



The Art of Reading
Book Club
Ealain na Léitheoireachta
Club Leabhair

The Art of Reading Book Club 2024



The Laureate
for Irish Fiction
An Laureate i gcomhair
Ficsean Éireannach



The Art of Reading 2024

The Laureate for Irish Fiction is proud to present The Art of Reading 2024, 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 2024, the Laureate and his guest writers will visit libraries around the country where they will be joined by library book club members to discuss a work of contemporary fiction, highlighting outstanding Irish writing and celebrating readers and book clubs. Recordings of the Art of Reading series are made available on demand as podcasts and videos, so that readers, book lovers and book clubs everywhere can 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 book 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

“The Art of Reading series offers readers a brilliant opportunity to delve into the world of Irish literature in the company of the Laureate for Irish Fiction, Colm Tóibín. It is no exaggeration to say that we are living in a golden age of Irish literature and the titles chosen by Colm reflect this. These sessions will offer readers and literature lovers unique insights into a range of excellent titles across the novel and short story forms. The Art of Reading highlights the important part that libraries play in our lives and in our communities. We are immensely grateful to Colm Tóibín and to Libraries Ireland for this wonderful initiative which has the effect of creating a national book club and which celebrates the vitality of readership.”

— Maureen Kennelly,
Director of The Arts Council
/ An Chomhairle Ealaíon

“Libraries Ireland are delighted to continue in partnership with the Laureate for Irish Fiction and the Arts Council for the third year of The Art of Reading. The programme to date has been a fantastic success, connecting and empowering communities to celebrate Irish literature and reading. We are very excited about the excellent line-up for this year’s programme, and look forward to the continued opportunity to share in the joy of reading with this truly national book club.”

— Anna-Marie Delaney, Chair of
the Libraries Development
Committee and Chief Executive
of Offaly 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 2024. These book clubs will have the first chance to hear the Laureate chat about the books with the writers, and will have an opportunity to take part in the discussion. Look out for information on booking the live events happening in libraries around the country on the Laureate social media accounts and in your local library information channels.
2. But even if you can't attend an Art of Reading event you can still take part! You can read along each month and watch or listen to video and audio recordings. Links to youtube videos and podcast recordings are available from the [Art of Reading web page](#). New recordings are shared on the last Thursday of each month.
3. Links and reminders to all of these events will be shared on the Laureate for Irish Fiction social media channels.



For more info on The Art of Reading, scan the QR code or visit artsCouncil.ie and search 'Art of reading'.



[Subscribe](#) to the Arts Council Podcast Channel by scanning the QR code or by searching 'Arts Council Ireland' on Spotify.



To stay up to date with all Laureate for Irish Fiction activities and events sign up to the newsletter [here](#) or by scanning the QR code.

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

Colm Tóibín



Credit: Barry Cronin

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 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* and a collection of essays *A Guest at the Feast* 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 received the Bodley Medal for his sustained contribution to the world of literature in 2023. 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.

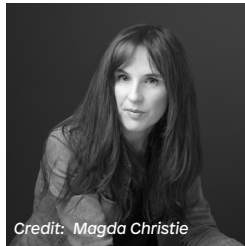
He is due to publish his novel *Long Island* in May 2024.

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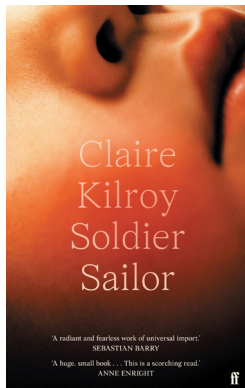
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Soldier Sailor (January)

by Claire Kilroy



Credit: Magda Christie



“Claire Kilroy’s first novel in more than a decade deals with the early days and nights of motherhood. ‘Soldier Sailor is a resonant and important book,’ Sarah Gilmartin has written in *The Irish Times*, ‘vital in all senses of the word, a flare sent up from the shores of early motherhood, a lesson in surviving the wilderness.’”

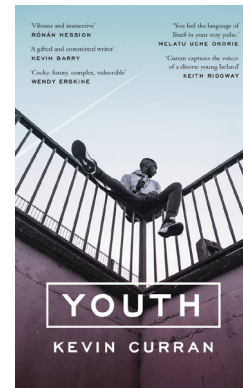
— Colm Tóibín

Claire Kilroy is the author of five novels, *All Summer* (Faber, 2003), *Tenderwire* (Faber, 2006), *All Names Have Been Changed* (Faber, 2009), and *The Devil I Know* (Faber, 2012). In 2023, after an eleven year silence, her fifth novel, *Soldier Sailor*, about the early years of motherhood, was published to universal acclaim. It was named a Best Book by *The Sunday Times*, *The Irish Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Financial Times*, *The Telegraph*, *The New Statesman*, *The Irish Independent* and *The Independent*.

Kilroy won the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature in 2004 and has been shortlisted many times for the Kerry Group Irish Novel of the Year and the Irish Book Awards. She studied at Trinity College and lives in Dublin.

Youth (February)

by Kevin Curran



“Kevin Curran’s novel deals with the lives of four teenagers in Balbriggan, Ireland’s most diverse town. When the protagonists intersect, the connections they make will change the course of their lives. ‘Irish-English has always been wild,’ Roddy Doyle has written in *The Irish Times*. ‘Youth, at its liveliest, seems to be telling us that we’re only starting.’”

— Colm Tóibín

Kevin Curran is from Balbriggan and has been a secondary-school teacher in his hometown for over a decade. *Youth*, his third novel, was published to critical acclaim in 2023. His first novel, *Beatsploitation* (2013), brought him national attention due to his depiction of Ireland’s new multicultural landscape. He has also published a second novel, *Citizens* (2016), and numerous short stories in major anthologies and literary journals such as *The Stinging Fly*.

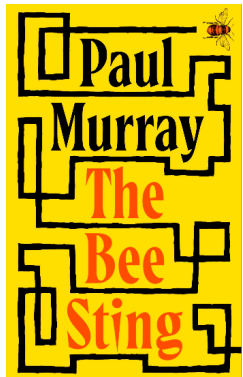
His fiction largely concentrates on working class life in the Dublin suburbs. He has also written non-fiction for *The Guardian* and *The Observer*.

The Bee Sting (March)

by Paul Murray



Credit: Lee Pellegrini



“Paul Murray’s novel is narrated by four members of the Barnes family, Dickie who runs a car showroom, his wife Imelda, and their children Cassie and PJ. The Guardian has written that Murray ‘is brilliant on fathers and sons, sibling rivalry, grief, self-sabotage and self-denial, as well as the terrible weakness humans have for magical thinking...”

— Colm Tóibín

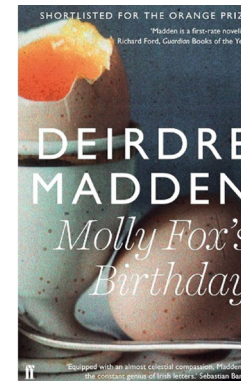
Paul Murray was born in Dublin and is the author of four acclaimed novels. *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* (2003) was shortlisted for the Whitbread First Novel Award. *Skippy Dies* (2010) was longlisted for the Man Booker Prize and shortlisted for the Costa Book. *The Mark and the Void* (2015) won the Bollinger Wodehouse Prize for Comic Fiction. *The Bee Sting*, published in 2023, won the An Post Irish Book of the Year (2023) and the Nero Book Award (2024). It was shortlisted for

the Booker Prize, the Kirkus Prize and the Writers’ Prize (2024). It was one of the Top Ten Best Books of 2023 in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, and named a Best Book of the Year by *The Irish Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Time*, *The Independent*, and others.

Paul’s stories and journalism have appeared in *New York Magazine*, *Granta*, *The Guardian*, *The Paris Review*, and *The New York Times*.

Molly Fox’s Birthday (April)

by Deirdre Madden



“It is the height of summer, and celebrated actor Molly Fox has loaned her house in Dublin to a friend while she is away performing in New York. Set over a single midsummer’s day, *Molly Fox’s Birthday* is a mischievous, insightful novel about a turning point - a moment when past and future suddenly appear in a new light.”

— Colm Tóibín

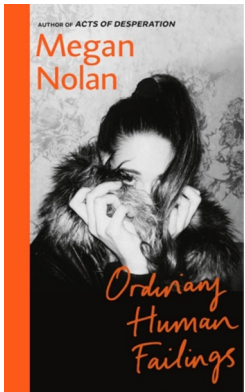
Deirdre Madden is a novelist. She has published eight novels for adults, including *Authenticity*, *Molly Fox’s Birthday*, and most recently *Time Present and Time Past*. She has won many awards for her work, including The Rooney Prize, The Hennessy Award, and The Somerset Maugham Award. For the first of her three novels for children, she won the Ellis Dillon Award. All her work is published by Faber and Faber and has been widely

anthologised. Her novels have also been translated into several languages, including French, Italian and German.

She studied English at Trinity College Dublin and has an MA in Creative Writing from the University of East Anglia. In 1997 she was Writer Fellow at Trinity, and since 2004 she has been teaching Creative Writing to undergraduates and on the MPhil programme in the Oscar Wilde Centre. She is a member of Aosdána.

Ordinary Human Failings (May)

by Megan Nolan



“Megan Nolan’s novel tells the story of the Green family who move from Ireland to London in the early 1990s. ‘Where Nolan really excels is in the delineation of complex, sometimes contradictory interior states, the water we all swim in and call “reality;” writes *The Financial Times*.”

— Colm Tóibín

Megan Nolan was born in 1990 in Waterford, Ireland and is currently based in London. Her essays and reviews have been published by *The New York Times*, *White Review*, *The Guardian* and *Frieze* amongst others. Her debut novel, *Acts of Desperation*, was published by Jonathan Cape in 2021 and was the recipient of a Betty Trask Award, shortlisted for the Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award and longlisted for the Dylan Thomas Prize.

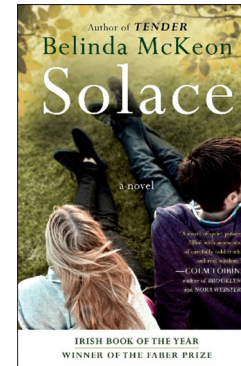
Her second novel, *Ordinary Human Failings* was published in 2023 and is shortlisted for the inaugural Nero Book Awards, for fiction and longlisted for the Gordon Burn Prize.

Solace (June)

by Belinda McKeon



Credit: Alen MacWeeney



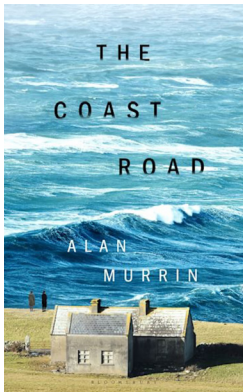
“In her compelling debut novel, *Solace*,” Anna Fogarty wrote in *The Irish Times* in 2011, ‘Belinda McKeon succeeds in subtly reconfiguring and updating the archetypal story of a son’s quarrel with his father. In her hands, it becomes a profound and exacting conjuration with the psycho-social shifts taking place in contemporary Ireland.’”

— Colm Tóibín

Belinda McKeon is a novelist, short story writer and playwright. She is the author of the novels *Solace* (2011) and *Tender* (2015), and has had short fiction and non-fiction published in *The Paris Review*, *Granta*, *Winter Papers*, *A Public Space*, *The Stinging Fly* and elsewhere. Her plays have been produced in Dublin and New York, most recently at the 2017 Dublin Theatre Festival, with *Nora* (Corn Exchange). She directs the new MA in Creative Writing at Maynooth University.

The Coast Road (July)

by Alan Murrin



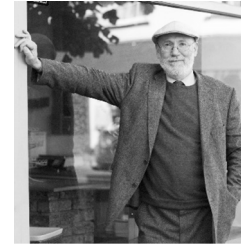
*“Set in 1994, *The Coast Road* tells the story of two women— Izzy and Colette. Colette has left her husband and sons for a married man in Dublin. When she returns to her home in County Donegal, her husband, Shaun, a successful businessman, denies her access to her children. ‘The last great book I read,’ the actress Gillian Anderson has said. ‘It will no doubt be a bestseller.’”*

— Colm Tóibín

Alan Murrin is an Irish fiction writer from Donegal. In 2021 he was the winner of the Bournemouth Writing Prize for his short story ‘*The Wake*’, which went on to be shortlisted for story of the year at the Irish Book Awards. As a novel in progress, *The Coast Road* was longlisted for the Caledonia New Novel Award. He is a recipient of an Irish Arts Council Next Generation Award and a graduate of the prose fiction masters at UEA.

The Lonely Sea and Sky (August)

by Dermot Bolger



“The novel tells the story of the rescue by a small Irish boat of 168 German sailors during World War II. The narrator is Jack Roche, a 14-year-old Wexford lad whose father has been killed at sea. Part historical fiction, part coming-of-age narrative, this is a perceptive and exciting novel about life at sea as a way of dramatizing human relations at their most intense.”

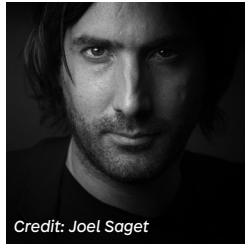
— Colm Tóibín

Dermot Bolger is the author of fourteen novels, including *The Journey Home*, *The Family on Paradise Pier*, *The Lonely Sea and Sky* and *An Ark of Light*. His debut play, *The Lament for Arthur Cleary*, received the Samuel Beckett Award. Numerous other plays include *The Ballymun Trilogy* and, most recently, *Last Orders on the Dockside* and an adaptation of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, both staged by The Abbey Theatre. He has published ten poetry collections, including *Other People’s Lives* in 2022. He devised the bestselling collaborative

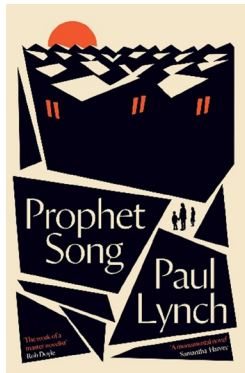
novels, *Finbar’s Hotel* and *Ladies Night at Finbar’s Hotel*, and edited numerous anthologies, including *The Picador Book of Contemporary Irish Fiction*. As an eighteen-year-old factory hand in 1978 he founded Raven Arts Press, which in time became New Island Books – one of Ireland’s leading publishers. In 2012 he was named Commentator of the Year at the Irish Newspaper awards. In 2021 he received the 2021 Lawrence O’Shaughnessy Award for Poetry and, in 2022, received an honorary doctorate in Literature from the National University of Ireland.

Prophet Song (September)

by Paul Lynch



Credit: Joel Saget



“Paul Lynch’s novel, winner of the 2023 Booker Prize, is set in the near future in a real Dublin in which a totalitarian regime has come to power. ‘If there was ever a crucial book for our current times,’ The Guardian has written, ‘it’s Paul Lynch’s Prophet Song.’”

— Colm Tóibín

Paul Lynch is the Booker Prize-winning author of five novels — *Prophet Song*, *Beyond the Sea*, *Grace*, *The Black Snow* and *Red Sky in Morning*. His most recent novel, *Prophet Song* was published to wide acclaim in 2023 and won the Booker Prize as well as being shortlisted for the An Post Irish Novel of the Year. He has previously won the Kerry Group Irish Novel of the Year, and France’s Prix Libr’ à Nous for Best Foreign Novel, among other prizes. He has been shortlisted for many international awards, including the

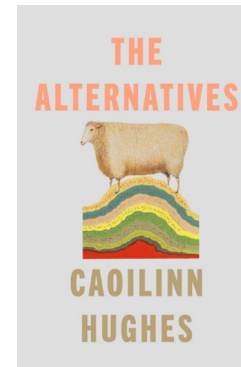
UK’s Walter Scott Prize, and France’s Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger, Prix Littérature-Monde, and the Jean Monnet Prize for European Literature. He lives in Dublin.

The Alternatives (October)

by Caoilinn Hughes



Credit: Robin Christian



“Caoilinn Hughes’s novel deals with the lives of four brilliant sisters, lives that have been deeply scarred by the death of their parents. As Hernan Diaz has written, this is ‘a tale about sisterhood, a novel of ideas, a chronicle of our collective follies, a requiem for our agonizing species... in a prose full of gorgeous surprises...glows with intelligence, compassion, and beauty.’”

— Colm Tóibín

Caoilinn Hughes is the author of *Orchid & the Wasp*, which won the Collyer Bristow Prize and was longlisted for the International Dublin Literary Award, and *The Wild Laughter*, which won the Royal Society of Literature’s Encore Award and was longlisted for the International Dylan Thomas Prize. She was recently the Oscar Wilde Centre Writer Fellow at Trinity College Dublin, and is now a Cullman Fellow at New York Public Library. *The Alternatives* is her third novel.

Close to Home (November)

by Michael Magee



“Michael Magee’s first novel deals with the Troubles as both legacy and aftermath. At its centre is Sean who has returned to Belfast. The book has been described by The Guardian as ‘a staggeringly humane and tender evocation of class, violence and the challenge of belonging in a world that seems designed to keep you watching from the sidelines.’”

— Colm Tóibín

Michael Magee is from West Belfast. His debut novel, *Close to Home*, won the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature. It was also named the Waterstones Irish Book of the Year 2023. He is a graduate of the Creative Writing programme at the Seamus Heaney Centre, Belfast.

How to Build a Boat (December)

by Elaine Feeney



“Elaine Feeney’s second novel, set in a small, fictional Irish town on the west coast, tells the story of Jamie, a boy who seeks to connect with his dead mother. ‘Feeney’s prose,’ The New York Times has written, ‘is both careful and relaxed — detailed in its description of place and character and of the effortful human urge to find order in the natural world.’”

— Colm Tóibín

Elaine Feeney writes poetry, fiction, and non-fiction. She has published three poetry collections including *The Radio* was *Gospel & Rise*. Her debut novel *As You Were* won Dalkey Book Festival’s Emerging Writer Prize, The Kate O’Brien Prize, Society of Authors’ McKitterick Prize, and was shortlisted for Novel of the Year at the Irish Book Awards and the Rathbones-Folio Prize. Feeney’s short fiction was published in *The Art of The Glimpse: 100 Irish Short Stories* and she has published widely including *The Paris Review*, *The Stinging Fly*, *The*

Moth, *Poetry Review* and *The Guardian*. Her second novel *How to Build a Boat* was published in 2023 and was nominated for The Booker Prize. A new collection, *All the Good Things You Deserve* is forthcoming in 2024. She lectures at University of Galway.



The Arts Council

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