



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

The Art of Reading Book Club



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

The Art of Reading

The Laureate for Irish Fiction is proud to present The Art of Reading, 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 2022, the Laureate will meet a different library book club each month to discuss a work of fiction by an Irish writer, highlighting outstanding Irish writing and celebrating readers and book clubs. The Laureate's selected titles include new work by contemporary Irish writers and works from the past from the Irish literary canon. 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.

"Our experience of reading became more intense and more essential during the lockdown. 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

"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 2022. 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 2023 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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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. 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. 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 is Chancellor of the University of Liverpool.

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Small Things Like These (February) by Claire Keegan



The Laureate says *“This short novel manages to dramatize both private life and public matters. It does so by working in careful, meticulous, emotionally-accurate detail, making no grand statements about character or circumstance. Everything is intimate, almost low-key, and yet the implications of the narrative are far-reaching.”*

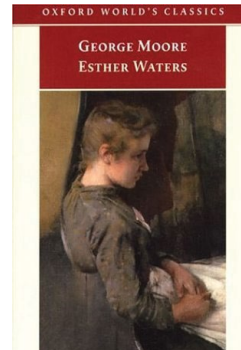
Claire Keegan’s debut collection of stories, *Antarctica*, was a Los Angeles Times Book of the Year. The Observer called these stories: ‘Among the finest recently written in English’. It was also awarded the William Trevor Prize, judged by William Trevor. In 2007, her second collection, *Walk the Blue Fields*, was published to huge critical acclaim and went on to win The Edge Hill Prize for the strongest collection published in The British Isles. The prize was adjudicated by Hilary Mantel. *Foster* (2010) won The Davy Byrnes Award, then the world’s richest prize for a story. It was judged by

Richard Ford, who said: ‘Keegan is a rarity – someone I will always want to read.’

Keegan’s stories are published in English by Faber & Faber, have appeared in The New Yorker, Granta, The Paris Review, Best American Stories, won numerous awards – and are translated into 17 languages. She is internationally renowned as a teacher of creative writing.

Her most recent work, *Small Things Like These*, was published in late 2021.

Esther Waters (March) by George Moore



The Laureate says *“In this novel, Moore works like a nineteenth century French painter in drawing a portrait of a spirited young women of reduced circumstances facing her destiny in an unforgiving world.”*

George Augustus Moore, otherwise known as GM, was born in Carnacun, Co Mayo in 1852. He was the son of George Henry Moore, an Irish MP. During his lifetime he lived in Paris and Dublin as well as London, where he died in 1933. He wrote prose, drama, memoir, poetry and art criticism. He was a prolific writer and his most well-known work includes the autobiography *Confessions of a Young Man* (1889), an autobiographical trilogy *Hail and Farewell* (1911-14) and the novels *A Mummer’s Wife* (1885), *Esther Waters* (1894), *Evelyn Innes* (1896) and *Sister Teresa* (1901). The

film *Albert Nobbs*, which features a screenplay co-written by John Banville, is based on a story by Moore.

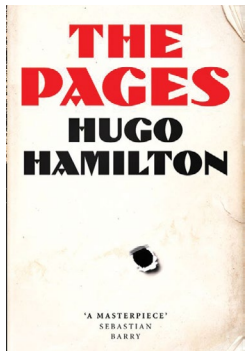
His early writing was influenced by the works of modern French writers including Gustave Flaubert and Émile Zola. Moore is known for introducing French naturalism into English and Irish literature. His writing is said to have influenced Joyce’s realism and he is often credited as being the first great modern Irish novelist.

The Pages (April)

by Hugo Hamilton



Credit: Marc O'Sullivan



The Laureate says *“This is an ingeniously told story, narrated by an actual book, a novel by the Austrian writer Joseph Roth, offering an account of its picaresque travels to America and back to Europe, while in the background we learn of the life of Joseph Roth himself and the dark times he lived in.”*

Hugo Hamilton is the best-selling author of *The Speckled People*, a memoir of his German-Irish childhood in Dublin, growing up with his German mother and prohibited by his revolutionary Irish father from speaking English. As a novelist and playwright, his work has won many international awards, including the French Prix Femina Etranger and the DAAD scholarship in Berlin, as well as the prestigious *Bundesverdienstkreuz*, awarded by the German state for his understanding of cultural diversity.

Hamilton is a member of Aosdána and lives in Dublin.

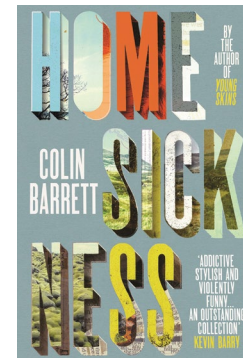
His latest novel is *The Pages*, published by Fourth Estate 2021 and by Knopf in the USA February 2022.

Homesickness (May)

by Colin Barrett



Credit: Rolex/Amoush Abrar



The Laureate says *“Colin Barrett has the ability to create character and create a scene in a few sentences. His dialogue that seems so spare and clipped manages to establish mood and build tension. His scenes are constructed with great sympathy, but there is also a bleakness in his vision. What is remarkable in his work is the texture of the language, the use of metaphor, the handling of rhythm.”*

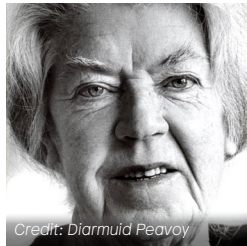
Colin Barrett is from County Mayo, Ireland. In 2009 he was awarded the Penguin Ireland Prize, and in 2014 his debut collection of stories *Young Skins* was published and awarded The Rooney Prize, The Frank O'Connor International Short Story Prize and The Guardian First Book Award. In 2018 he was announced as the Rolex Arts Initiative Literary Protégé, mentored by Colm Tóibín. His stories have appeared in *The Stingray Fly*, the *New Statesman*, the *New Yorker*, Harper's and have been read on Radio 4.

His story 'Calm With Horses' was adapted for a feature film starring Barry Keoghan, Cosmo Jarvis and Niamh Algar, released in 2020.

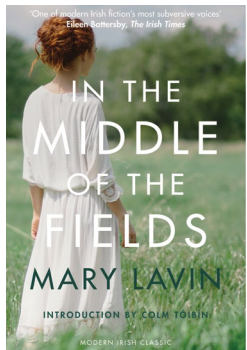
Colin's new short story collection, *Homesickness*, will be published in 2022. He is also working on his debut novel, due to be released in summer 2023.

In the Middle of the Fields (June)

by Mary Lavin



Credit: Diarmuid Peavoy



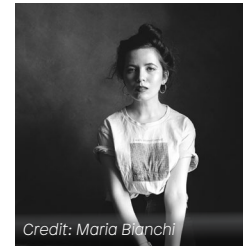
The Laureate says *“These stories are written with a spareness, a wryness, that manage to make the source of their immense power ambiguous and mysterious. In the title story, it is unclear what the dominant emotion is, whether it is grief or shock or fear or resignation. That way of writing at an angle to easy assumptions, easy interpretations, makes Mary Lavin’s stories luminous and memorable”*

Born in 1912 in Massachusetts, USA, Mary Lavin was the only child of Irish parents. The family returned to Ireland to live when she was a child. She studied English and French in University College Dublin, after which she taught French in Loreto College, St Stephen’s Green, Dublin, where she had gone to school herself. She was best known for her short stories, many of which featured in *The New Yorker*, where she was under contract. Lavin received numerous national and international awards and honours including the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for

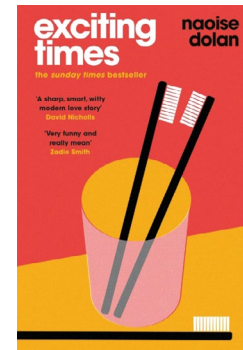
her début collection, *Tales from Bective Bridge* (1943), the Guggenheim Fellowship and an Honorary Doctorate from UCD. Regarded as a pioneering female author, much of her writing focused on feminist issues and the topic of widowhood. She died in 1996.

Exciting Times (July)

by Naoise Dolan



Credit: Maria Bianchi



The Laureate says *“This novel is a tour-de-force work about exile and the world of expats in Hong Kong. Seeking accommodation, looking for love, teaching English as a foreign language, dealing with foreigners, being Irish, calling home, are all dramatized with wit and emotional accuracy and a refusal to settle for easy narrative solutions.”*

Naoise Dolan is an Irish writer born in Dublin. She studied at Trinity College, followed by a Master’s in Victorian literature at Oxford. She writes fiction, essays, criticism and features for publications including *The London Review of Books*, *The Guardian* and *Vogue*.

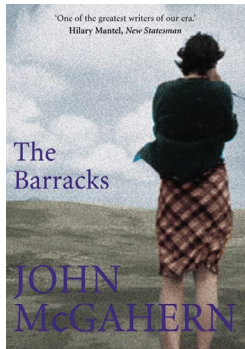
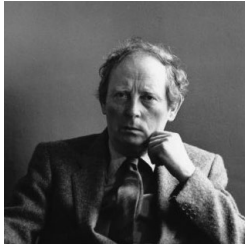
Naoise’s debut novel *Exciting Times* was published by W&N in the UK and by Ecco in the US in 2020, and became a Sunday Times bestseller, widely translated and optioned for TV. She has been shortlisted and longlisted for several

prizes, including The Women’s Prize for Fiction, the Dylan Thomas Prize and The Sunday Times Young Writer of the Year Award. *Exciting Times* was shortlisted for the An Post Irish Book Awards and the Waterstones Book of the Year in 2020.

Her second novel is forthcoming.

The Barracks (August)

by John McGahern



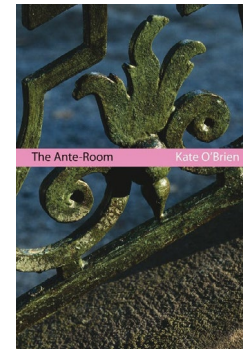
The Laureate says *“This bleak, unrelenting novel portrays a woman in the Irish midlands who has married a policeman and become a surrogate mother to his children in the time after his first wife’s death. Elizabeth, too, is facing her own death. Her character is drawn with great sympathy. The most intimate moments are handled with piercing sensitivity and truthfulness.”*

John McGahern was born in Dublin in 1934 and raised in Leitrim and Roscommon. A graduate of UCD, he worked as a primary school teacher and held various academic posts at universities in Britain, Ireland and America. He is the author of six novels and four collections of short stories. His novels included *The Barracks* (1963); *The Dark* (1965); *The Leavetaking* (1975), *The Pornographer* (1980), *Amongst Women* (1990) and *That They May Face the Rising Sun* (2001). He published his much acclaimed *Memoir* in 2005. His short story collections were *Nightlines* (1970); and *High Ground* (1985) which were

collected and published as *The Collected Stories* (1992). He also wrote plays for radio, television and theatre. He received many awards, including the Æ Award (1962); the Macaulay Fellowship (1964); Chevalier d’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (1989); The Irish Times/Aer Lingus Literary Award (1990); the GPA Award (1992); and the Prix Étranger Ecuireuil (1994). He was short-listed for the Booker Prize in 1990 for *Amongst Women*. His work has been translated into many languages. On his death in 2006, he was acclaimed as ‘the most important Irish novelist since Samuel Beckett’ by *The Guardian*.

The Ante-room (September)

by Kate O’Brien



The Laureate says *“This novel is written with great intensity, being set over a time period of three days in which the focus is on the entire life of a single family, all the secrets and treacheries coming into the open. Time and character are dealt with in this book with sharp insight, masterful precision.”*

Kate O’Brien was born in 1897 in Limerick. A graduate of UCD, she was an internationally acclaimed fiction writer. In her early career she worked as a journalist and found initial literary success as a playwright. She also wrote short fiction, literary essay, literary criticism and travel writing. Her first novel, *Without My Cloak* (1931), won the Hawthornden and the James Tait Black Memorial prizes. She wrote nine novels in total, including *Mary Lavelle* (1936) and *The Land of Spices* (1941), both of which were banned in Ireland.

Her novels were very popular and widely read in her time, both in Ireland and abroad and her most successful novel, *That Lady* (1946), was made into a Hollywood film. She died in 1974.

Edith (October)

by Martina Devlin



The Laureate says “*Edith is an engrossing and sensitive portrait of the writer Edith Somerville during the War of Independence when her writing partner Violet Ross is dead and her own career as a writer not flourishing. It is a portrait of a sensitive, solitary figure in a time of turmoil, of a woman striking out as an artist in a time when there were many barriers*”

Martina Devlin has written 11 books, including the novels *About Sisterland* and *The House Where It Happened*, and the short story collection *Truth & Dare*. Her latest book *Edith: A Novel* – about the writer Edith Somerville – will be published by the Lilliput Press in May. Prizes include the Royal Society of Literature’s V.S. Pritchett Prize and a Hennessy Literary Award. She writes a weekly current affairs column for the *Irish Independent* and has been named National Newspapers of Ireland commentator of the year. Martina is the first holder of a PhD in literary practice from Trinity College

Dublin, where she is currently an adjunct lecturer in Irish literature. She presents the City of Books podcast, sponsored by the Arts Council and supported by Dublin UNESCO City of Literature and the Museum of Literature Ireland.

The Last September (November)

by Elizabeth Bowen



The Laureate says “*This is another novel set during the Irish War of Independence. Just as Martina Devlin’s book is about solitude and introspection, this centres on a house party, scenes filled with chatter and strange silences, things unmentioned and unmentionable. And in the background are the insurgents, the sense of impending doom.*”

Elizabeth Bowen was born in Dublin in 1899. An only child of Anglo-Irish descent, she was educated in England and spent her summers at Bowen’s Court in County Cork. She was a short-story writer, novelist and essayist. Her first book, a collection of stories entitled *Encounters*, was published in 1923 with the help of Rose Macaulay of the Bloomsbury Group. *The Hotel* (1927) was her first novel. Her most highly regarded and well-known novels, *The Death of the Heart* (1938) and *The Heat of the Day* (1948), were set in London between the World Wars and during

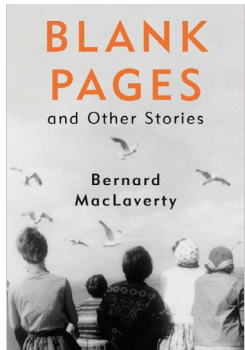
the Blitz. Her novel *The Last September* (1929) recounts the history of Bowen’s Court and is set during the events that preceded Irish independence. She was awarded the CBE in 1948 and received an honorary degree from Trinity College Dublin in 1948 and from Oxford University in 1956. The Royal Society of Literature made her a Companion of Literature in 1965. She died in 1973.

Blank Pages and other stories

(December) by Bernard MacLaverty



The Laureate says “MacLaverty offers a masterclass in how to create character, how to build scenes by accretion of detail, how to work with implication and suggestion, how to write indirectly and manages to create more energy and more expression by working in muted colours and plain textures.”



Bernard MacLaverty was born in Belfast (14.9.42) and lived there until 1975 when he moved to Scotland with his wife, Madeline, and four children. He has been a Medical Laboratory Technician, a mature student, a teacher of English and occasionally a Writer-in-Residence (Universities of Aberdeen, Augsburg, Liverpool John Moore's and Iowa State). After living for a time in Edinburgh and the Isle of Islay he now lives in Glasgow. He is a member of Aosdána.

He has published five novels and six collections of short stories most of which are gathered into *Collected Stories* (2013). He has written versions of his fiction for other media – radio plays, television plays, screenplays, libretti. *Blank Pages*, published in August 2021, is his sixth collection of short stories.

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