heavy stock and featuring work from such writers as Tobias Wolff, Ian Frazier, and William Maxwell, *DoubleTake* was, according to Mr. Tower, not just the only game in town but a truly hot commodity. He was ecstatic to be anywhere near it, regardless of his actual duties.

He rose quickly, though, and by the time the magazine was stripped of its funding and relocated to Boston, Mr. Tower was overseeing its Web site and sitting in on editorial meetings. Instead of following the magazine to Boston, though, he followed one of its former editors, David Rowell, to *The Washington Post Magazine* and pitched him a piece about what it’s like to work for a traveling carnival. Though Mr. Tower had exactly zero reporting experience, Mr. Rowell took a chance on him-- in part because of their shared affection for Joseph Mitchell, Richard Yates, and Raymond Carver-- and in so doing, set the stage for a run of richly reported long-form pieces that are knuckle for knuckle on par with Mr. Tower’s fiction stylistically and emotionally.

According to Mr. Rowell, the magazine pieces Mr. Tower wrote for him unmistakably informed many of his short stories, and share with them some central preoccupations.

“Wells is great about taking you into these worlds that you’ve never really considered before, whether it’s long-haul trucking or the people who work at Walmart or a classical music piano competition,” Mr. Rowell said in an interview. “His characters have these great visions of how things should be, and it’s very difficult for them to get to that place. These are characters who are often down on their luck—there’s a kind of disappointment that spills into their lives that they are trying to rise above.”

Simon Van Booy

Shortlisted for the Cork City - Frank O'Connor Award

Reading Friday 18th September 7pm



Simon Van Booy was born in London and grew up in rural Wales and Oxford. After playing football in Kentucky, he lived in Paris and Athens. In 2002 he was awarded an MFA and won the H.R. Hays Poetry Prize. His journalism has appeared in magazines and newspapers including *The New York Times* and *The New York Post*. Van Booy is the author of *The Secret Lives of People in Love*, now translated into several languages. He lives in New York City, where he teaches part-time at the School of Visual Arts and at Long Island University. He is also involved in the Rutgers Early College Humanities Program (REaCH) for young adults living in undeserved communities. www.simonvanbooy.com

‘The stories of *Love Begins in Winter* are stylistically brilliant and emotionally beautiful. I found myself gasping, literally gasping, at surprises so perfectly attuned as to be inevitable. Simon Van Booy is an extraordinary writer, and this is a book to be read and reread again and again.’

-- Binnie Kirshenbaum

Simon Van Booy knows a great deal about the complex longings of the human heart, and he articulates those truths in his stories with pitch-perfect elegance. *Love Begins in Winter* is a splendid collection, and Van Booy is now a writer on my must-always-read list.

— Robert Olen Butler, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*

from

Love Begins in Winter

Jane wiped her eyes and noticed a small child standing at the edge of her blanket with a red bucket.

The girl had lovely eyes. Her belly lunged forward. Her red bucket was full of water. Jane reached out to the girl, but she turned and ran away.

Above her, the sky held on to a few clouds. They hung far out at sea—watching the lives of people who’d gathered at the edge of land.

The red bucket reminded Jane of Walter, calling to her as she reached the edge of the field long ago in Ireland. And then his large, rough hand, which although she didn’t know it then, was a young hand.

The beach was dark, and the sand had been packed hard by the outgoing tide. Rain lingered; like something said but not forgotten.

Walter ran to the water’s edge, and Jane remembered a moment of panic when he disappeared from her sight—but then he was upon her again. He had found shells and he unloaded them into her small arms.

She told him about her mother and father, and he listened and kissed her once on the forehead, telling her that they would never truly leave her behind—that people, like little fish, are sometimes caught in the cups of rocks as the tide sweeps in and out.

Jane wondered what he meant; whether it was she or her parents who were trapped.

“And should you ever feel too lonely, Jane,” Walter said as they carried the moon home in buckets, “listen for the roar of the sea—for in it are all those who’ve been and all those who are to come.”

extract from Interview with Simon
Van Booy, author of *The Secret Lives of
People in Love* by Nancy L. Horner

<http://estellabooks.blogspot.com/2007/08/interview-simon-van-booy.html>

The first time I spoke to Simon Van Booy by phone, he told me about his youth in rural Wales. "I grew up around sheep," he said. "Always sheep; lots of sheep." The second time, I gave him very bad directions to the Barnes & Noble on Washtenaw Avenue in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The third time we spoke, he said, "I am now completely lost." As it turned out, Simon was able to see the "real" Ann Arbor, the part with character, the funky and beautiful downtown area, thanks to my terrible directions and the emergency assistance of a spouse with a talent for navigation.

Simon parked on Main Street and we met at Main and Liberty, in front of one of the many Starbucks coffee shops, to introduce ourselves. He wore a white shirt with thin stripes, a pink striped tie, a navy blue blazer and a black cap with black frame glasses. Tendrils of dark hair escaped below his cap. Turning a circle, Simon suggested we go to the Greek place, The Parthenon, for coffee. He pointed out the statue in the window of our booth. "This is perfect," he said, removing his cap.

Simon ordered coffee for himself, a Perrier for me. "The Greek make the best coffee. When you get to the bottom there are coffee grounds. It's very strong," he said. His coffee arrived in a tiny cup, liquid sloshing onto the saucer. The waitress apologized and Simon warned her that he would probably pick up the saucer and drink it. He loves his Greek coffee. He ordered moussaka and dolmades, and when they arrived he pushed a plate toward me. "This is for you," he said. "I'm always mothering people. He split both dishes with me. When my Perrier glass ran low, he picked up the bottle and refilled my cup.

Simon chattered a mile a minute. He's easy to talk to and, as expected, has a big heart. I asked him if he's always written. "Always, always," he said. "I feel car sick if I don't."

He told me his grandfather was the news agent for Dylan Thomas, that when he returned for his grandmother's funeral in Wales, he closed his eyes as the funeral procession passed by so that his memory of home wouldn't be replaced.

Simon has lived in a number of interesting places and spoke so rapidly that I couldn't seem to get down the order of where he lived and when. He's lived in Oxford and London, Kentucky, Paris, Athens, and now New York City. His smile is shiny and white, "not a very British" smile, because he was in an accident, his teeth knocked out and replaced.

He told me that Athens is dangerous because it's home to many refugees. "They carry guns," he said. "I was robbed in Athens at gunpoint. It was midnight and I took a different path from my usual route, through a park. They held a gun to me and patted me down, stripped me of everything they considered valuable. I don't know if the gun had bullets, but the man who took my wallet came back. After the man who held the gun on me left, he came back and gave me the picture of my girlfriend from my wallet." Simon patted his heart and said he wondered what that man's story was. He must have had some great love to have understood, to care to bring back that photo.

I asked him about the story, "Little Birds", the first story in *The Secret Lives of People in Love* and one of my favorites.

"Didn't you love Michel?" he asked.

"I did," I said. "And, I wondered about the child. Did he have a name?"

"He was nameless," Simon explained. I told him I thought so. I didn't remember seeing a name, just "peanut". The story adoptive father Michel has told his child about how he was found in a subway station is elaborate but, I asked, was it fabricated by Michel?

Simon told me that I'd gotten it right. The story Michel told his little peanut is wild enough for other people to see it's impossible; it can't be true. And, yet, the boy is so firmly convinced that when the train stops at the subway station where Michel says he was found, he "remembers" the station. Michel has planted a beautiful history in the mind of the child. "What matters," Simon told me, "is that he has so much love for this child, not where he came from." Simon mentioned that one of his reviewers commented upon the fact that all the children in his stories are loved and cared for. I nodded. Maybe that's one reason that each of the stories -- in spite of the fact that they often involve pain and loss -- retain an aura of hope.

I asked him if his characters are based on reality. The Russian shoemaker, he said, is real. He fixes Simon's shoes; he lives in New York.

I asked if *The Secret Lives of People in Love* is his first book. He took my copy and opened it up. It's his second book, he said, but see . . . the first was absorbed into the second.

But he's widely published, I added, in major magazines. "I've sold every story I've ever written," he told me. "But, for every sale I've had 76 rejections."

"You keep track?"

"Yes." Simon told me that number may not be precise, but it's close.

I ask him how he ended up living in so many wonderful places. He replied that people ask him to come live in their country and write about it. "For some reason I'm dear friends with several diplomats," Simon told me. "I would love to travel to different countries, meet locals, and then write about their triumph and tragedy. Of course, this requires knowing some language, so I plan a year or two in advance and then study the language. . . . I also love strange food and will wear anything." He has a story he wants to set in Wales and he plans to move back to Wales, at some point, so he can write the story, but "won't be leaving New York any time soon."

The weekend before we met, Simon acquired an agent because the L.A. Times wrote a spectacular review that garnered his book a lot of attention. Having an agent, he said, could get him some exposure. Since the review, he had spoken to people about movie rights. He said he was thrilled and surprised that such a great review came from California, that he was pleased to know they actually read and it's not all just movies and breast implants. He told me silicone breast implants make great paperweights and we both laughed at the thought of someone explaining a breast implant holding down papers on a crowded desk.

Simon's favorites:

Dubliners by James Joyce, the complete works of Flannery O'Connor, the complete works of Emily Dickinson, *The Jakarta Tales*, Poems of Philip Larkin, *Marcovaldo* by Italo Calvino, *The Gift* by Hafiz, *Wings of Courage* by George Sand (retold by Barbara Wersba), everything by Rilke, *Death in Venice* by Thomas Mann, the complete works of Shakespeare and all of Marcel Proust.

Festival Club

Wednesday to Saturday

16th - 19th September from 10pm onwards.

In the Hayloft, upstairs at the Long Valley bar on Winthrop Street. Each evening live music with some of Cork's best musicians and songsmiths and readings too by emerging authors.



Reading Friday 11.00pm

Born in Cork in 1961, **Kevin Doyle** attended University College Cork graduating in chemistry. After a period working in New York he returned to Ireland. A short story writer since the mid90s, he has been published in a wide range of literary journals in Ireland including *Cúirt*, *Stinging Fly* and *Southword*. His stories have also appeared in a number of anthologies including the acclaimed *Irish Writers Against The War*. Short-listed for the Ian St James International Award in its penultimate year he came runner-up. Also selected in 2000, 2001 and 2004 to appear at the Frank O'Connor International Festival of the Short Story, his stories have been described as 'terse and original'. In 2006 he was shortlisted for Listowel Writers Week's Best Original Full Length Play and is currently in the process of revising this work about the Irish revolutionary Captain Jack White.

As well as being a creative writer, Kevin Doyle has written extensively about Irish and radical politics in the alternative press and on the Indymedia news network. He is the author of the pamphlet *Parliament or Democracy?* and his interview with Noam Chomsky is republished in the recent *Chomsky On Anarchism*.

He teaches creative writing occasionally and has participated in a number of projects for Cork City Council and Cork City Library. www.kevindoyle.ie

Reading Thursday 10.45pm

A graduate of UCC and a native of Macroom **Madeleine D'arcy** worked as a criminal law solicitor and as a legal editor in London before returning to Cork in 1999 with her husband and son. She began writing in 2005 after attending workshops with Claire Keegan. She has been shortlisted in several short story competitions and one of her stories has been published in the Sunday Tribune's *New Irish Writing* in 2009. She is also working on a novel.

Reading Saturday 11.00pm

Jon Boilard (see page 2)

Performing musicians:

Wednesday: Hank Wedel

Thursday: Marja Gaynor and Eileen Healy

Friday: Fintan Lucy

Saturday: Perry Wild

“Towns and cities have a mental age of their own. The mental age limit defines the period after which a young man or woman of talent ought to pack his bags and get out. I don’t know exactly how you judge the mental age of a town, but one way is by its bookshops and libraries, art galleries and theatres and concerts.

I have a feeling that, at one time, Cork, for a short time at least, during the reign of Cormac McCarthy, was a real European capital. It has ceased to be that and the problem now is how it’s going to recreate a life for itself, a life in which a man can live completely from the cradle to the grave; that I think is a problem not only for Cork, but for the whole of Western European Civilisation. Life has to start flowing back into the smaller places. Metropolis ended with Hiroshima. People have got to start living a much less specialised form of life, a much more a community form of life and my feeling about this city is... either people make a success of it or Western Europe is finished.”

Frank O’Connor speaking to the BBC in 1961

Grant Aided by
Cork City Council



Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí

Proudly working to create a city life without limits!

Cork City Council, through its sponsorship of the Arts; its funding of the Cork City-Frank O’Connor Award, the Frank O’Connor International Short Story Festival and the other activities of the Munster Literature Centre is working to create a life without limits, to ensure that men and women can develop to their fullest creative and intellectual extent; so that they are never obliged to leave their home city to fulfil themselves. Cork City Council works to raise the quality of city life by facilitating access to the Arts for all the community.



Take a bow!

The arts really matter to us in Ireland; they are a big part of people's lives, the country's single most popular pursuit. Our artists interpret our past, define who we are today, and imagine our future. We can all take pride in the enormous reputation our artists have earned around the world.

The arts play a vital role in our economy, and smart investment of taxpayers' money in the arts is repaid many times over. The dividends come in the form of a high value, creative economy driven by a flexible, educated, innovative work force, and in a cultural tourism industry worth €5 billion a year.

The Arts Council is the Irish Government agency for funding and developing the arts. Arts Council funding from the taxpayer, through the Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism, for 2009 is €75 million, that's about a1 euro a week for every household.

So, when you next turn the pages of a great book or hear a poem that inspires you or attend an enthralling reading, don't forget the role you played and take a bow yourself!

Find out what's on at

www.events.artscouncil.ie

You can find out more about the arts here:

www.artscouncil.ie



The Munster Literature Centre

www.munsterlit.ie

Founded in 1993, the Munster Literature Centre (Tigh Litríochta) is a nonprofit arts organisation dedicated to the promotion and celebration of literature, especially that of Munster. To this end, we organise festivals, workshops, readings and competitions. Under our imprint Southword Editions, we publish a biannual, online literary journal, poetry collections and anthologies. We actively seek to support new and emerging writers and are assisted in our efforts through funding from Cork City Council, Cork County Council and the Arts Council of Ireland.

Originally located on Sullivan's Quay, in 2003 the centre moved to its current premises in Frank O'Connor House (the author's birthplace) at 84 Douglas Street, courtesy of Cork City Council who bought and refurbished the building in time for O'Connor's centenary.

In 2000, the Munster Literature Centre organised the first Frank O'Connor International Short Story Festival, an event dedicated to the celebration of the short story and named for one of Cork's most beloved authors. The festival showcases readings, literary forums and workshops. Following continued growth and additional funding, the Cork City - Frank O'Connor Short Story Award was introduced in 2005, coinciding with Cork's designation as that year's European Capital of Culture. The award is now recognised as the world's most prestigious award for the short story form and is presented at the end of the festival.

In 2002, the Munster Literature Centre introduced the Seán Ó Faoláin Short Story Prize, an annual short story competition dedicated to one of Ireland's most accomplished story writers and theorists. This too is presented during the FOC festival. Each Spring we present a differently themed literary festival with an emphasis on poetry.

Workshops are held by featured authors in both autumn and spring, allowing the general public to receive creative guidance in an intimate setting for a minimal fee. In addition, the centre sponsors a Writer in Residence each year.

The Centre has built up an extensive video and audio literary archive which visitors to the centre can access.

We invite you to browse our website for further information regarding our events. It is possible to sign up for our mailing list on our homepage www.munsterlit.ie

Should you have any queries, we would be happy to hear from you.
info@munsterlit.ie