The 12th Annual

Cork International Short Story Festival 2011

ELEVEN years ago the Munster Literature Centre established the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Festival. Cork is a corner of the world renowned for its association with the short story and great short story writers, not only Frank O'Connor and Sean O'Faolain but also Daniel Corkery, Elizabeth Bowen and William Trevor. O'Connor, however, had been the master whose star had been obscured by clouds. This festival was founded to remove those clouds and to celebrate the literary genre most closely identified not only with O'Connor but with Cork.

In 1961 the BBC had described Frank O'Connor as Ireland's greatest living author. Flann O'Brien and Samuel Beckett were living in obscurity at that time. But by the end of the century Beckett was a Nobel prize laureate with an unassailable reputation, Flann O'Brien had been embraced by an intelligentsia who rightly appreciated his great wit and penchant for modernist innovation; and Frank O'Connor, at this time in Ireland, was mostly dismissed as a backward traditionalist, master of a lightweight literary genre. Francis Stuart, another modernist darling, had written an influential, much republished, travesty of an essay dismissing O'Connor and O'Faolain as having had a relationship with the Irish Free State which was analogous to that of the Soviet Writers' Union to Stalin's Russia. Never mind that Stuart had been the only Irish writer of note to enter into a close relationship with a totalitarian state (he had earned his living broadcasting for the Hitler regime in Berlin at the height of the Holocaust and the devastation of Europe); never mind that Frank O'Connor was blacklisted by De Valera's government at the same time and prevented from making a living for his condemnation of Irish neutrality and for leading a private life at odds with Catholic Church morality — Stuart had successfully set up O'Connor and O'Faolain as embodying the antithesis of modernity. Ireland from the 1980s onwards was in the grip of a social civil war centred around Magdalene laundries, divorce rights, abortion, church state relations. All the more ironic that the divorced O'Connor who had been targeted by the Catholic Church as a *bete noir* should have been so successfully painted as a poster boy for the traditionalist status quo. No academic or serious thinker in the country was seriously thinking about him.

He was, however, still treated as a hero of the short story form in America where not only his own stories but his lectures on the short story, collected in the volume *The Lonely Voice*, had had a seminal influence on the likes of Richard Ford, Tobias Wolff, Raymond Carver and many others *and* he was still the subject of serious academic attention there.

In the early years of the festival great writers from all over the world read with us including Richard Ford, Alasdair Gray, Ludmila Ulitskaya, the last of the Irish old guard such as James Plunkett and Hugh Leonard; and newer names such as Anne Enright and Claire Keegan. American academics delivered lectures on what made O'Connor great, Irish academics such as Declan Kiberd were provoked to re-examine him, archived filmed interviews were dusted off and seminars on subjects such as O'Connor and censorship were held. Gradually O'Connor's reputation was revived and a new generation of young Irish academics chose to turn their attention to him. Also in these years we established the award in his name and discovered that we were an integral part of the international revival in the literary genre he was most famous for. Over the years as O'Connor's reputation grew we emphasised more and more the contemporary writing aspect of the festival until we reached the point where O'Connor is now the subject of separate dedicated academic conferences *(see page 40)* and we can concentrate on delivering a festival of the best in contemporary practice in short fiction. Our festival's new name reflects that reality.

I am most excited by the programme I have assembled this year. This is the seventh year we are presenting the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, for the best short story collection published in English, with the crucial support of Cork City Council and thus for the seventh year we present the cream of the last year's crop of short story publishing; with readings by the six award finalists, including global grandees and literary debutantes. This year we have a shortlist dominated by women authors and for the first time two Irish authors. We also have great writers not in competition such as the British authors Helen Dunmore and Clare Wigfall. We have a healthy selection of young Irish writers , including a programme featuring some authors assembled in the recent Faber anthology and a selection of writers representing the Irish in America. We have a presentation of young Canadian debutante authors and we have a celebration of Cork's twinning relationship with San Francisco through our Bay Area connections programme. Elements of these separate strands intertwine such as in the shortlisting of Canadian and SF Bay Area writers for the award. We feature other awards too with readings by the Sean O'Faolain Prize winner, the winner of the Hennessy Emerging Fiction Award and a special showcase this year of stories from the Francis McManus Award. We feature literature in translation with Michael Ajvaz from the Czech Republic.

We will present again the annual Cork Literary Walking Tour by O'Connor biographer Jim McKeown; interviews with a selection of festival participants, a seminar on the subject of short story anthologies and workshops for short story practitioners given by prize winning authors.

I would like to thank especially our regular major funders Cork City Council and the Arts Council without whom this festival would be impossible. The arts have a crucial role to play in shaping mature societies; communities in which a person can continue growing into late adulthood. We are blessed in Ireland and in Cork in having a polity which understands that fact.

We issue thanks too for the crucial support we are receiving this year from RTE, The Canadian Council for the Arts and the embassy of the USA in Dublin.

Lastly, I would encourage patrons who can afford it to make donations at the festival events they attend. We are refraining from charging entry to ensure greater accessiblity, but the donations we receive help keep us out of debt.

— Patrick Cotter,
Festival Director,
The Munster Literature Centre,
Frank O'Connor House,
84 Douglas Street,
Cork.
www.munsterlit.ie
www.corkshortstory.net

Supporting this Festival

Grant Aided by
Cork City Council

Statio Bene Fida Carinis

Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí

the arts council an chomhairle ealaíon

funding literature

artscouncil.ie

EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DUBLIN, IRELAND

Canada Council for the Arts

Conseil des Arts du Canada

RTÉ RADIO 1

CORK COUNTY COUNCIL 1899

Hennessy

Vibes & Scribes
BOOK & MUSIC STORE
We buy, sell & exchange
Open late 7 days
1 BRIDGE STREET, CORK. TEL. 021-4505320. FAX. 021-4551294

LIAM RUISEAL TEO.

49/50 OLIVER PLUNKETT STREET CORK
TEL: 021 - 427 0981
FAX: 021 - 427 1850
EMAIL: ruisealbooks@eircom.net

waterstones.com
69 Patrick Street Cork
Phone: 021-4276522

Michael Ajvaz

Reading Friday September 16th
7.30pm
Winner of the Jaroslav Seifert Prize

Poet, fiction writer, and essayist Michal Ajvaz was born in Prague in1949. Between '67–'74 he read Czech and aesthetics at Prague University. He did various menial jobs including work as a janitor, a night-watchman in a garage and a pump attendant for the Prague Waterworks. Since 1994 he has worked as a full-time writer. He lives in Prague. His novel *Empty Streets* was awarded the Jaroslav Seifert Prize in 2005, the most prestigious literary award in the Czech Republic. Two other novels *The Other City* (1993) and *The Golden Age* (2001) are available in English translation from Dalkey Archive Press.

The English translation of *The Golden Age* was listed as Amazon's No 1 Science Fiction novel for 2010.

There was still fighting going on in some quarters of the capital when old Vieta got into his car and headed out to Cormorant Bay. He wove his way through streets clogged with tanks, armoured personnel carriers, and crowds of people. On the northernmost edge of the city he was stopped by guards wearing the uniforms of South Floriana; luckily it turned out their commander was a former student of his. The roads to the north of the city were still quite dangerous, so the commander offered Vieta a lift to the camp in his jeep. The camp was made up of low barracks standing in a long row on a sweltering plain of sand and rock above the sea. The government troops had by now abandoned the place. Confused and emaciated prisoners were wandering about the scorching sands; they bore witness to the departure of the troops the day before, in a ship that had been waiting below in the harbour. They had seen the troops loading aboard some heavy crates; presumably these contained documents they hadn't succeeded in burning and intended to dispose of at sea.

The professor asked all the prisoners about Fernando. Many of them had met him in the camp. Vieta discovered that his son had arrived there the very day martial law had been imposed.

From "The Wire Book" by Michal Ajvaz from *Best European Fiction 2011* ed. by Aleksandar Hemon.

Jon Boilard

Winner of the 2005 Sean O'Faoláin Prize
Workshop Saturday September17th 9.30am
(see page 35 for details)
The Bay Area Connection

Born and raised in Western New England, Jon Boilard has been living and writing in the San Francisco area since 1986. More than 50 of his short stories have been published in literary journals in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Asia. Boilard's "Green Street Incidents", first appearing in The Sun Magazine, received a special mention in the 2011 edition of the Pushcart Prize Best of the Small Presses series. A past winner of the Sean O'Faolain Award, Boilard has also seen several of his pieces earn individual small press honors.

"Masterful writing with an authentic voice. Dark, relentless stories with slivers of light and moments of tenderness that are powerful and redemptive."

- Tim McKee,
Editor, *The Sun Magazine*

You are toast. You're in a 1962 Impala that was your dad's before he split. It's on cement blocks in the back yard. There's a heat wave going on, it's Indian Summer. It's muggy as hell and mosquitoes are still fat and lazy but everywhere. Your mom serves beers at the VFW and doesn't get home until after midnight. There's a washing machine in the back yard, too, and a dog on a chain and lots of dog crap in hard piles. NRBQ is in the Dwire Lot doing its last couple sets. You fire up another doobie. The dog watches you from the end of his chain with his head cocked. It's your mom's dog and she named it Shithead, she says after the old man because they have the same disposition. You suck on watermelon Now and Laters with your knees against the back of the front seat. Your big brother is behind the wheel with his hands at ten and two like he's old enough to drive. He adjusts his mirrors. He moves his head to the drum solo that you can barely hear past the trees and the schoolyard and the train tracks and the long line at the beer tent. A warm breeze is like the restroom hand driers at the BP Diner. You stuff the roach in your pocket and pretend you're riding to Virginia Beach where your cool cousin Floyd got herpes.

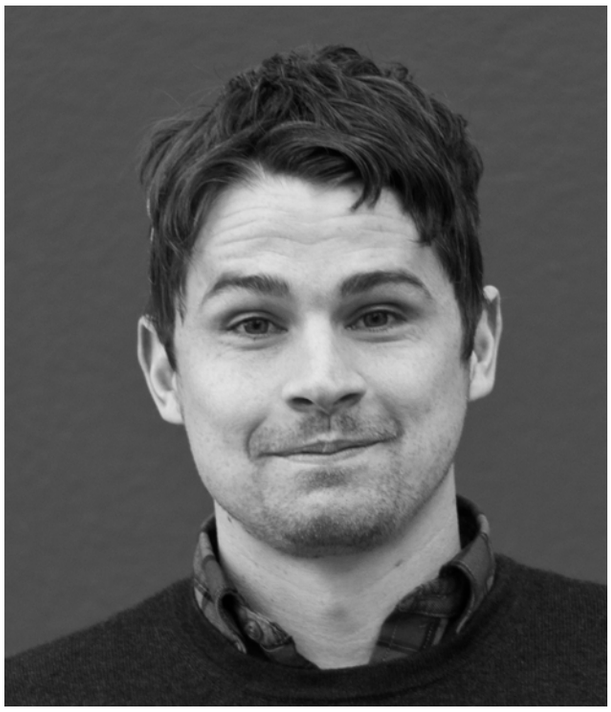
from *Before Dying*

Michael Christie

Interview Thursday September 15th 4pm

Reading Thursday September 15th 7.30pm

Young writers from Canada



Michael Christie was born and raised beside an enormous lake in the industrial town of Thunder Bay, Ontario. During the 2000s, he worked for six years in a homeless shelter on Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, Canada's poorest neighborhood, providing outreach to the severely mentally ill. His first book, *The Beggar's Garden*, a collection of stories set in Vancouver, published by HarperCollins Canada, was released in early 2011 to great critical praise. He holds an MFA from the University of British Columbia, and his fiction has been twice nominated for the Journey Prize, Canada's top short story honour. He is also a former professional skateboarder, and is currently the Senior Editor of *Color Magazine*, a skateboard magazine based in Vancouver. His work has appeared in *The National Post*, *Taddle Creek*, *Quill & Quire*, and *Vancouver Review*, and he has recently moved with his wife and young son from Galiano Island, British Columbia, back to Thunder Bay, where he currently teaches creative writing at Lakehead University, and is at work on a new book.

Canada Council for the Arts Conseil des Arts du Canada

I'm lying on a sheetless mattress in my room, watching a moth bludgeon itself on my naked light bulb. Over near the window sits a small television I never watch, beside it a hot plate I never use. I spend most of my time here, thinking about rock cocaine, not thinking about rock cocaine, performing rudimentary experiments, smoking rolled tobacco rescued from public ashtrays, trying to remember what my mind used to feel like, and of course, studying my science book. I dumpstered it two years ago and ever since it has been beside my mattress like a friend at a slumber party, pretending to sleep, dying for consultation. I read it for at least two hours every day; I know this because I time myself. It's a grade-ten textbook, a newer edition, complete with glossy diagrams and photos of famous scientists who all look so regal and determined, it's as though the flashbulb had caught them at the very moment their thoughts were shifting the scientific paradigm forever. I like to think that when they gazed pensively up at the stars and pondered the fate of future generations, they were actually thinking of me.

I excavated the book in June. The kid who threw it out thought he would never have to see science again, that September would never come. What an idiot-I used to believe that.

My room is about the size of a jail cell. One time, two guys came through my open window and beat me with a pipe until I could no longer flinch and stole my former TV and a can of butts, so I hired a professional security company called Apex to install bars on my window. I spent my entire welfare cheque on them, just sat and safely starved for a whole month. I had to pay the guy cash up front because he didn't believe I could possibly have that kind of money. It felt good to pay him that kind of money, he did a good job.

From *The Beggar's Garden* by Michael Christie.

Helen Dunmore

Winner of the Orange Prize for Fiction
Reading & Interview
Wednesday September 14th 7.30pm

Helen Dunmore is a poet, novelist and children's writer. Her poetry has won her the Cardiff International Poetry Prize, Alice Hunt Bartlett Award and Signal Poetry Award, and *Bestiary* was shortlisted for the T.S. Eliot Prize. Her latest Bloodaxe poetry titles are *Out of the Blue: Poems 1975-2001* (2001) and *Glad of These Times* (2007). She has published ten novels and three books of short stories with Viking Penguin, including *A Spell of Winter* (winner of the Orange Prize for Fiction, 1995), *Talking to the Dead* (1996), *The Siege* (2001), *Mourning Ruby* (2003), *House of Orphans* (2006) and *Counting the Stars* (2008). She lives in Bristol.

'Her style is so delightful that whatever subject she chooses, the reader's chief pleasure is in hearing her describe it ... A warm and liquid summer by a lake, the slap and sting of sea swimming, a 'rank summer green' night, a pregnancy 'like a distortion' - character, place and mood are evoked with exquisite precision.'

- The Spectator

I am an orphan. I say these words aloud to myself and hear them move around the room and then disappear into the carpet. They sound like a lie, even though they are true. An orphan is small, scared and hopeful, battling bravely in an institution or bowling along a country road in a dog-cart towards a new home where she won't be wanted at first. Orphans have red hair, wide vocabularies, and a carpet-bag containing their earthly possession. An orphan is a child with a destiny.

I know the literature. 'Orphans of the Storm: the journey to self-actualisation in literature for children.' We don't yet teach a module with that title, but we may well do so one day. It has exactly the right ring to it. Our students like modules which demand opinions rather than extensive reading. My studies in English Literature have brought me here, to this room where words sink into the cord carpet, to this university staff flat in a concrete block full of students.

They are arriving now. Parents are unloading cars, lugging TVs up echoey staircases, checking the wiring on the communal microwave, opening and then quickly closing the bathroom doors. Soon they'll be gone and the kids will be on their own. Big, bonny temporary orphans with credit cards.
My mother died during the summer. I practise the words and they too disappear. When last term ended I was a woman with a mother whom I visited each weekend. Some colleagues knew why, others didn't. I had learned a new vocabulary. I would say 'Macmillan nurse' and on one or two faces there would shine complete understanding. On others, not a flicker.

Esther to Fanny, this is Esther to Fanny, come in.

I listen. I'm not daft enough to think there's going to be any answer. My name is Esther. My mother's name was not Fanny.Fanny Burney, and in her letter she described a mastectomy performed on her without anaesthetic, in 1811.

from *Esther to Fanny*

Siobhan Fallon

Reading Friday September 16th
7.30pm
Irish in America

Siobhan Fallon lived at Fort Hood while her husband was deployed to Iraq for two tours of duty. She earned her MFA at the New School in New York City and now lives with her family near the American Embassy in Amman, Jordan. *You Know When the Men Are Gone* is her first book.

"Siobhan Fallon tells gripping, straight-up, no-nonsense stories about American soldiers and their families. It's clear from her tender yet tough-minded first book, *You Know When the Men Are Gone,* that she knows this world very well. The reader need not look at Ms. Fallon's biography to guess that she, like her book's characters, has spent time living in Fort Hood, Tex., watching the effects of soldiers' leave-takings and homecomings on men and the wives they leave behind. Married to a man who is on at least his third tour of duty, Ms. Fallon now lives where he is stationed, in the Middle East."
- *The New York Times*

The buses were blue. There was a long line of them lurking, heaving in that big circus-animal way, giving off exhaust, shuddering, making their presence known, devouring the scant minutes left to the families. When the six hundred uniformed soldiers gathered into a sea of digitized green, Kailani Rodriguez and the other Bravo Company wives drew together. They watched their soldiers stand at attention behind the red banner of unit colours, then march into the waiting buses. The women waved and finally let themselves cry, holding tight to the children who wanted to run after their fathers.

Cristina Diaz nudged Kailani and pointed away from the men, who were turning back for a final thumbs-up before boarding. Kailani followed Cristina's perfect fingernail as it pierced the air to the left, a hot pink arrow centering on the supply company bus.

"What?" Kailani asked. She didn't know any of the supply soldiers; they were "non-combat" forces, all the cooks, mail clerks, mechanics, truck drivers, and forklift operators who would work at the forward operating base, or FOB, in Iraq. Most of them wouldn't go beyond the wire like her infantry, trigger-pulling, rifleman husband, Manny. Now, thanks to Cristina's distraction, when Kailani looked back at her husband's bus, she could no longer distinguish Manny's head among so many short-haired others.

From *You Know When the Men Are Gone* by Siobhan Fallon.

Q&A Extract from Siobhan Fallon's Website

Why did you become a writer? Was it a lifelong goal?

I've always loved to write. And my family has always been incredibly supportive of my writing. My father is from Leitrim, Ireland. Yeats' grave is near the town where he grew up and, for as long as I can remember, my dad has been giving me things that relate to famous Irish authors: bookmarks with Oscar Wilde quotes, postcards of Brendan Beehan, James Joyce novels he picked up at an odd library sale. My dad also owns an Irish pub, The South Gate Tavern, in my hometown of Highland Falls, New York, and my mother, brother, sister and I have all spent long shifts working there. So there were always plenty of stories in my house, lots of sitting over hot pots of tea talking about the people who came in and out of the bar. I think bartending trained me to observe, listen, and take note of all the different characters.

back to top

What writer or writers have had the greatest influence on you?

When I was working on Y*ou Know When the Men Are Gone,* I read Benjamin Percy's *Refresh, Refresh* and was completely mesmerized. Percy's title story is about these scrappy teenagers trying desperately to become men. Their dads are deployed and their absence hangs over the action, it creates the momentum, but the reader learns very little about the actual soldiers, instead an echo of the war reverberates in every daily action of the fatherless boys. And in Percy's latest book, *The Wilding,* he has a character who is a wounded veteran. I admire how Afghanistan and Iraq inform Percy's fiction; he doesn't let the reader forget what is going on in the world and how soldiers are affected. He keeps the dialogue alive. Likewise, in my stories, I'm not as focused on the bombs on an Iraqi street as I am on the small, rippling tragedies that occur in American homes.

Are you working on a new book? Can you tell us anything about it?

I am working on a novel. It's the story of Evie Parker, a young, up-and-coming chef whose husband deploys to Afghanistan shortly after their marriage, leaving her in Oahu, Hawaii. She's a feisty, unreliable narrator who faces many of the issues that my characters in *You Know When the Men Are Gone* deal with. Evie is almost neurotically aware of right and wrong, but she is really good at making terrible decisions. She works in the competitive world of fine dining and it is easier for her to lose herself in her culinary creations, and perhaps in the company of another angry young chef, than to be the good wife and pine for her deployed husband. And then her husband returns.

What do you hope readers will take away from *You Know When the Men Are Gone?*

I hope they come away with a new understanding of military families. Military life, especially since 9/11, is so different than civilian life and I wanted to capture the reality of this small portion of society that deals daily with war, the pride and fear and loss that is never far from an Army's family's thoughts. Even the ordinary things that happen, kids doing poorly in school, husbands and wives fighting over bills, seem to take on a different meaning because everything in their lives is heightened by the stress and threat of deployments.

Extract from SF Chronicle Review

If you happen to be on a U.S. Army post like Fort Hood, Texas, and hear the sound of a recorded bugle playing late in the day, you will see every moving car come to a stop and its occupants step out and turn toward the region of the post where the American flag is being lowered and folded for the night. If the occupants are soldiers, they will stand at attention and salute. If they are family members, they will place their hands over their hearts.

The spectacle of people silently honoring a flag that they may not even be able to see is beautifully evoked by Siobhan Fallon in a debut short-story collection, *You Know When the Men Are Gone,* that surely marks the beginning of a major career.

In the title story, set about one year into the current Iraq war, the people who stop their cars for the flag ceremony are the wives who have been left behind by the deployment to Iraq of the 18,000 men in the 1st Cavalry Division. Fallon has lived at Fort Hood, the home of the First Cavalry, and is married to an Army officer who served three tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan during the first six years of their marriage. She has a sharp, clean, prose style; a gift for telling urgent, important stories; and an eye for the kind of odd, revelatory detail that may seem ordinary if you have spent time on military bases but that civilians rarely encounter. At Fort Hood, streets are named Hell-on-Wheels and Tank Destroyer. Men returning from a year in a war zone are met by the "Horse Cavalry Detachment ... dressed in Custer-era uniforms." Each returning soldier receives a pamphlet suggesting that "you do not engage in intercourse with your wife immediately upon return ... BE PATIENT!!!"

Siobhan Fallon writes with a generous spirit about people caught in lives over which they have little control. In a book that is not didactic and that does not engage in a debate about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there are no wholly bad people. There are people who are defeated by the pressures of waiting through a war, or an interrogation, or the aftermath of a bomb exploded in a market; and there are people who achieve a moment of grace in their lives as they try to hold their families and communities together.

Órfhlaith Foyle

Reading Wednesday September 14th 9pm

Faber Presents

Órfhlaith Foyle was born in Africa to Irish parents. Her first novel *Belios* was published by The Lilliput Press in 2005. *Revenge*, an anthology of her poetry and short fiction was published by Arlen House also in 2005. Her first full collection of poetry *Red Riding Hood's Dilemma* was published by Arlen House in 2010 and later short-listed for the Rupert and Eithne Strong Award in 2011.

Her first full collection of short stories *Somewhere in Minnesota and Other Stories* is to be published by Arlen House in 2011. The title story was recently published in Faber and Faber's *New Irish Short Stories;* edited by Joseph O' Connor.

Órfhlaith is currently writing her second novel.

I was sitting in a diner in God knows where in Duluth, Minnesota, during wintertime and the waitress was concerned for me. She liked my accent and noticed my bruised face.
She said, 'Who's been hurting you, sweetheart?'
I don't like it when people use sweet language on strangers. Sweet language belongs to lovers. But she was kind. A little bit old with worn blonde hair, the sort that was dying before she was, and the fat had fallen in her face. I wanted to draw her so I ripped a napkin from the dispenser and took my pencil from my pocket.
My phone buzzed against my hip twice then switched to message mode.
The diner door opened, and the waitress called out, 'Hey John.'
John raised a salute. 'How are you these days, Hetty? The kids?'
Hetty laughed. She said her husband had come over with the kids yesterday. She said they were all grown up now and one of them wanted to be an archaeologist. He always did like finding dead useless things, she said.
I tried to ignore her voice but it had a good rhythm to it and it helped me move my pencil.

From "Somewhere in Minnesota" by Órfhlaith Foyle taken from *New Irish Short Stories*, ed. by Joseph O'Connor.

"In an era of economic mismanagement and mistrust the power of the Arts is needed more than ever. Help us keep the Arts a priority, help us keep telling the truth about the real Ireland."

— Garry Hynes

The Arts are a necessity. Not a luxury.
The Arts are an asset. Not an overhead.

National Campaign for the Arts.
visit www.ncfa.ie to see what you can do.

Yiyun Li

Shortlisted for the 2011 O'Connor Award

Reading Friday September 16th 9pm

The Bay Area Connection

Yiyun Li is the author of *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers, The Vagrants* and *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl*. A native of Beijing and a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, she was the recipient of the inaugural Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award, the Whiting Writers' Award, and the Guardian First Book Award. She teaches writing at the University of California, Davis, and lives in Oakland, California, with her husband and their two sons.

The girl, unlike most people photographed for fashion magazines, was not beautiful. Moreover, she had no desire to appear beautiful, as anyone looking at her could tell, and for that reason Teacher Fei stopped turning the pages and studied her. She had short, unruly hair and wide-set eyes that glared at the camera in a close-up shot. In another photo, she stood in front of a bedroom door, her back to the camera, her hand pushing the door ajar. A bed and its pink sheet were artfully blurred. Her black T-shirt, in sharp focus, displayed a line of white printed characters: MY FATHER IS LESS OF A CREATURE THAN A PIG OR A DOG BECAUSE HE IS AN ADULTERER.

The girl was nineteen, Teacher Fei learned from the article. Her parents had divorced three years earlier, and she suspected that another woman, a second cousin of her father's, had seduced him. On her eighteenth birthday, the first day permitted by law, the daughter had filed a lawsuit against him. As she explained to the reporter, he was a member of the Communist party, and he should be punished for abandoning his family, and for the immoral act of having taken a mistress in the first place. When the effort to imprison her father failed, the girl started a blog and called it A Declaration of War on Unfaithful Husbands.

"What is it that this crazy girl wants?" Teacher Fei asked out loud before reaching the girl's answer. She wanted her father to lose his job, she told the reporter, along with his social status, his freedom, if possible, and his mistress for sure; she wanted him to beg her mother to take him back. She would support him for the rest of his life as the most filial daughter, but he had to repent-and, before that, to suffer as much as she and her mother had.

From *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl* by Yiyun Li.

The Guardian First Book Award that she won last night is the latest accolade for a collection of short stories which has so far earned her a $200,000 book deal, a Pushcart Prize, a Plimpton Prize, and, last year, the inaugural €50,000 Frank O'Connor Short Story Award: among the finalists for that prize was the Irish writer William Trevor, whose work, Li insists, taught her everything she knows about writing. Certainly her short stories are, like his, full of social and emotional violence, of implacable events that crush frail lives as a lorry might unknowingly crush an ant; but, as with his, the violence is eyed askance. She understands how cruelty is essentially absurd; that what is interesting is how people respond to it - and that these feelings are complicated, can change from minute to minute, which is where the drama really lies. This very human understanding, delivered in taut, unjudgmental sentences, is why many of the stories are so satisfying.

As one begins to suspect from its repeated appearance in *A Thousand Years of Good Prayers*, Li grew up on a compound in Beijing devoted to the families of nuclear researchers and scientists; her father was a physicist, her mother a schoolteacher. Because of the importance of nuclear weapons to the government, she wrote in a New Yorker essay two years ago, scientist-intellectuals such her father escaped the purges of the cultural revolution. Which did not mean none of them saw anything - she has written, of a moment when, aged five, she saw four rope-bound men being displayed to a crowd before their execution.

Her family was not wealthy. "When I grew up there was not even a middle class. My parents were intellectuals, but as poor as peasants. There were officials and everybody else. We belonged to the everybody else." The arrival of a refrigerator when she was 14 was a major punctuation point. Food was rationed, meat a rare treat. They had to keep secret the fact that her grandfather, who lived with them, had fought in the civil war, but on the nationalist side, with the Kuomintang.

Li was an instinctively private child, and "privacy was such a bad thing. If you grow up in China, there is no concept of privacy. You share rooms. People will knock on your door and they're your guest - I didn't do well with that. And you're not supposed to hide anything, even your diary, from anybody." By the time she was 10, she knew the point of education was escape - preferably to America, like many people she knew.

At the weekends she attended a school for the best child mathematicians culled from all the schools in Beijing; for at least one year she found herself in the top class. As for English, they learned grammar for six years - but did not speak a word. Until she was in the army, she says, the only English book she had read was an abridged version of Anne Frank's diary; in the army, the girls' platoon passed around copies of Thomas Hardy, Hemingway, Jack London, DH Lawrence. "The first time I read *Gone With the Wind*, I read a photocopy this big" - she demonstrates a silly height - "it was, like, pirated? There was a shop near where I went to school that had many English books. And it had a room at the back which said foreigners cannot enter. It was full of pirated books, and photocopied Reader's Digests."

Tiananmen Square, for her, as for so many others, was a turning point. "I became an adult, a grown-up, after that." She was 17. "It was Saturday, and my friend and I went to the mathematics school. When we came back it was 6.30 in the evening and people were already pushing buses into the streets to block the army. I think we all knew it would happen on that day. A lot of people went out on to the street, hoping that if there were enough of them they would not shoot." Li and her elder sister were locked in the house, with their father standing guard; their mother went to investigate. She did not get as far as the square, but saw a grief-stricken mother being driven around the city displaying her seven-year-old who had been shot by the army, a bloody rallying cry. "My mother saw the body, and she came home crying. After that, people were so scared. It was an incredible week."

After her year in the army Li went to university in Beijing and became an immunologist whose sole aim was to win a place at graduate school in the US. She chose Iowa, and arrived in 1996, aged 23, and discovered that her sister's suggestion that she should watch Baywatch to learn about the US was not much use. That first year, surrounded by cornfields and unfamiliar people and trying to get by on English learned from tapes, she missed her family and boyfriend, but "I was actually very happy to be on my own." There was no one to talk to about books, though, and when she saw an ad in the student newspaper for an eight-week community writing course, she signed up. She'd never produced a single piece of writing in English before, so she was taken aback when the instructor read her first effort, about the grandmother she had never known, and asked if she'd ever thought about being published.

extracted from a 2006 *Guardian* interview by Aida Edemariam

Alexander MacLeod

Shortlisted for the 2011 O'Connor Award

Interview Thursday September 15th 4pm

Reading Thursday September 15th 9pm

Young writers from Canada

Alexander MacLeod was born in Inverness, Cape Breton and raised in Windsor, Ontario. His first collection of short stories (*Light Lifting*, Biblioasis 2010), was shortlisted for the Giller Prize, the Commonwealth Prize, two Atlantic Book Awards, and went on to become a national bestseller. Alexander holds degrees from the University of Windsor, the University of Notre Dame, and McGill; he currently lives in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia and teaches at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, in Canada.

Canada Council for the Arts | Conseil des Arts du Canada

Nobody deserved a sunburn like that. Especially not a kid. You could see it right through his shirt. Like grease coming through waxed paper. Wet and thick like that, sticking to him. Purple. It was a worn out, see-through shirt and the blisters he had from the day before had opened up again. Now they were hardening over for the second time, sucking the fabric into his back. I tried not to think about him taking that shirt off. He'd have to rip at it quickly – like a bandage – and that would tear away any of the healing that had already happened. Half his back would go. He had a sunburn bad enough to bleed.

I saw it coming the day before and I probably should have said something and stopped it. It was bright. One of those clear afternoons where there's just enough of a breeze to trick you into thinking it's nice and cool. On a day like that you can forget that the sun is still up there, on top of the breeze, still coming straight down. Most people have been caught at least once by a trick day like that and it's worse now. Now it's over before you feel anything. You can get permanently hurt if you don't pay attention.

I watched it happen. I watched that burn going into him – the pink blotches moving across his shoulders and down the backs of his arms. He was turning colours right in front of me and I didn't say a word. Instead, I thought about how it's strange that you really can't feel a burn like that when it's going in. Or you feel it only like a nice comfortable kind of all-over warm. Everything seems fine when you're out there in the daytime, but at night – when a bad burn starts to come out – that's a totally different thing. That's a special kind if trouble. I've been there. Probably everyone's been there.

From *Light Lifting* by Alexander MacLeod.

Alexander MacLeod Interview at Maisonneuve.com

Matthew Brown: The reader gets the sense that significant parts of the stories in this collection might have come directly from your own experiences. The naturalistic feel of the stories, and the detailed descriptions feel like they come from first-hand knowledge. Have you drawn a lot from your own life or are the stories mainly works of research and imagination?

Alexander MacLeod: The stories are all fictional, and many of the key scenes are purely imaginary, but the raw materials and most of the settings and contexts are definitely drawn from my own experience and I do have first-hand knowledge in many of these areas. I was once a pretty serious long distance runner and I have small kids and I did the interlocking brick job, etc. I built these narratives out of the stuff in my life, and I wanted to try and be honest and treat those forces fairly and directly, but the book isn't the story of my life and though I'm trying to be honest, this isn't the "truth."

MB: At times the stories almost feel like documentaries about the lives of the characters. Do characters take precedence over the plot for you; are they a starting point for the unfolding of the story?

AM: It's funny because the characters are usually my secondary concern when I'm trying to make the story. I normally start with two or three key images — the girl jumping off the roof, the near drowning and the hard swimming lesson, for example—and then I build around the images and put the characters into the scenes. For me, the characters are going to be shaped by what they do or what happens to them so the structures of the scenes and the key images are more important to me than a character's internal motivations. Don't get me wrong: I want the characters to retain their agency and their autonomy inside the finished narrative, but as a writer, in the process of making the story, I don't start with them.

MB: There is a lot of tension that builds up in these stories, and even moments of danger and violence. Did you intend for this to be a common thread in this collection, and is there a conscious reason why you went in that direction?

AM: Yes, that focus on tense moments, critical instances of decision, was definitely something I wanted to explore in the book. In many of the stories I was trying to look at different kinds of actions and trying to think about how or why these movements could become (or fail to become) significant to the characters. The runners are an obvious example of this — they train for significant action — and maybe the swimmer, too, but I think it's still there in the car story and the ones about the delivery boy and the bricks and the parents. In all these cases, you're right: there is a kind of tension and maybe a threat of violence. I was trying to raise the stakes a bit, trying to make it clear that, whatever decision gets made in this plot, whatever course of action is followed, there will be clear consequences for that choice and the world will look different before and after.

MB: You teach at St. Mary's University, in Halifax. How does teaching affect your writing? Do you find yourself working out strategies and problems as you teach, or is teaching pretty removed from your own writing work?

AM: I think teaching has had a very positive effect on my writing. When I give a lecture on a great short story or a really complicated novel, I'm trying to draw the students' attention to how this piece works and what makes it so powerful. I'm trying to puzzle through the narrative technique behind the thing and trying to pay attention to practical matters of construction and craftsmanship. For me, teaching students to be good and careful readers is really just a continual repeating of my own daily struggle to do the same. Having a consistent opportunity to work on those skills and a stable environment in which to practise is a wonderful thing. The normal challenges are always there — the occasional lazy and/or dishonest student, sloppy rush-job work, insane marking loads, cramped schedules etc — but I still like the job very much.

MB: You've said that the short story is a form that you want to continue with. Who writes or has written some of your favourite short stories?

AM: I'm definitely influenced by my father's stories and though I know I am close to them in my personal life, I also believe they are truly and objectively excellent. The same goes for Alice Munro. I'm not close to those stories in any personal way, but I think she has a nearly unmatched emotional intelligence and an amazing ability to craft a story. Her latest stories are some of the best she's ever written. I admire Lisa Moore's short fiction and Lynn Coady's *Play The Monster Blind* and I think Clark Blaise's essential contribution to Canadian writing in books like *Tribal Justice* and *A North American Education* has been tragically underestimated.

Alison MacLeod

Reading Friday September 16th 4pm

Alison MacLeod grew up in Nova Scotia, Canada and has lived in the UK since the late eighties. Her most recent book, *Fifteen Modern Tales of Attraction* (Penguin) was deemed by the Guardian to be 'as inventive as it is original'. In 2008, one of its collected stories, 'Dirty Weekend', was awarded the Society of Authors' Olive Cook Prize for Short Fiction while the collection itself was named as one of the 'Top 10 Books to Talk About in 2009' in association with the Guardian and World Book Day. MacLeod's short fiction has been published in a wide range of magazines and broadcast on the BBC. She is also the author of two novels, *The Changeling* (Macmillan, 1996) and *The Wave Theory of Angels* (Hamish Hamilton/Penguin, 2005), and has won Writer's Awards from both Arts Council England and the Canada Council for the Arts. Her next novel will be published by Penguin in September 2012 and is set in Brighton, where she now lives. She is currently completing her second short story collection. Alongside her writing, she lectures on a part-time basis at the University of Chichester, where she is Professor of Contemporary Fiction and Director of Thresholds International Short Story Forum.

As Denis Noble, Professor of Cardiovascular Physiology, succumbs to the opioids – a meandering river of fentanyl from the IV drip – he is informed his heart is on its way. In twenty, perhaps thirty minutes' time, the Cessna air ambulance will land in the bright, crystalline light of December, on the small landing-strip behind the Radcliffe Hospital.
A bearded jaw appears over him. From this angle, the mouth is oddly labial. Does he understand? Professor Noble nods from the other side of the ventilation mask. He would join in the team chat but the mask prevents it, and in any case, he must lie still so the nurse can shave the few hairs that remain on his chest.

No cool-box then. No heart on ice. This is what they are telling him. Instead, the latest technology. He remembers the prototype he was once shown. His new heart will arrive in its own state-of-the-art reliquary. It will be lifted, beating, from a nutrient-rich bath of blood and oxygen. So he can rest easy, someone adds. It's beating well at 40,000 feet, out of range of all turbulence. 'We need your research, Professor,' another voice jokes from behind the ECG. 'We're taking no chances!'

Which isn't to say that the whole thing isn't a terrible gamble.

from 'The Heart of Denis Noble', published in *Litmus: Short Stories from Modern Science* (Comma Press, 2011).

Francis McManus Award

Readings Friday September 16th 5pm

RTE Presents

The RTE Radio 1 Short Story Competition was founded in memory of Francis Mac Manus , the Kilkenny born novelist, biographer and former Head of Talks and Features at Radio Eireann.
Over the past 25 years the competition has proved to be a launching pad for several new and emerging Irish writers and continues to offer a platform for the best of contemporary fiction.
In the past 25 years over 500 stories from the competition have been broadcast. Among the names who have featured in the competition and who have gone on to win national and international acclaim are Claire Keegan, Molly Mc Closkey, Anthony Glavin, Mary O'Donnell and Ivy Bannister.

Dundalk-born doctor Austin Duffy is the overall winner of the 26th Francis MacManus Short Story Competition emerging from 810 entries as an exciting new voice in Irish fiction. Born in Dundalk, he graduated in Medicine from Trinity College Dublin in1998. After a postgraduate fellowship in cancer research in New York he took up the position of Staff Clinician in the Medical Oncology Branch of the National Cancer Unit in Besthesda, Washington DC where he now works and lives. While in New York he attended the prestigious Writers' Studio in Greenwich Village which he says was a crucial turning point in his inspiration and development as a writer. He embraced that institution's philosophy that "when the desire to write is strong enough and the writer has found his/her voice then anyone can learn the craft necessary for full creative expression."

In his winning story, 'Orca', the winning author calls on his medical expertise to explore the complex relationship between a young doctor and his teenage patient, who is terminally ill with cancer. The story is written from the inside with great compassion, insight and skill.

Set in Cork, where the author spent time working as a registrar following his graduation from Trinity College, Dublin 1998, 'Orca' uses the cityscape to explore the stark contrast between the harrowing clinical hospital ward and the calm of the early morning urban streets to which his hero escapes.
Austin Duffy's story was chosen from 810 entries which was narrowed down to a shortlist of 25.
The final adjudication was made by a panel of distinguished writers and academics - Alan Titley, Molly McCloskey and John MacKenna under the Chairmanship of RTE Radio1 Producer Seamus Hosey.

RTÉ RADIO 1

Austin Duffy's winning story will be read by the actor Diarmuid Murtagh who graced our screens earlier this year on the TV blockbuster *Camelot*.
Second Prize was won by Patrick Griffin from Kilkenny City for his story "Platform 17 – Grand Central Station" Patrick's story will be read by the actor and cabaret artiste Susan Zalouf.
Third Prize was won by Andrew Fox from Skerries, Co. Dublin for his story "Seven Steps Home". Andrew's story will be read by Cork actor David Coakley who graced our screens earlier this year on the TV blockbuster *Camelot*

Eoin McNamee

Reading Saturday 17th September 7.30pm

Faber Presents

Eoin McNamee was born in Kilkeel, Co Down in 1961. His novels include *Resurrection Man, The Blue Tango* and *12 23.* His latest novel is *Orchid Blue,* based on the execution of Robert McGladdery for the murder of Pearl Gamble.

"It is this sense of how the defining moments come to be agreed – of how they are essentially defined by the ruling class – that illuminates Orchid Blue, so that what begins as a crime thriller gradually builds not only into a political novel of the highest order but also that rare phenomenon, a genuinely tragic work of art."

-John Burnside *The Guardian*

"McNamee's style is refreshingly taut and spare, full of active verbs. He does not describe what his energetic characters are doing. He just lets them do it."

- *The New York Times*

All through August Cheryl had seen the light outside the hangar buildings at night. Cheryl lived in a mobile home in the caravan park at the edge of the aerodrome and could see across the empty aprons and deserted runways. Some Russians were running a coach-works from the hangar buildings. The runways were used by autoclubs for racing and rallys and there was a need for custom auto parts. The aerodrome had been built during the war and used as a staging post for the D-Day landings. It had closed in 1949 when the last Americans went home.

The Russians had come in 2003 to work in the fish factories in the town. They had been drawn to the aerodrome from the start.

'They have dreams of America,' Dieter said, 'here is closest they will ever get to it. There are cities in Russia that were left off the map during the Cold War,' he said, 'whole cities with millions of people hidden from the outside world. What sort of country is that, do you think?'

From "Handmade Wings" by Eoin McNamee taken from *New Irish Short Stories,* ed. by Joseph O'Connor.

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

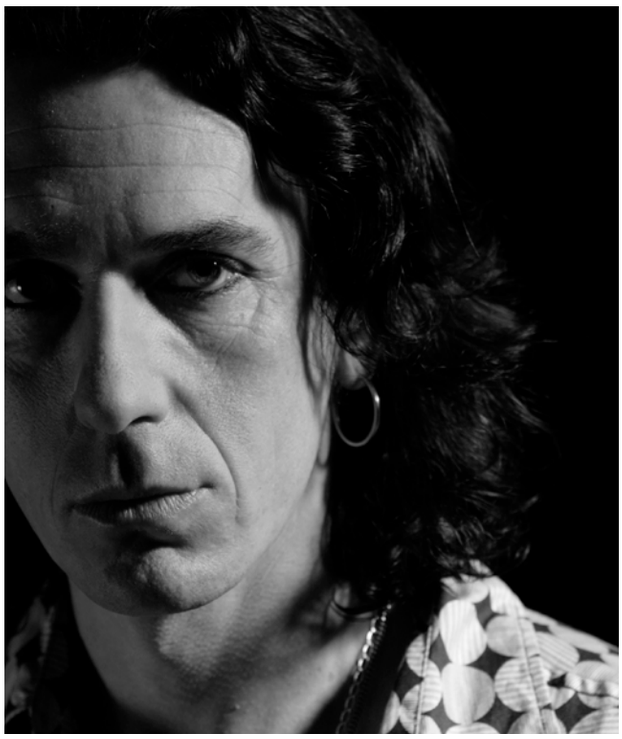
You can find out more about the arts here:

www.artscouncil.ie

Peter Murphy

Reading Wednesday September 14th 9pm

Faber Presents



Peter Murphy was born in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford. His first novel *John the Revelator* was published in the UK and Ireland by Faber & Faber and in the US by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and was nominated for the 2011 IMPAC literary award and shortlisted for the 2009 Costa Book Awards. His short story 'The Blacklight Ballroom' was included in *The News From Dublin,* an anthology of Irish short stories, published by Faber and edited by Joseph O'Connor.

One of Ireland's foremost arts writers, his journalism has been published in *Rolling Stone, Music Week, the Irish Times,* and he served as a contributing editor with *Hot Press* magazine. Peter is also a regular guest on RTE's arts review show *The View* and has contributed liner notes to the forthcoming remastered *Anthology of American Folk Music*.

Nearly a year into the civil war that no one cared to declare a civil war, they grew tired of hatching their fires and waiting to die in their dressing gowns, and blitz spirit drove the first ones out like animals after hibernation to smell the air and test the inclination of the wind. Then, as if privy to the twitching of antennae or some hive-mind transmission, somebody got word from somebody, who heard of a place to congregate on Saturday night – the Blacklight Ballroom in the basement of the old Bailey Hotel. That was three years ago. If not for the weekly militia tribute, those black armband boys might have shut it down on the grounds of illegal assembly or breach of curfew or whatever. But come fetor or freeze, snipers or shelling, the show goes on. It's been postponed only once, on account of August's epizootic. From all over the county they come, huddled like wetbacks of cattle in the trailers of tarped artics, in four-wheel drives and SUVs, in dented Zetors canopied with asbestos and three-inch Plexiglas, in pocked or perforated coaches customised with great plates of tin or aluminium nail-gunned to the panels.

From "The Blacklight Ballroom" by Peter Murphy taken from *New Irish Short Stories,* ed. by Joseph O'Connor.

Edna O'Brien

Shortlisted for the 2011 O'Connor Award
Reading Saturday September 17th 9pm

Since her debut novel *The Country Girls* Edna O'Brien has written over twenty works of fiction along with a biography of James Joyce and Lord Byron. She is the recipient of many awards including the Irish PEN Lifetime Achievement Award, the American National Art's Gold Medal and the Ulysses Medal. Born and raised in Co. Clare she has lived in London for many years.

They were in. Mother, father, and daughter. Delia had stayed awake to hear them come in, but she would be awake anyhow, since sleep eluded here more and more as the years went on. Occasionally, she would fall asleep unbeknownst to herself and waken in that grim hour before dawn and, going to the window, she would see her dog come from under the hedge, tuned to the first, almost imperceptible sound inside the house, and look up at her with knowing eyes, asking that she come down, open the back door, and serve it its usual saucer of tea with milk. Sometimes she took a tablet, but dreaded being at the mercy of any drug and had a secondary dread of one day not being able to afford them. In her wide-awake vigils, she prayed or tried to pray, but prayer, like sleep, was on the wane now, at the very time when she should be drawing closer to her blessed Maker. The prayers came only from her lips and not from deep within anymore. She had lost that most heartfelt rapport that she once had with God. So at night, awake, she would go around the house in her mind and think of improvements that she would make to it in time – new wallpaper in the good room, where the existing pink was stained around the window frames, brown smears from repeated damp. Then in the vacant room where apples were stored, the wallpaper had been hung upside down and had survived the years without any visitors noticing that the acorns and hummingbirds were the wrong way around. She might have it replaced also, just to get the better of those bostoons who had hung it incorrectly. Delia was a woman who liked to be always in the right.

From *Saints and Sinners* by Edna O'Brien.

What a sight. Standing straight-backed at the edge of the room, O'Brien, queenly and beautiful, brought to mind nothing so much as a glorious boat, coming slowly in to port: the elegant prow of her nose, the blown sails of her hair, the leaden anchor of her evening bag, hanging over a crooked arm. Her skin was pale and almost completely unlined, and she wore an expression of purest interest, as if to say: is this where they launch books now? When I got home, I looked her up on the internet. According to what I read, she would turn 80 in just a few months' time.

Today, at home in Knightsbridge, she is just as mesmerising. It's as if she has cast a spell on me. Partly, it's her house, which has a dark, fairytale quality. O'Brien has lived here for many years: far longer, I'm guessing, than her neighbours, with the result that her home now stands in striking contrast to their boring Farrow & Balled places. It has a hunkered look, forced to play its game of odd one out, and a strange exterior passage – like the entries you get between Yorkshire terraces – that takes you to the front door. Inside, the blood-red stairs are so gloomy and narrow, and the rooms so crammed with books, that it seems almost to pulsate, like an artery. As for O'Brien herself, she is resplendent in velvet, fur at her cuffs, her face immaculately made up, the powder and paint working as a perfect foil for her preternaturally shiny eyes (which are not, as people tend to assume, green, but dark grey; I suppose this mistake is down to the fact that *The Country Girls*'s sequel was called *Girl With Green Eyes*). But it's the way she speaks that is really extraordinary. Although she left Ireland more than half a century ago, apparently, it never left her. Her voice is deep and sibilant, and it makes you think of the rills and the rivers of Clare, the county where she grew up.

O'Brien is about to publish *Saints and Sinners*, a collection of short stories that is her 21st work of fiction (she is also the author of three works of non-fiction and five plays. It's a shimmering book – lyric, but highly controlled – and it will perhaps confound some of those critics (her thin-skinned countrymen, mostly) who think she is obsessed with an Ireland that no longer exists. Yes, there are drinkers here, and homesick men who must make their living digging London roads, and a released Republican prisoner. But there is also a pungent whiff of the harsh, money-obsessed Ireland that grew up in the years before the crash – the Ireland where, as she puts it, "people took their helicopter to lunch only four miles away". When she started writing, Ireland's deepest and darkest passions were obscured from view by its airless relationship with the Catholic church. No longer. The question now is: with the church so disgraced, and so abandoned, what will fill the space it leaves behind?

"Someone said to me in Dublin: masses are down, confessions are down, but funerals are up!" She laughs. "Religion. You see, I rebelled against the coercive and stifling religion into which I was born and bred. It was very frightening, and all pervasive. I'm glad it has gone. But when you remove spirituality, or the quest for it, from people's lives, you remove something very precious. Ireland is more secular, but it went to their heads: a kind of hedonism. They're free, yes, but questions come with freedom. What about conscience? Conscience is an essential thing." She didn't see the crash coming, but she knew no good could come of the boom. "It generated an ethos of envy. I'll never forget walking along by St Stephen's Green [Dublin]. There was a big hoarding with an advert on it for a motor car. 'Enjoy the begrudgery,' said the slogan. It was very cynical, but very true. Not a healthy sign."

But why is her pre-eminent subject still, after all these years, Ireland, when she does not live there, and once could not wait to escape it? She has the skill to write about anything. "Flannery O'Connor said: if you're going to write, you'd better come from somewhere. I feel that. A writer's imaginative life commences in childhood; all one's associations and feelings are steeped in it. When you're young, everything is seen in wonder and detail. I don't see it as a limitation. So long as the words and the story spring from a true place, that's all that counts." Besides, she still visits often, for all that she no longer has a house there (the place in Donegal that her architect son, Sasha, built for her proved to be inimical to writing. "I couldn't write a line there. It was beautiful, but as I said to him: these rooms are too big to write in"). Ireland is a country of ghost settlements, these days, she says. "All those buildings that went up like mushrooms in the damp and the rain. Now they're sitting empty, their windows chalked up." Nevertheless, she is glad of it. You might even say that she needs it. "Yes, I'm very thankful for Ireland," she says, pressing a hand to her breast bone. "It stirs things up in me. It gives me so much."

Edna O'Brien was born in the village of Tuamgraney, in County Clare, and she grew up a serious little girl: anxious and sensitive. "It was the situation," she says. "Money troubles, drink troubles, all sorts of troubles." Her father was a gambler and a drinker: violent, unpredictable and thwarted. The family had once had money but now, thanks to him, it was gone. "There were the relics of riches. It was a life full of contradictions. We had an avenue, but it was full of potholes; there was a gatehouse, but another couple lived there; we had lots of fields, but they weren't all stocked or tilled. I remember fields high with ragwort. I remember my father giving them to other people. There was a prodigality, which I regret to tell you I have inherited." The atmosphere was further complicated by her mother, who had been to America, and returned with a little "Yank style". In her mother's wardrobe hung a green georgette dress, a mournful reminder of happier times (it takes a starring role in one of the new stories). But were her parents unhappy with each other, or were they each unhappy in their own separate ways? "I hate talking about it," she says with a sudden shudder, childlike for a moment. "But it wasn't happy, no. People's lives were so hard. My mother worked like a demon: feeding animals, carrying buckets."

Extract from a *Guardian* Interview by Rachel Cooke
February 2011

Glen Patterson

Reading Saturday 17th September 7.30pm

Faber Presents

Glenn Patterson was born, and lives, in Belfast. He is the author of seven novels: *Burning Your Own* (1988), *Fat Lad* (1992), *Black Night at Big Thunder Mountain* (1995), *The International* (1999), *Number 5* (2003), *That Which Was* (2004), and *The Third Party* (2007). His non-fiction works are *Lapsed Protestant* (2006), and *Once Upon a Hill: Love in Troubled Times* (2009). A new novel *The Mill for Grinding Old People Young* will be published by Faber next year.

Back in the days when that was the sort of thing that did happen, Maurice McStay passed on details of his neighbour's car to another man he knew as a result of which the neighbour wound up dead. No one ever suspected Maurice. He had gone to the funeral with the rest of the street. He had put his arms around his neighbour's wife, shaken the children's awkwardly offered hands. The youngest boy looked Maurice in the eye. I wish it had been you and not my daddy, he said. The boy's mother was appalled, forgetting for the moment in her rush to apologise her own grief. God forgive you, she said, and to Maurice, he doesn't understand what any of it means. Maurice was nursing the hand he had with difficulty wrested back. There's no need to apologise, he said. The boy had buried his face in his mother's skirts. She tried to get him to turn round. Really, Maurice said, no need.

From "Footnote" by Glenn Patterson from *New Irish Short Stories*, ed. by Joseph O'Connor.

Suzanne Rivecca

Shortlisted for the 2011 O'Connor Award

Interview Thursday 15th September 5pm

Reading Thursday 15th September 9pm

The Bay Area Connection

Suzanne Rivecca's first book, *Death is Not an Option* was a finalist for The Story Prize, The PEN/Hemingway Award, and the New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award. She is the recipient of the Rome Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters as well as writing fellowships from Radcliffe and Stanford University. She is currently living in Rome and San Francisco, CA.

Twenty-seven years ago, when you were a surgical intern at Bingham Medical Center in Paw Paw, Michigan, you saved my father's life. He was not your patient. And although he, too, worked at Bingham-as director of the nephrology laboratory-the two of you never crossed paths there. The moment at which you saved his life did not take place in a hospital at all, but in the master bedroom of our vinyl-sided ranch on Paley Road, directly across the street from the red-brick split-level you shared with your wife during tenure of your residency. It was a month before the tornado.

It must have been disconcerting when my mother knocked on your door that morning. You knew her, I suppose, in the way you must have known my father, with a certain unconscious gratitude for the consistency of her persona: the woman across the street who waved from her lawn, fixed as a model in a seasonal catalogue spread, posing through cycles of snow-clearing and mowing and gardening. She was a schoolteacher. She spoke with the brisk hand-clapping pragmatism of someone who could not tell us what was wrong with our father, and she couldn't tell you, either. What was wrong with him defied classification. There was a renegade volatility to it, like a bewitchment or a biblical plague. She ushered you through the foyer and past the bookshelves and server, past Jane and me and through the white-painted double doors leading to the hallway, and she must have said, in the well-bred embarrassed way of someone unaccustomed to making requests, "Can you just look at him?" If it were a hospital you would have opened the door and breezed in and started confidently prognosticating. But it was a home and there were children; all around you were the smells of lives having been led for years without serious interruption until this fissure, this pox visited improbably upon a modest peach-colored ranch house bought for $15,000 in 1970, a house that looked too inconsequential for a pox to have taken the trouble, a house indistinguishable from hundreds of others in a frumpily virtuous neighbourhood skirting the edge between middle-class and lower-middle-class, a neighbourhood you escaped from as soon as you started making real money, Doctor, and then it was off to Portage and the executive homes.

From *Death is not an Option* by Suzanne Rivecca.

Suzanne Rivecca Interview Extract from LAist.com

Your short story collection explores a very specific emotional territory. Each character has an interesting journey from the lies they've been telling themselves to an arrival at emotional honesty. An arrival at seeing themselves and others for who they really are and what that means for their future. This is something that folks often take years of therapy to fully recognize and own. Yet, in these stories, we are seeing characters at that exact moment of realization, at the precise point in their lives where this shift occurs. What about this shift, this moment of realization, interests you?

I'm intrigued by how, more often than not, those "a-ha" moments are fleeting, just momentary flashes of grace, and people don't really recognize or feel their impact until years later. In most of my stories, that shift is too much for the characters to process and they aren't able to translate it into action. But that moment of standing at the precipice of some huge and potentially disturbing mystery is one of the most ennobling moments I can think of. It's like standing in front of a burning bush. In that light, we are all fleetingly burnished with meaning.

In these serious moments of raw self-honesty, you find a way to infuse dark humor, acerbic wit. Many passages had me laughing out loud right before plunging back into deep emotional territory. It struck me as very honest, very true to the human condition. That even while working through serious life-altering situations, we can find a way to laugh, to roll our eyes at the madness of it all, even if only as a coping mechanism. Is this something you intended for these stories? Or is this your own sense of humor coming through?

I think the humor in the stories functions as a kind of badge of humanity. Trauma doesn't erase your personality and replace it with a blackout curtain. I've read a lot of fiction that portrays victims of abuse or violence as utterly unaware of the mythology and tropes and catchphrases and bywords of victimhood. They never have to contend with the very real issue of how to meet or subvert other people's expectations of what a "victim" is supposed to act like. The characters in my stories may be frightened and maladjusted, but they're keenly aware of how they're perceived, they have a fine-tuned ear for the ridiculous, and they make fun of the labels that are put on them. The humor, I think, is an assertion of individuality and selfhood in the face of a society that prescribes an "appropriate" way for you to be affected by trauma. If I see one more movie in which a sexually abused child grows up to be an extremely attractive junkie prostitute with a heart of gold, for example, I'll lose it.

What responsibility do writers have to tell the truth, even in fiction, and what responsibility do they have to stay away from easy solutions when they are exploring social issues like homelessness?

I've been trying to write stories that feature homeless kids and their experiences. And it's very hard to resist the urge to give your story a villain. It's very tempting, based on what I've witnessed firsthand—the shocking callousness and blindness of police and residents in the Haight, the self-serving agenda of the mayor and his staff, the mind-boggling, self-satisfied incompetence of certain journalists—to turn some characters into evil caricatures. But that would turn my fiction into propaganda. When you're writing about social issues, or about situations in which people do bad things to each other, I think it's important to keep an eye on the bigger picture. It's not individual people who are evil and deserve to be pilloried in print. The real evil comes from a collective lack of empathetic imagination. The real problem is that the neighbors can't put themselves in the homeless kids' place, or vice versa. And what is good fiction if not an act of empathetic imagination? Ultimately, the magic of fiction makes the reader put herself in someone else's shoes—effortlessly, unthinkingly, with compassion that's borne of emotional identification, not of analysis or bias.

In the grand old debate of to MFA or not, what advice do you have for writers considering this step and the costs associated with it?

MFA programs can be hotbeds of careerist insanity—a lot of hungry writers competing for measly nuggets of validation—but I think it's important to extract the good stuff from your program and ignore the bad. I'd advise people to get an MFA only if it's fully funded. I can't see the point of going into debt for it; and from what I've heard, programs in which the funding isn't equally dispersed can create a very toxic environment in and out of the classroom. But I've never bought into the argument that MFA programs are a bad thing, or that they've created a generation of homogenized writers. At their best, what they do is give people enough money to scrape by for a year or two while they take advantage of an unprecedented luxury: the opportu-

Ethel Rohan

Reading Friday September 16th 4pm

The Bay Area Connection – Irish in America

Ethel Rohan is the author of *Hard to Say,* PANK, 2011 and *Cut Through the Bone,* Dark Sky Books, 2010, the latter named a 2010 Notable Story Collection by The Story Prize. Her work has or will appear in *The Good Men Project, The Chattahoochee Review, Los Angeles Review, Potomac Review* and *Southeast Review Online,* among many others. She earned her MFA in fiction from Mills College, California. Raised in Dublin, Ireland, Ethel Rohan now lives in San Francisco, California. Visit her at ethelrohan.com.

"In *Cut Through the Bone,* Ethel Rohan renders, with precision and beauty, lives engulfed by loneliness and loss. Rohan creates worlds at once tremendously recognizable and tremendously strange, and the voices of her characters lingered in my mind long after I finished the final story. This is a marvelous collection, filled with moments that startle and shatter." — Laura van den Berg, author of *What the World Will Look Like When All the Water Leaves Us*

Daddy gave off that sour Sunday morning smell that I knew meant he wouldn't want to get out of bed until at least the afternoon, but I told him, over and over, that he needed to get up, that it was important. After I whined, tugged on his arm, and repeated "important" enough times he eventually dragged himself from the bed. He pulled on his crumpled trousers and grey shirt, the clothes taken from the floor and stinky with sweat, cigarette smoke, and women's perfume.
I led him down the hall and into his old bedroom, his arm a leash between us. He stood, blinking, bleary-eyed, in the middle of the bedroom he used to share with my mother. He grumbled, unimpressed with my ideas of important.
"Please," I said. He held his head with both hands, said he was inside a dark cage. I ran to the windows and pulled back the sheer curtains, let as much light as possible into the room.
He stared at the bed, his old bed, and at the hardwood floor, his old floor. I'd pulled out Mother's dresses from the wardrobe and laid them out on the pillows and patchwork quilt, and lined-up her old purses, scarves, and shoes on the floor.
For months, I'd secreted myself away in my parents' old bedroom and dressed-up in all my mother's old things, primped and pranced in front of the wardrobe's full-length mirror. Inside the mirror, my mother smiled back at me, fussed over my hair and the zip of my dress. She always cooed at how lovely I looked. I told her I wasn't nearly as beautiful as she was. I didn't tell her that I wanted to fold her up into a tiny, perfect square and stitch her to the skin over my heart.

From *Cut Through the Bone* by Ethel Rohan.

Personal Mobile Short Story Festival

Monday-Friday September 12th-16th
Venue:
RTE Studios Father Matthew Street, Off South Mall, Cork

This year we are innovating with the introduction of a ***Personal Mobile Short Story Festival.***

How does that work? We hear you ask.

We have got together with RTE Cork to provide a dozen MP3 players, each loaded with a plethora of short story readings which have been part of the ***Book on One*** radio series. This series has been produced out of Cork for years by Aidan Stanley. If you bring your passport or driver's licence with you to the RTE studios between 10am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday the week of the festival, you can exchange them for one of the players. When you return the player you get your passport or licence back.

We can supply some cheap earphones, but for optimum quality you should bring your own quality earphones from home.

You can stroll around town, or sit in the park, or take the ***Personal Mobile Short Story Festival*** home overnight (while careful not to miss all the wonderful live readings happening each evening at the Metropole Hotel!) to listen to work as stupendous as Claire Keegan's *Walk the Blue Fields* & *Foster*; Frank O'Connor reading a selection of his own stories; Paschall Scott reading more O'Connor stories; Ruth McCabe reading her father Eugene's *The Love of Sisters*; Garry Murphy reading from Kevin Barry's *There Are Little Kingdoms*; Peter Gaynor reading John Montague's *Death of a Chieftan*; William Wall reading from his story collection *No Paradiso*; readings from Brian Friel's short stories & more.

RTÉ RADIO 1

Kevin Barry,
Brian Friel,
Claire Keegan,
Eugene McCabe,
John Montague,
Frank O'Connor,
William Wall
& more!

Stinging Fly Presents

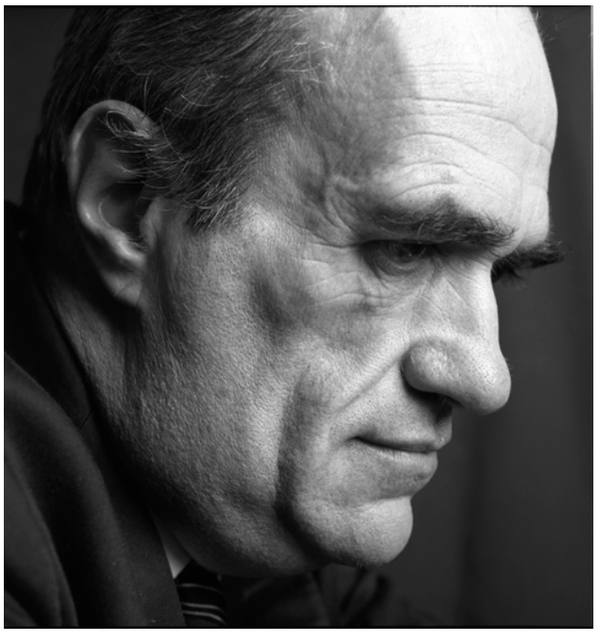
One of Ireland's Leading Literary Journals Presents
New Voices
Reading Saturday September 17th 4pm

Kathleen Murray lives in Dublin. A number of her short stories have appeared in *The Stinging Fly,* most recently in the Summer 2011 edition, and in anthologies of Irish writing. She was the winner of the Fish International Short Story Prize in 2007 and was shortlisted for the Davy Byrnes Award in 2009. She received an Arts Council bursary in 2010.

Mary Costello, originally from Galway, lives in Dublin. Her stories have been anthologised and published in *New Irish Writing* and in *The Stinging Fly,* most recently in the Spring 2011 edition. She was shortlisted for a Hennessy Award, and in spring 2010 was a finalist in the Narrative Short Story Competition in the U.S. She received an Arts Council bursary in 2011. A collection of her stories will be published by The Stinging Fly Press in early 2012.

Colm Tóibín

Shortlisted for the 2011 O'Connor Award
Reading Saturday September 17th 9pm



Colm Tóibín was born in Enniscorthy, Co. Wexford in 1955. He studied at University College Dublin and lived in Barcelona between 1975 and 1978. Out of his experience in Barcelona he produced two books, the novel *The South* (shortlisted for the Whitbread First Novel Award and winner of the Irish Times/ Aer Lingus First Fiction Award) and *Homage to Barcelona,* both published in 1990. When he returned to Ireland in 1978 he worked as a journalist for *In Dublin*, *Hibernia* and *The Sunday Tribune*, becoming features editor of *In Dublin* in 1981 and editor of *Magill,* Ireland's current affairs magazine, in 1982. He is a regular contributor to the *Dublin Review*, the *New York Review of Books* and the *London Review of Books*. In 2006 he was appointed to the Arts Council in Ireland. He has twice been Stein Visiting Writer at Stanford University and also been a visiting writer at the Michener Center at the University of Texas at Austin. He is currently Leonard Milberg Lecturer in Irish Letters at Princeton University.
Among his other novels are *The Master* and *The Heather Blazing*. He has published two short story collections, *Mothers and Sons* (2006, winner of the Edge Hill Prize) and *The Empty Family* (2010).

The moon hangs low over Texas. The moon is my mother. She is full tonight, and brighter than the brightest neon; there are folds of red in her vast amber. Maybe she is a harvest moon, a Comanche moon. I have never seen a moon so low and so full of her own deep brightness. My mother is six years dead tonight, and Ireland is six hours away and you are asleep. I am walking. No one else is walking. It is hard to cross Guadalupe; the cars come fast. In the Community Whole Food Store, where all are welcome, the girl at the checkout asks me if I would like to join the store's club. If I pay seventy dollars, my membership, she says, will never expire, and I will get a seven per cent discount on my purchases.
Six years. Six hours. Seventy dollars. Seven per cent. I tell her I am here for a few months only, and she smiles and says that I am welcome. I smile back. The atmosphere is easy, casual, gracious.
If I called you now, it would be half two in the morning; I could wake you up. If I called, I could go over everything that happened six years ago. Because that is what is on my mind tonight, as though no time had elapsed, as though the strength of the moonlight had by some fierce magic chosen tonight to carry me back to the last real thing that happened to me. On the phone to you across the Atlantic, I could go over the days surrounding my mother's funeral. I could go over the details as though I were in danger of forgetting them. I could remind you, for example, that you wore a suit and a tie at a funeral. I remember that you, or someone, said that you had to get a taxi from Dublin because you missed the train or the bus. I know that I looked for you among the crowd and could not see you as the hearse came after Mass to take my mother's coffin to the graveyard, as all of us began to walk behind it. You came to the hotel once she was in the ground, and you stayed for a meal with me and Sinead, my sister. Jim, her husband, must have been near, and Cathal, my brother, but I don't remember what they did when the meal had finished and the crowd had dispersed. I know that as the meal came to an end a friend of my mother's, who noticed everything, came over and looked at you and whispered to me that it was nice that my friend had come. She used the word 'friend' with a sweet, insinuating emphasis. I did not tell her that what she had noticed was no longer there, was part of the past. I just said yes, it was nice that you had come.

From *The Empty Family* by Colm Tóibín.

Extract from a Colm Tóibín interview with José Francisco Fernández University of Almería,

Q: There is an established myth about the Irish character and the telling of stories. Do you feel the oral tradition informing your stories or the stories of other Irish writers?

A: I wish I could say that it makes no difference at all, because I think it's overmentioned that somehow Irish people are naturally writers, because it comes somehow from the culture of story-telling in a way that, say, people who write in Germany or France or England are more civilised and their writing comes from a more literary source. But, and I think this is very important, when you are young in Ireland you learn very quickly not to bore people, and it's one of the great things to know as a writer, when the story must be interesting and when it must stop; how to manipulate the story. If you're a child in a large family and your aunt comes to visit, you would watch her doing it quite early, unless she is a terrible bore, and if she's a terrible bore that is the worst thing she could be. Her could be bad, and no one would mind that so much, or she could be smelly, no one would mind. But if she's boring, that would be really dreadful. I had a large extended family and some of them would come to the house and it wouldn't be formal story-telling, they'd just talk, but the talk would be interesting. You learned that naturally, and you also learned that talk was a form of disguise. People often didn't talk at all about what was most important to them. So that you learned to know that talk wasn't a way of telling people about yourself, but it is often the way of disguising yourself and so I suppose then you began to read, and when I began to read Camus, or Kafka or Hemingway I couldn't work with the system which says all the time that those stories of Hemingway's are full of silences, full of what is not being revealed, and the end of the story is ambiguous. That's something I recognised and knew and couldn't work with, but I don't think it's true to say that there is a continuous line between an old Irish oral tradition and a current Irish literary tradition. I think it's a dotted line, it's a faint line, it's a jagged line, but it is a line, but there is also a line to other things, including a central European literary tradition.

Q: Would you draw a ranking of the best Irish short story writers?

A: No, but I would draw a ranking of short stories. It's a funny thing about that, that there are certain stories that really matter to me and I read them all the time. They would be James Joyce's short story "The Dead", Daniel Corkery's short story "Nightfall", Frank O'Connor's short story "Guests of the Nation", Eugene McCabe's short story "Music at Annahullion", Mary Lavin's short story "A Cup of Tea", Mary Lavin's short story "Happiness", Mary Lavin's short story "The Widow's Son"… and that's just for starters, I mean, I am talking from memory, just what would naturally come into my mind, there would be others. I would talk about those stories rather than writers. And there are other stories by Eugene McCabe as well, and John McGahern's short story "A Country Funeral", which is the longest short story he wrote, it's something that really, really affected me and I read it all the time. So of all the stories I have named, knowing them like you know songs, like if you go to the CD player and put on track 8, rather than play the whole CD, it would be just in certain moods you would go to look for them, and that's how I would do that. But if you wanted ranking I think the best way to go about it is to say 'who are the ones that are least known who should be better known?' and certainly Eugene McCabe would be very high on my list, as would Michael McLaverty, as would Bernard MacLaverty, and certainly Mary Lavin. Almost everything she wrote is interesting. And the entire book of stories Dubliners really remains an extraordinary achievement, something that can be read now not as a period piece, but something that is alive and that you can read and that sings to you still.

Q: I would like to ask about your own book of short stories, *Mothers and Sons*. Did it help having written novels first? Was this book some kind of break from writing novels?

A: The previous novel, called *The Master*, a novel about Henry James, was very successful. It made me some money and it was published all over the world, and I was very suspicious of that. It was nice at the time, I would have been disappointed had it not happened. It was an international novel, but I do worry about that, and I was terribly interested in going back very deep into where I'm from, and I'm not from a world like Henry James, and to writing very quiet rural stories about tiny moments, things that occurred, people missing each other, love not working, gnarled relationships… And I also had as a result of writing that, because the book was actually much longer, it was cut the book, so I worked for a long time on it, writing every day, working very hard, I had to develop a fluency and it's an odd business for a writer because it's like being an athlete, like that the more you run the more your breath can be controlled for better running. If you have written a very long novel and you've finished it, instead of feeling 'Oh, that's great, that's done', what you have is almost like training your voice for singing, that you have it now and you can work with it more fluently. I have always found trouble before with short stories, which is getting the beginnings out of them, how to start your short story, how to get enough information in the first paragraph without putting too much information in, how would you get it to seem natural, how would you get the first sentence of a story, and with this fluency I was able to work like that.

Valerie Trueblood

Shortlisted for the 2011 O'Connor Award
Interview Friday 16th September 3pm
Reading Friday 16th September 9pm

Valerie Trueblood grew up in rural Virginia, USA, studied with John Hawkes and John Berryman, worked as a caseworker in Chicago and as a reference librarian at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C. In 2006, Trueblood's first novel, *Seven Loves*, came out from Little Brown and was a Barnes and Noble "Discover Great New Writers". She lives in Seattle and the Methow Valley.

"Trueblood has earned a place next to Alice Munro on my shelf of fiction" - *Alicia Ostriker*

"In her outstanding new collection of short stories, *Marry or Burn*, Valerie Trueblood uses the threads of familiar topics—love, marriage, separation, general angst—to spin affecting, utterly unexpected yarns. There are first dates, broken hearts, unlooked-for affairs, and of course weddings (brides and grooms figure prominently in five of the 12 stories)—but Trueblood has completely rewritten the script for each of these everyday events." - *Elle*

When she was twenty, Francie Madden shot and killed her husband Gary. He had joined the Seattle police force six months before, and she shot him with his service revolver. She aimed at his shoulder as he had shown her with the human silhouette at target practice, but she hit his neck and blew out an inch of the carotid artery.
Gary had roughed her up in the two years of their marriage, but this was not unusual in either of their families in 1975, or in fact around the south city limits where they had grown up. He had been a popular football player, known for the fights he got into after a few too many, as well as his liking for the upper hand with his girlfriends. At Francie's trial his own mother Sharla testified that when his dad left, Gary took over the TV, the car keys, and the correction of his little brothers.
In spite of that, a picture of Francie emerged that was worse. All her life she had had a violent temper, and the prosecutor saw to it that that came out: how she had pounded the head off a doll, how as a little thing she would shout at her brother during Mass. How they had to lock her in the basement when she got going, how in middle school she had chased her two-timing boyfriend (the one before Gary) off a dock, and the poor kid, in front of his friends, had cannonballed into the lake fully dressed rather than let her catch him. These things were said by people with no particular grudge against Francie, said even in her defense. She wasn't mean: she was hotheaded. She came from a line of hotheads. Her father had been in the county jail for shooting out a picture window when the neighbours crossed him.

From *Marry or Burn* by Valerie Trueblood.

from **What's the Story? Aspects of the Form.**
-an essay by Valerie Trueblood from *American Poetry Review*

It is rare to find a review of a book of stories nowadays that doesn't begin by patronizing the form. Anthologists do it; short story writers of genius do it. Alice Munro, writing the greatest stories of our era in English, modestly allows that she kept waiting to do a novel but could get only stories done in the time available. An interviewer asks Tobias Wolff, "Is there a reason you've stuck with the short story all these years and not ventured into a full-length novel?" and if Wolff tears his hair out we don't see it as he answers, "I don't know why. It must be the way I see life."

It must be the way a lot of people see life. Right now the piles of story collections on bookstore tables could almost levitate. There's the rub. We don't call anybody a practitioner of the poem or the novel. Practitioners write detective fiction--though once a writer dives to a certain psychological depth in the genre he or she slides out of the label and comes up a novelist, fit to associate with the author of *The Secret Agent*, with Simenon and Sciasia.

The introduction to a recent prize collection notes the "high achievement" of today's short story writers, another lingers over their "level of accomplishment." By now we know stories skillfully crafted, deft or finely wrought will have come with a remarkable facility from the hands of wordsmiths, a kind of language-adept like those helpless reciters of prime numbers This is the atmosphere of the 4-H fair; it's hard to imagine poets being lined up in the sawdust like this, getting ribbons for their recipes. The poem may be an inch of type or square as prose on the page, it may appear upside down and in side out without loss to itself; few will ruefully compare it to an epic, and no one will ever come up to the poet and say, "Do you think you're ready for a full-length work now?"

How those words stab the true lover of the short story, to whom it is as important that "The Lady with the Pet Dog" took place in Yalta as that a war ended there.

The Chamberlen family, inventors of the obstetrical forceps, worked under a drape so as to hide the device and keep the credit. To some extent all art hides its workings, even process art, but the short story is routinely called up to the front of the room and made to own up to it. "What made you think of that?" "Well, one day ..."

The early years of the last century saw a storm of opinion and instruction about the short story form, much of it devoted to rules, charts showing how much dialogue a given amount of prose could support, and diagrams of plots. Although today the rules are more likely to be couched in the language of psychology, and to pay their respects to the inner voice, things are not so different now. A mail-order catalogue advertises a dozen new texts on writing fiction; yellow newsboxes in San Franciscos sell writing classes; conventions of vocabulary, mood and voice circulate through the universities and into print, and literary magazines still stipulate that characters must "grow."

When prize collections come out, a student may turn to a special section at the back and review the various blind alleys taken on the way to the story's "click." The authors admit to all manner of false starts before "it" happened, so that if we're not careful we find ourselves half acceding to the idea of a trick, in the tale and in the making of the tale: not the artist's painful re-imagining but "it," the twist, the tactic, that made the story work, made it stand still and take the halter and go to market.

Sometimes the contributors' pages read like ads, lacking only a number to call for a tip that might increase the odds of getting to "it." Fortunately we can turn back to the stories, largely unaccounted for by their authors. We can object when a critic says of a writer's abilities, as one did recently in a magazine, "she could pull something anytime" and "She pulls off many moments of structural wizardry." We don't have to nod as if structural wizardry is what our book group has for breakfast, we can throw the magazine at the wall: "The power of the short story is not the click! Not the moment 'pulled off!' Not 'it'!"

The short story is an art form. It is not a smaller edition of another art form, a bike on training wheels, a dry run, a "turn." If a novelist writes one, he or she is not revving with the brake on or making do with fewer ideas or weaker nerve than usual. A number of the short stories of writers we know as novelists--in this country say Cheever, Paul Bowles, Helprin, Oates--are works of art finer than any of their novels. Sometimes a born short story writer tries to write novels and finally succeeds, as Katherine Anne Porter and Eudora Welty did, and although the novels are of interest they are without the genius of the stories. Oddly enough there is more room in the short story for the play of genius, meaning an intensity of mind and voice. Enough has been cleared away that oxygen goes to the flame of it. Today Katherine Anne Porter would probably have found in the vogue form of linked stories a safe harbor for her particular gift, away from the torture it went through to produce *Ship of Fools* and the ensuing critical assault on that book.

The story is not a minor form. Some of the most memorable works in Russian, German, English, French, Yiddish and Japanese are short, stories. In the West we are coming late to the great works of Africans. Not so long ago, certain stories were so well-known that we forgot who wrote them. Was it Kipling or Maugham who wrote "The Letter."? Who wrote that story of the hanged man who sees the future instead of the past flash before him, or the one in which the old woman reaps a field by herself, or the one with the snow and the little boy going mad? Memorable didn't mean we knew them by heart; sometimes we remembered a story never written. Or we remembered, from late childhood, a taste and not the ingredients. Did she really die in the end? Where did the bird take the statue's eyes? Did the wolves finally close in?

Clare Wigfall

Winner of the BBC National Short Story Award

Four Day Workshop

For Advanced Writers (see page 35)

Clare Wigfall is a British writer, born in Greenwich, London 1976. Her debut collection of short stories *The Loudest Sound and Nothing* was published by Faber and Faber in 2007 to critical acclaim.

She grew up in Berkeley, California before moving back to London. She began writing at an early age. After an early role as assistant and editor to the late President of Mensa, she graduated from the University of Manchester in 1998. She received her MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia. At age 21, Faber and Faber offered her a book contract, based on reading a single story she had written. She worked on her debut collection for almost a decade.

Clare has claimed that music was a large influence in writing the debut collection. She mentions such various influences as the Dirty Three, John Fahey, Jolie Holland, Bonnie "Prince" Billy, Jefferson Airplane, Cat Power, Bach, Rachel's and Six Organs of Admittance each influencing one of the stories.

In 2008 she won the internationally renowned BBC National Short Story Award for 'The Numbers', one of the stories from her collection.

When we draw up at the house we see Nathaniel distanced by the lawn. He's dressed for the bees, but as he walks towards the car he lifts the nets covering his face and slips off his gloves. I've retouched my lipstick and am leaning forward to replace my shoes as Thomas skirts the boot of the car to open my door for me. We emerge just moments before Nathaniel reaches us, me still fiddling with the clasp on my purse. His face surprises me when I look up, so passive does it appear beneath the wide netted brim of his hat. He is marginally less pale than his outfit, with skin reminiscent of dry paper once heavily crumpled and later run through a press. He smiles only when he comes to a point on the grass just a pace or two away from us, and even then it is a slim smile, wintry.

'Hello, old chap.' Thomas has his arm about my waist but stretches out his free hand to Nathaniel's shoulder. His excitement is palpable. I feel it through the thin voile of my dress.

Nathaniel nods and holds his smile. 'Good to see you.'

'And you, you old devil.' Thomas tilts his head towards me, still grinning, his glance catching mine momentarily before angling back to his friend. 'So, Nathaniel. Meet Céline, my pretty French wife.' His laugh hangs a moment above our heads before diluting in the sky.

from *The Loudest Sound and Nothing*

"The Loudest Sound and Nothing *is the finest debut collection I've read since Clare Keegan's* Antarctica *– and like Keegan, Wigfall seems to have emerged as a talent fully-formed. These are sorrowful, disturbing and darkly beautiful stories, and they deserve, absolutely, to be read."*

- Peter Hobbs

Deborah Willis

Interview Thursday September 15th 4pm
Reading Thursday September 15th 7.30pm

Young writers from Canada

Deborah Willis was born and raised in Calgary, Canada. Her fiction has appeared in *Grain, Event, Prism International,* and *The Walrus*. Her first book, *Vanishing and Other Stories,* was named one of *the Globe* and *Mail's* Best Books of 2009, and was nominated for the BC Book Prize and the Governor General's Award. She has worked as a horseback riding instructor and a reporter, and currently works as a bookseller in Victoria, BC.

"Even-tempered, sober and intimate, Willis's debut collection has a gravity that suggests both the conventionality and maturity of an author well into her career. But if echoes of Mavis Gallant and Alice Munro (and, in the hard-luck stories, Raymond Carver) reveal her as an astute apprentice, Willis also illustrates her talent for crafting stories that confidently reflect her distinctive techniques and voice."

~ The Vancouver Sun

The most beautiful girl in my school was named Mary Louise. Though the name has a Roman Catholic ring to it, I don't think she was a believer. She did, however, bring out a religious kind of devotion in most of us who went to high school with her. We loved and hated and feared her with the same fervency that we might a goddess. I was at the age when I noticed feminine beauty more than masculine, because I was always comparing myself with other girls. So I can still remember that Mary Louise had long legs, ankles that were perhaps too thick, and dark eyes. She was tall and had such a confident gait that she reminded me of a horse-maybe Pegasus, or one of the lucky horses that drew Apollo's chariot. She looked as if she could have been close to the sun.

In fact, the sun always seemed to be touching her. Her skin had a permanent tan, and even in winter the ends of her hair were bleached. This might have been because she spent each summer outside, swimming and water-skiing at her family's cabin in Ontario. I'm not sure how I knew this detail, since I was a grade beneath her and was never her friend. But somehow I'd heard about the cabin, imagined that Mary Louise spent two months in her bathing suit, and was jealous of the way she must have looked. I could picture her driving a motorboat and canoeing. I imagined that at night she and her family played board games, or took out their binoculars and looked at the clear night sky.

From *Vanishing and other stories* by Deborah Willis.

Canada Council for the Arts | Conseil des Arts du Canada

Festival Workshops

Advanced Short Stories with Clare Wigfall

Four three-hour sessions Wednesday to Saturday September 14th-17th, 9.30am -12.30pm. Limited to ten places. Cost €120. Venue: Munster Literature Centre, Douglas Street, Cork.

A workshop series designed for those who already have experience in writing short stories and are now keen to hone their technique and develop their work in a supportive and friendly workshop environment. Over the course of the four sessions we will focus upon themes such as character development and story plotting through in-session exercises and by looking at examples from storytelling masters. We will also give attention to how to read in public and there will be opportunity for each student to put this into practice and share one of their own stories with the group for practical critique. This workshop series is not for the faint-hearted; a huge amount will be packed into the four sessions, and hard work is expected, but there will also be much laughter and the experience is guaranteed to inspire and motivate.

Course tutor Clare Wigfall has lived in London, Berkeley, Prague, Berlin, and now Edinburgh. Her debut collection *The Loudest Sound and Nothing* (Faber & Faber) was published in 2007 to critical acclaim. The following year she won the 2008 BBC National Short Story Award and was later nominated by William Trevor for an E.M. Forster Award. Most recently she was given a K. Blundell Trust Award and was longlisted for the Sunday Times EFG Bank Short Story Prize. She has published in *Prospect*, the *Dublin Review*, *New Writing 10*, and *A Public Space*. She has also written for BBC Radio 4 and NPR Berlin, and is the current Writer in Residence for Booktrust. Clare is presently working on a new collection and a novel, both for Faber, and is awaiting the publication of her first children's picture book. Clare has taught writing workshops all over Europe; she is approachable, generous with her experience, and her teaching has an energy that never fails to inspire her students.

Short Story Workshop for Beginners with Jon Boilard

One three-hour session. Saturday 17th 9.30-12.30pm. Limited to ten places. Cost €30. Venue: Munster Literature Centre, Douglas Street, Cork.

Are you a beginning fiction writer? Do you have a story you're trying to take across the finish line? Bring it with you to the Short Story Workshop for Beginners. Jon Boilard will lead the three-hour session designed to explore the strengths and weaknesses of your piece, and to help you prepare your manuscript for publication. Time permitting, Jon will also provide writing exercises that will help jog your creativity during the inevitable slumps, discuss the elements of fiction and share his perspective on "the writer's life" and the art of shamelessly promoting your work.

Born and raised in Western New England, Jon Boilard has been living and writing in the San Francisco area since 1986. More than 50 of his short stories have been published in literary journals in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Asia. Boilard's "Green Street Incidents", first appearing in *The Sun Magazine*, received a special mention in the 2011 edition of the Pushcart Prize Best of the Small Presses series. A past winner of the Sean O'Faolain Award, Boilard has also seen several of his pieces earn individual small press honours.

To check if there are any places left in these popular workshops contact the Munster Literature Centre directly at 021-4312955 or info@munsterlit.ie. Payment in advance would be required to secure your place.

The Munster Literature Centre
Ionad Litríochta an Deiscirt

Founded in 1993, the Munster Literature Centre (Ionad Litríochta an Deiscirt) 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, occasional poetry collections in translation and anthologies. We actively seek to support new and emerging writers and are assisted in our efforts through regular funding from Cork City Council, Cork County Council, Culture Ireland, Foras na Gaeilge 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 International Short Story Festival in Ireland, an event dedicated to the celebration of the short story and named for one of Cork's most beloved authors. It remains the world's oldest annual short story festival. The festival showcases readings, literary forums and workshops. Following continued growth and additional funding, the Frank O'Connor International 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 annually 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 festival. Each Spring we present an internationalpoetry festival. 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 facilitates a residency exchange with the Shanghai Writers' Association each year which enables an Irish writer to live for two months in Shanghai and a Chinese author to live in Cork.
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

Prizewinners' Showcase

Readings by the winners of the Sean O'Faolain Short Story Prize & The Hennessy Emerging Fiction Award.

Saturday September 17th at 12 Noon

The winner of this year's O'Faolain Prize is unknown going to press but the winner of the Hennessy Emerging Fiction Award is Eileen Casey. Her fiction has also received The Maria Edgeworth Award, Listowel Writers' Week Short Fiction Prize and The Cecil Day Lewis Award. To date, her stories have been published in *the Moth, Verbal Arts Magazine* and *the Sunday Tribune*, among others.

mlc literature

Hennessy

Southword Online

Southword is now an online journal providing the best in contemporary writing for free.

What have you been missing?

Fiction writers who have featured in previous issues include: Colm Tóibín, Hansjörg Schertenleib, Haruki Murakami, James Lasdun, William Wall, Mary Leland, Desmond Hogan, Nuala Ní Chonchúir, Vanessa Gebbie, Francesc Serés, Jyrki Vainonen and many others.

Poets featured have included Ingeborg Bachman, Billy Collins, Kristiina Ehin, Martin Espada, Tess Gallagher, Patrick Galvin, Barbara Korun, Thomas McCarthy, John Montague, Eugenio Montale, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Bernard O'Donoghue, Gregory O'Donoghue, Dennis O'Driscoll, Mary O'Malley, Maurice Riordan, Silke Scheuermann, Peter Sirr, Gerard Smyth, Matthew Sweeney, Brian Turner and others.

Accessible through a link on the Munster Literature Centre's Home Page www. munsterlit.ie or simply scan the code above.

Talks & Walks

A series of public interviews, discussions and a walking literary tour

Wednesday

One of the United Kingdom's most distinguished authors, Orange Prize winning British poet, novelist & short story writer **Helen Dunmore** will talk to novelist and O'Connor Award judge, Alannah Hopkin (see page 7) 7.30pm Reading & Public interview. Free. €5 donation encouraged.

Thursday

4pm Michael Christie (see page 6), **Alexander MacLeod** (O'Connor Award Finalist, see page 14) & **Deborah Willis** (see page 34) a trio of young Canadian writers all with their first short story collections under their belts will talk to BBC national short story prize winner **Claire Wigfall** about themselves, how they broke into publishing, the place of the Canadian writer in North America, the short story in general etc. Free.

5pm O'Connor Award Finalist **Suzanne Rivecca** (see page 24) has been honoured for her first book *Death is Not an Option*. Long-term San Francisco resident Rivecca is taking a break from a residency in Rome to attend the festival. She will be interviewed by festival director Patrick Cotter. About herself, her work, her experience as a Stegner Fellow at Stanford and the short story in general. Free

Friday

3pm American novelist and short story writer **Valerie Trueblood** (see page 31) who is an O'Connor Award Finalist with her book *Marry Or Burn* will be interviewed by Irish novelist & short story writer **Nuala Ní Chonchúir**, about the different creative wells novels and stories are drawn from and where poetry might fit into all of this. Free

Saturday

2.30pm This year's Saturday Seminar is on the subject of Short Story Anthologies. What are their uses? Do they help a writer's career? Are they canonical? Do they sell? How is their function different from a good literary journal? Speaking from the stage will be writers and publishers and as usual, questions from the audience will be encouraged. Free

Sunday

12 Noon. A Cork Walking Literary Tour. Led by the loquacious Jim McKeown, O'Connor's most recent biographer. Follow him as he leads you through the heart of the city and shares with you its literary lore about Corkery, O'Faolain, O'Connor and others. The tour finishes outside the Metropole Hotel in MacCurtain Street. Please dress for the weather, wear supportive shoes & exercise caution with street traffic. Free

"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 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

Proudly working to create a city life without limits!

Cork City Council, through its sponsorship of the Arts; its funding of the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, the Cork 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.

UCC Fringe Event

Not part of our festival programme but happening simultaneously

'Frank O'Connor: A Man of Many Voices'

DETAILS: Free Public Performance and Roundtable Debate.
Time and Date: 18.00pm – 19.30pm, Friday, September 16, 2011.
Venue: Boole 1 Lecture Hall (near Boole Library), University College Cork.

Open to the public and invited guests, this unique and exciting event will be recorded for radio, as the final programme in the new six-part radio documentary on O'Connor.

PART ONE (40 minutes)

1. General Welcome and Event Opening.

2. Introduction: O'Connor as Short-Story Writer, Critic, Theatre Man.

3. Film Screening of segment: O'Connor commenting on his own writing from Self-Portrait (RTE television documentary, January 1962).

4. Live New Dramatic Performance of excerpt from an O'Connor short story.

5. Live New Dramatic Performance of excerpt from O'Connor's autobiographical classic, *An Only Child*.

6. Live New Dramatic Performance of excerpt from one of O'Connor's Abbey Theatre staged plays, adapted from his original short story, *In the Train*.

PART TWO (40 minutes)

7. Roundtable Debate

Chair: Dr. Hilary Lennon (School of English)
Participants:
Edna O'Brien (writer, shortlisted for The Frank O'Connor Short-Story Award); Alan Titley (short-story writer, *Irish Times* columnist, and Irish literature scholar); Colbert Kearney (Irish literature scholar, RTE Radio 1 Sunday Miscellany contributor, and novelist); Eoghan Harris (*Sunday Independent* journalist, and cultural and political commentator).

8. Open to the floor for radio-recorded public Q&A session.

All welcome to attend.

UCC Organisers: Dr. Hilary Lennon (School of English), Dr. Ger Fitzgibbon (Drama & Theatre Studies), Dr. Barry Monahan (Film Studies). Any queries, please contact: h.lennon@ucc.ie / Tel: 021 4903288