



**The Art of Reading
Book Club**
Ealain an Léitheoireachta
Club Leabhair

The Art of Reading Book Club 2023



**The Laureate
for Irish Fiction**
An Laureate i gcomhair
Ficsean Éireannach



The Art of Reading 2023

The Laureate for Irish Fiction is proud to present The Art of Reading 2023, a monthly book club for readers across Ireland.



Introduction

The Art of Reading is curated and hosted by Colm Tóibín, Laureate for Irish Fiction 2022-2024. Over the course of 2023, the Laureate will meet a different library book club each month to discuss a work of contemporary fiction by an Irish writer, highlighting outstanding Irish writing and celebrating readers and book clubs. Each event will be recorded and available to watch online or to listen to as a podcast, so that readers, book lovers and book clubs everywhere will be able to join in the Art of Reading with the Laureate.

“Although reading is mainly done in silence and when alone, it includes a sense of community, an idea of sharing. Readers want to talk about the books they like, to think about the internal workings of a novel or a story, and exchange ideas on books, all to enrich the experience of reading. Reading, as much as writing, is an art. It requires a creative response to the text. No books matters unless someone is reading it. The purpose of the Art of Reading Book Club is to deepen the idea of a community of readers and to recognize the vitality and excitement in the act of reading and thinking about books.”

— Colm Tóibín, Laureate for Irish Fiction 2022-2024

“Libraries Ireland are delighted to partner with the Laureate for Irish Fiction and the Arts Council in The Art of Reading. The programme blends perfectly two areas at the heart of what libraries do: promoting reading and literature and connecting and empowering communities. We hope to help get as many people as possible involved in this truly national book club, celebrating Irish literature and the joy of reading, and sharing their thoughts and insights with friends and family.”

— Colette Byrne, Chair of the Libraries Development Committee and Chief Executive of Kilkenny County Council, on behalf of public libraries.

How can readers everywhere take part in The Art of Reading?

1. Libraries Ireland and the Arts Council have paired library book clubs with the selected titles for 2023. These book clubs will have the first chance to hear the Laureate chat about the books, and will have an opportunity to take part in the discussion. If your library book club would like to get involved for 2024 you should ask your local library to put your club forward. If you are not a member of a book club, contact your local library to find out about possible options for joining one.

2. But even if you're not in one of the selected book clubs, you can still take part! You can watch or listen to a video and audio recording, which will be available from the [Art of Reading web page](#) on the **last Thursday of each month**.
3. Each event will be available as a podcast from the [Arts Council podcast](#) channel at the end of each month.
4. Links and reminders to all of these events will be shared on the Laureate for Irish Fiction social media channels.

Find out more or watch back on the Arts Council website at: arts council.ie/Arts-in-Ireland/Literature/Laureate-for-Irish-Fiction/The-Art-of-Reading-Book-Club/

Subscribe to the Arts Council Podcast Channel: <https://open.spotify.com/show/O8oJHDxsS0To5HLDJAKmbT>

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#TheArtofReading

Instagram: [@laureateirishfiction](https://www.instagram.com/laureateirishfiction)

The Arts of Reading Book Club is an initiative of the Arts Council and the Laureate for Irish Fiction, in partnership with Libraries Ireland.

Colm Tóibín



Colm Tóibín was born in Enniscorthy Co. Wexford in 1955 and educated at University College Dublin. He lived in Catalonia for several years before he returned to Dublin to work as a journalist, becoming Features Editor of *In Dublin* in 1981 and editor of *Magill* in 1982. In 1987, he received a bursary from the Arts Council to support his early writing. His three travel books are: *Bad Blood: A Walk along the Irish Border* (1987); *Homage to Barcelona* (1990); and *The Sign of the Cross: Travels in Catholic Europe* (1984). His ten novels include *The Master* (2004), winner of the Dublin IMPAC Prize and the LA Times Novel of the Year; *Brooklyn* (2009), winner of the Costa Novel of the Year; and *Nora Webster* (2014), winner of the Hawthornden Prize. He was awarded the Rathbones Folio Prize in 2022 for his most recent novel *The Magician* (2021) which was also shortlisted for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction.

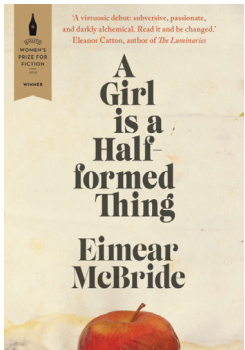
His two collections of stories are *Mothers and Sons* (2006), winner of the Edge Hill Prize, and *The Empty Family* (2010), shortlisted for the Frank O'Connor Award. His plays include *The Testament of Mary* (2011), nominated for a Tony Award for Best Play. He published a collection of poetry *Vinegar Hill* in 2022. In 1993, he was elected to Aosdána and in 2020 became a vice-president of the Royal Society of Literature. He is a member of both the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His work has been translated into more than thirty languages. He is a contributing editor at the *London Review of Books*. In 1995, he received the E.M. Forster Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. In 2017 he won the Kenyon Review Award for Literary Achievement and the Richard C. Holbrooke Distinguished Award from the Dayton Literary Peace Prize. In 2021 he was awarded the David Cohen Prize. He has taught at Stanford University, the University of Texas at Austin, Princeton University, the University of Manchester and Columbia University. He was Chancellor of the University of Liverpool from 2017 to 2022.

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A Girl is a Half-formed Thing (January)

by Eimear McBride



“Eimear McBride’s ground-breaking first novel uses a style that matches the conscious mind’s darting processes. It tells the story of a young woman in an Irish town in a time when the open religiosity is in conflict with changing sexual mores. In the novel, words and sentences themselves are under pressure as the events of the novel become more tense and dramatic and painful.”

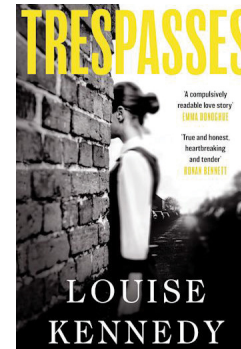
— Colm Tóibín

Eimear McBride is the author of three novels: ‘*Strange Hotel*’, ‘*The Lesser Bohemians*’ and ‘*A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*’. She held the inaugural Creative Fellowship at the Beckett Research Centre, University of Reading which resulted in the performance work ‘*Mouthpieces*’ - later broadcast by RTE Radio. Her first full length non-fiction work ‘*Something Out of Place: Women & Disgust*’ was published in 2021, while her first foray into film writing and direction ‘*A Very Short Film About Longing*,’ produced by DMC and BBC Film, has

recently been completed. She is the recipient of the Women’s Prize for Fiction, Goldsmiths Prize, James Tait Black Memorial Prize, Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize, Desmond Eliot Prize and the Kerry Prize. She grew up in the west of Ireland and now lives in London.

Trespases (February)

by Louise Kennedy

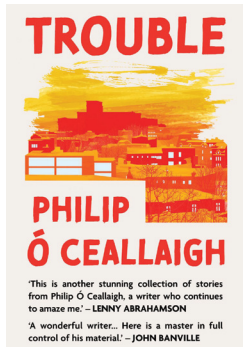
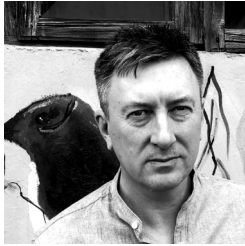


“The unforgettable protagonist of Louise Kennedy’s ‘*Trespases*’ is 24-year-old Cushla Lavery, a Catholic schoolteacher living in 1975 in a small town outside Belfast. The novel narrates the story of her love affair with an older, married, Protestant barrister with the same wit and eye for detail as are on display in her book of stories ‘*The End of the World is a Cul de Sac*.’”

— Colm Tóibín

Louise Kennedy grew up in Hollywood, Co. Down. Her short story collection, *The End of the World is a Cul de Sac* (Bloomsbury 2021) won the John McGahern Prize. Her debut novel, *Trespases* (Bloomsbury 2022) won Eason’s Novel of the Year at An Post Irish Book Awards, and was shortlisted for the Waterstones Debut Fiction Prize and the Barnes & Noble Discover Prize. Before she started writing, she spent nearly thirty years working as a chef. She lives in Sligo.

Trouble (March) by Philip Ó Ceallaigh



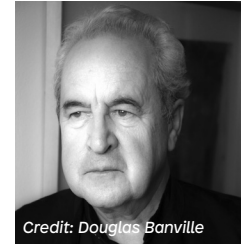
“Philip Ó Ceallaigh is a brilliant, uncompromising and ambitious writer who has long been resident in Bucharest. Of his collection of stories ‘Trouble,’ the *Los Angeles Review of Books* wrote: ‘Ó Ceallaigh writes with such immediacy, such confessional intensity, that when the narrator leans in close and says, “Look — there lies trouble,” it is impossible to look away.”

— Colm Tóibín

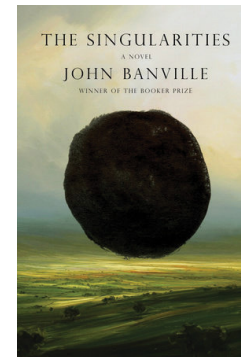
Philip Ó Ceallaigh has published over fifty short stories, most of them gathered in his three collections. The most recent is *Trouble*, from the Stinging Fly Press. He has been described by John Banville as “a master” of the short story form and named by Rob Doyle as his “favourite living writer of short stories”. His work has appeared in *Granta*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books* and *The Irish Times* and has been translated into over a dozen languages. He was awarded the Rooney Prize for Irish

Literature for his first book, *Notes from a Turkish Whorehouse*. He is also an essayist and critic with a particular interest in Jewish-European history, and his translation of Mihail Sebastian’s interwar novel *For Two Thousand Years* was published by Penguin Classics. He lives in Bucharest, Romania.

The Singularities (April) by John Banville



Credit: Douglas Banville



“In this brilliant and dreamy novel, John Banville gives life to the many characters who have peopled his fiction over fifty years. He allows them to meet each other, revisit old scenes not as ghosts or as revenants but as fictional protagonists with their own precise memories, their own pressing desires. There are some resonant evocations of place but all is bathed in a sense of pure aftermath.”

— Colm Tóibín

John Banville is a novelist, screenwriter, playwright and book reviewer. He worked in journalism for many years, and was literary editor at *The Irish Times* from 1988 to 2000. He is a regular contributor to *The New York Review of Books*, and other journals.

His novels include *The Book of Evidence*, *The Sea*, and, most recently, *The Singularities*. Among the awards he has received are the Man Booker Prize, the

Austrian State Prize for Literature, the Kafka Prize, Irish PEN Award and the Prince of Asturias Award. He has written a number of crime novels, including *Snow*, and, most recently, *April in Spain*. He was born in Wexford, and lives in Dublin.

Haven (May)

by Emma O'Donoghue



“Haven, Emma Donoghue’s fourteenth novel, is set on Skellig Michael in the year 600 when three Irishmen decide to establish a monastery on this extraordinary piece of bare rock. The Chicago Review of Books has written: ‘In classic Donoghue narrative style, it all unfolds in a confined space under cramped conditions ... convincingly conveyed by Donoghue’s raw descriptions and her exceptional skill with emotionally authentic dialogue.’”

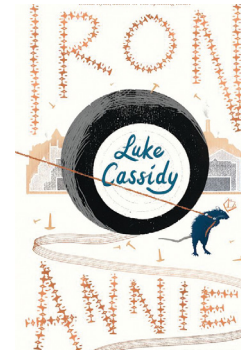
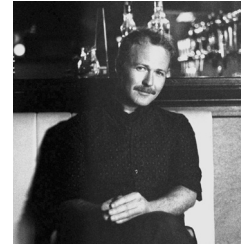
— Colm Tóibín

Born in Dublin in 1969, Emma Donoghue is an award-winning writer living in Canada. Her latest novel *Haven*, is about the monks who landed on Skellig Michael in the seventh century. She was nominated for an Academy Award and a Bafta for her adaptation of her Booker-shortlisted international bestseller *Room*, and her theatrical adaptation with songs by Cora Bissett and Kathryn Joseph (which premiered at the Abbey) will open on Broadway this April. She co-wrote the 2022 film of her novel *The Wonder*, Netflix UK’s first feature shot in Ireland.

Some of her other novels are *The Pull of the Stars*, *Akin*, *Frog Music*, *The Sealed Letter*, *Life Mask* and *Slammerkin*, as well as *The Lottery’s Plus One* and *The Lottery’s More or Less* for younger readers.

Iron Annie (June)

by Luke Cassidy



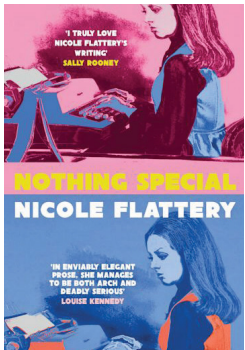
“Iron Annie is written with astonishing energy and verve. It is set in the criminal underworld of Dundalk, but more important, it is written in a tone that is intriguing and unforgettable. It uses a living and contemporary language distilled by Cassidy into a radically original style, a style that establishes him, with this debut book, as one of the most exciting writers in Ireland now.”

— Colm Tóibín

Luke Cassidy is a writer and theatre-maker from Dundalk. His debut novel *Iron Annie* was published by Bloomsbury Books in September 2021, and shortlisted for the Desmond Elliott Prize in 2022. He toured a theatre adaptation of *Iron Annie* to theatres around Ireland in 2021 & 2022, and is currently developing new work for the stage. His second novel, *Tooth & Nail*, will be published in early 2024, also by Bloomsbury Books. He is published in North America by Vintage/Anchor Books.

Nothing Special (July)

by Nicole Flattery



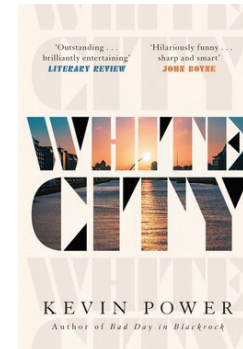
“Nothing Special is set at a very particular New York moment. It is 1966. Mae, the protagonist, lands a job as typist for the artist Andy Warhol who is embarking on an unconventional novel by taping the conversations of his associates and friend. Mae moves on the edges of Warhol’s world, attending the counterculture parties. The novel dramatizes her coming-of-age in Warhol’s New York.”

— Colm Tóibín

Nicole Flattery’s story collection *Show Them A Good Time* was published by The Stinging Fly in Ireland and Bloomsbury in the UK in 2019. Her novel *Nothing Special* is forthcoming in 2023. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, the *London Review of Books* and *Sight & Sound Magazine*.

White City (August)

by Kevin Power



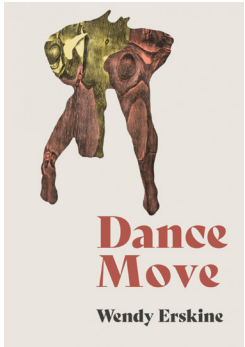
“Ben, the protagonist of *White City*, is, John Self writes in the *Guardian*, the ‘son of a disgraced Dublin banker, languishing in rehab and writing an account of his wrong turns as therapy.’ As Ben gets involved in a dodgy property deal in Serbia, Power creates a world of Irish people on the make with the hapless Ben at its centre. Ben, the *Irish Times* writes, ‘is Power’s unforgettable creation.’”

— Colm Tóibín

Kevin Power is the author of two novels, *Bad Day in Blackrock* (2008) and *White City* (2021). He is the winner of the 2009 Rooney Prize for Irish Literature. His writing has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Review of Books*, *The Guardian*, *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Independent*, and many other places. He teaches in the School of English, Trinity College Dublin.

Dance Move (September)

by Wendy Erskine



“The Guardian writes of Wendy Erskine’s collection of stories: ‘She identifies what is most fruitful about her characters’ predicaments – the emotional core, the most resonant ironies – and traces with rapt and infectious attention their doomed if valiant attempts to shimmy away from the real.’ The stories, the Dublin Review of Books writes, ‘are gloriously offbeat tales of people who live on the flip side and are out of step with those around them.’”

— Colm Tóibín

Wendy Erskine’s two prize-winning short story collections, *Sweet Home* and *Dance Move*, are published by The Stinging Fly Press and Picador. Other fiction has been published by, among others, Rough Trade Books and The Tangerine Press. She recently edited *Well I Just Kind of Like It*, an anthology about the home and art, produced by Paper Visual Art. In 2022 she was a Seamus Heaney Fellow at Queen’s University. She is a full-time secondary school teacher.

My Father’s House (October)

by Joseph O’Connor



“My Father’s House is set in Nazi-occupied Rome in the middle of the Second World War. Monsignor Hugh O’Flaherty who, using the Vatican as his headquarters, sets about smuggling thousands of Jews and Allied prisoners out to Italy to safety. The Financial Times writes that ‘the diverse ventriloquism of O’Connor’s novel evokes a city in peril with wonderful vitality.’”

— Colm Tóibín

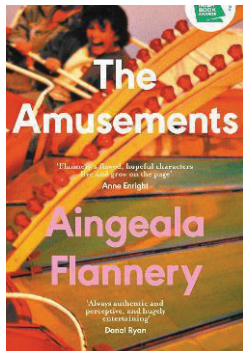
Joseph O’Connor’s fiction is published in 40 languages. *Star of the Sea* has sold more than a million copies. *Shadowplay* won the An Post Irish Novel of the Year Award and was shortlisted for the Costa. Other books include *Cowboys and Indians* (Whitbread Prize shortlist), *Desperadoes*, *The Salesman*, *Inishowen*, *Redemption Falls*, *Ghost Light* (Dublin One City One Book 2011), *The Thrill of it All*, two short story collections, several stage plays and film scripts and six nonfiction volumes. His CD *The Drivetime Diaries* reached number

one in the Irish charts. In 2011, he was elected to Aosdána. Awards include the Prix Zepher for European Novel of the Year, France’s Prix Millepages, Italy’s Premio Acerbi, an American Library Association Award, the Nielsen Bookscan Golden Book Award, the 2022 American Ireland Funds AWB Vincent Literary Award and the Bram Stoker Gold Medal for Cultural Achievement. His novel, *My Father’s House*, was published in January 2023. He is Frank McCourt Chair of Creative Writing at UL.

The Amusements (November) by Aingeala Flannery



Credit: Bríd O'Donovan



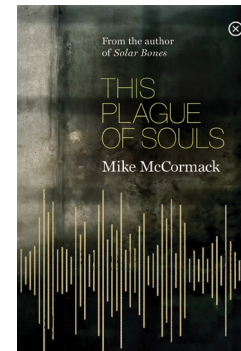
“Aingeala Flannery’s first collection of linked stories is set in the seaside town of Tramore. ‘The people in this book are not real but the town of Tramore is,’ Flannery has written. ‘It took up residence in my imagination when I was a child and has refused to leave.’ RTE has written that ‘The Amusements’ ‘weaves a gorgeous, empathetic story of a teenager yearning for freedom.’”

— Colm Tóibín

Aingeala Flannery was born in Waterford. She’s an award-winning journalist, broadcaster and writer. Her short story *Visiting Hours* won the 2019 Harper’s Bazaar short story competition, and she has twice been a finalist in the RTÉ short story competition, first in 2018, and again in 2022 for her story *Scrappage*. Aingeala was awarded a Literature Bursary by the Arts Council of Ireland in 2020 and 2021.

Her debut novel *The Amusements* was published by Penguin Sandycove in June 2022, and was shortlisted for The Irish Book Awards. Aingeala holds an MFA in Creative Writing from UCD. She lives in Dublin and is working on her second novel

This Plague of Souls (December) by Mike McCormack



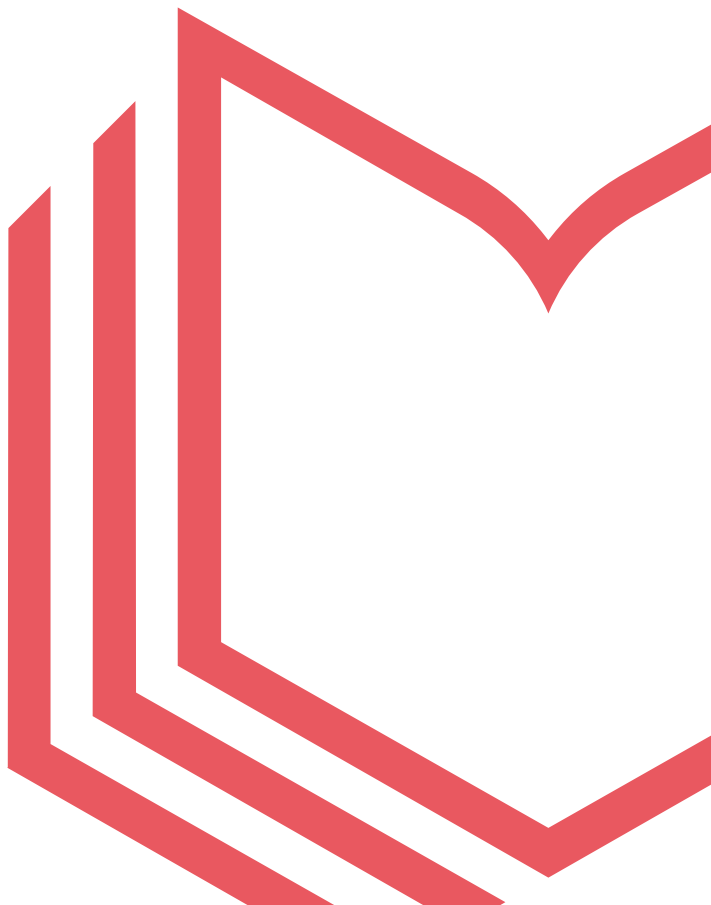
“In the Irish Times preview of the best novels forthcoming in 2023, Martin Doyle writes: ‘The prospect of a new novel [by Mike McCormack] is one to savour. Part roman noir, part metaphysical thriller, This Plague of Souls deals with how we might mend the world – and is the story of a man who would let the world go to hell if he could keep his family together.’”

— Colm Tóibín

Mike McCormack comes from the west of Ireland and is the author of two collections of short stories *Getting it in the Head* and *Forensic Songs*, and three novels *Crowe’s Requiem*, *Notes from a Coma* and *Solar Bones*.

In 1996 he was awarded the Rooney Prize for Literature and *Getting it in the Head* was chosen as a New York Times Notable Book of the Year. In 2006 *Notes from a Coma* was shortlisted for the Irish Book of the Year Award.

In 2016 *Solar Bones* was awarded the Goldsmiths Prize and the Bord Gais Energy Irish Novel of the Year and Book of the Year; it was also long-listed for the 2017 Man Booker Prize. In 2018 it was awarded the International Dublin Literary Award. He is a member of Aosdána.



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