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Dalkey Literary Award winners revealed

The Dalkey Book Festival, in conjunction with Zurich Insurance, has announced the inaugural winners of the Dalkey Literary Awards.

This marks the first year of the Dalkey Literary Awards, launched in collaboration with Zurich Insurance, and is aimed exclusively at Irish writers with a total prize fund of €30,000. The winner of the 'Novel of the Year' category will walk away with €20,000 whilst the writer crowned 'Emerging Writer' will receive €10,000. The Awards are the most lucrative in the country and recognise some of the most remarkable home-grown literary talents in Ireland.

The two winning authors are:

- Novelist and short story writer **Christine Dwyer Hickey**, who wins the Dalkey Literary Award for Novel of the Year with *The Narrow Land*, a searing novel of loneliness and regret, depicting the legacy of World War II and the ever-changing concept of the American Dream which the judges described as 'luscious', 'enthraling', and 'emotionally engaging'.
- Award-winning essayist, editor and renowned arts critic **Sinéad Gleeson**, who wins the Dalkey Literary Award for Emerging Writer with *Constellations*, a collection of powerful essays that delve into art, illness, ghosts, grief, and our very ways of seeing and which the judges felt was "easily one of the standout books in any field over the last 12 months."

The winners were announced via video link on Saturday 20th June 2020. Viewers can watch both Christine and Sinéad receive the news of their award at: zurich.ie/dalkey-literary-awards

Commenting on her win for Novel of the Year, Christine Dwyer Hickey said: "I am so thrilled to have won such a special award at the very first year of the Dalkey Literary Awards. It's wonderful, I can't believe it. This means so much to me and that someone out there appreciates it, validates all of the hard work. I spent five years working on *The Narrow Land* from beginning to end, so to even be nominated for a prize means the world to me. I will celebrate this for sure!"

Commenting on her win for Emerging Writer of the Year, Sinéad Gleeson said: "It means a huge amount to even be shortlisted for this prize, not just because Dalkey Book Festival is one of my favourite festivals but because it's the first year of the Dalkey Literary Awards. To be recognised for your work is always a wonderful thing and for me, just to get on a shortlist is enough because you already know there has been a lot of people in this crowded field and you got to the final part. I'm thrilled!"

David McWilliams, Co-Founder of the Dalkey Book Festival said: "Over the next 10 years we aim to make the Dalkey Literary Awards a central part of Ireland's literary calendar and we will be delighted to continue to reward Irish genius and literary talent as it develops, as I have no doubt it will do."

Sian Smyth, Director of the Dalkey Book Festival said: "The shortlists for the first year of the Dalkey Literary Awards were exceptionally strong, reflecting the breadth of talent out there. Thank you to the judges who had a difficult – although, they say enjoyable – task in choosing the winners. I'd like to commend them on their enthusiasm, professionalism, and thoughtfulness throughout the process."

"I am thrilled to see *The Narrow Land* win the Novel of the Year award. It is wonderful to bring this great novel to even wider public attention, which it so deserves. The Emerging Writer category was also a strong shortlist of six very different books, and I'm delighted that Sinéad Gleeson's *Constellations* - a powerful collection of essays, insightful and expressive, personal and political - has won the Emerging Writer Award. Thanks must go to Zurich Insurance who made these awards possible; their commitment to backing the arts in Ireland is exceptional and we hope to continue this partnership supporting the world of books and Irish writing talent."

Neil Freshwater, CEO Zurich Insurance plc said: "We are delighted to have supported the Dalkey Literary Awards, a major new step in the development of the Dalkey Book Festival and its overall aim of promoting excellence in literature. Supporting the Dalkey Literary Awards reinforces our commitment to and championing of writers, literature and creativity in Ireland at a time when it's never been more important. We're thrilled the prize means so much to Christine and Sinéad, truly wonderful writers who represent our very best creative talent. I also want to congratulate all shortlisted authors which, in itself, is a fantastic achievement among such strong competition."

The two winning authors were selected from a panel of 12 writers' resident in or born in Ireland and published in Ireland or the UK in 2019. The shortlist for each category was nominated by a designated panel made up of 14 well-known critics, writers and public figures within the Irish literary world. Each category had three judges who each reviewed the shortlisted authors and selected one overall winner.

The establishment of the Dalkey Literary Awards marked a major new step for the highly popular Dalkey Book Festival, which has grown exponentially since its 2010 debut with the support of Zurich. It will return in full swing in summer 2021.

ENDS

Further Information:

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About the Dalkey Literary Awards:

The Dalkey Book Festival and Zurich are proud to announce the Dalkey Literary Awards. To be held annually, the awards are in two categories: 'Novel of the Year' and 'Emerging Writer'. The awards are for writers' resident in or born in Ireland and published in Ireland or the UK in 2019.

The shortlist for each category was nominated by a designated panel made up of 14 well-known critics, writers and public figures within the Irish literary world. Each category had three judges who each reviewed the shortlisted authors and select one overall winner.

For more information about the awards, please see: zurich.ie/dalkey-literary-awards

About Zurich Insurance:

Zurich is one of Ireland's leading insurance companies providing a wide range of general insurance and life insurance products and services. The company employs over 1,000 people across its locations in Dublin and Wexford.

Zurich is committed to supporting the arts in Ireland and is proud of its longstanding partnerships with both the Dalkey Book Festival and The National Gallery of Ireland.

Zurich in Ireland is part of Zurich Insurance Group (Zurich), a leading multi-line insurer that serves its customers in global and local markets. With about 53,000 employees, it provides a wide range of property and casualty, and life insurance products and services in more than 210 countries and territories. Zurich's customers include individuals, small businesses, and mid-sized and large companies, as well as multinational corporations. The Group is headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland, where it was founded in 1872.

Christine Dwyer Hickey Bio:

Christine Dwyer Hickey is an award-winning novelist and short story writer. Her novel *The Cold Eye of Heaven* won the Irish Novel of the Year of the Year 2012 and was shortlisted for the Irish Book Awards. *Last Train from Liguria* was shortlisted for the Irish Book Awards novel of the year 2004. Her bestselling novel *Tatty* was chosen as one of the 50 Irish Books of the Decade, longlisted for the Orange Prize and shortlisted for the Hughes & Hughes Irish Novel of the Year Award, for which her novel *The Dancer* was also shortlisted.

Further info on *The Narrow Land*:

1950: late summer season on Cape Cod. Michael, a ten-year-old boy, is spending the summer with Richie and his glamorous but troubled mother. Left to their own devices, the boys meet a couple living nearby - the artists Jo and Edward Hopper - and an unlikely friendship is forged.

She, volatile, passionate and often irrational, suffers bouts of obsessive sexual jealousy. He, withdrawn and unwell, depressed by his inability to work, becomes besotted by Richie's frail and beautiful Aunt Katherine who has not long to live - an infatuation he shares with young Michael. A novel of loneliness and regret, the legacy of World War II and the ever-changing concept of the American Dream.

Sinéad Gleeson Bio:

Sinéad Gleeson is a writer of essays, criticism and fiction. Her writing has appeared in *Granta*, *Winter Papers* and *Gorse*, she is a contributor to *Being Various: New Irish Short Stories* (Faber, May 2019), an editor of three short anthologies, including *The Long Gaze Back: an Anthology of Irish Women Writers* and *The Glass Shore: Short Stories by Women Writers from the North of Ireland*, both of which won Best Irish Published Book at the Irish Book Awards. Sinéad has also worked as an arts critic and broadcaster and presented *The Book Show* on RTÉ Radio 1. She lives in Dublin.

Further info on *Constellations*:

How do you tell the story of a life in a body, as it goes through sickness, health, motherhood? And how do you tell that story when you are not just a woman but a woman in Ireland?

In these powerful and daring essays Sinéad Gleeson delves into art, illness, ghosts, grief and our very ways of seeing. In her spirited, warm voice, Sinéad takes us on a journey that is both extraordinarily intimate and universal in its resonance.

Judge's comments about *The Narrow Land* by Christine Dwyer Hickey

Andrea Catherwood: Totally absorbing from the first page, *The Narrow Lands* transported me to 1950s Cape Cod. It's deceptively straightforward writing explores major themes of a relationships, marriage, childhood and trauma and subsumes us in a Cape Cod summer. The characters have stayed with me long after that last page. Like the very best novels it made me stop, think and reassess my own relationships. I feel richer for having read this book, I'm pressing into the hands of friends and family.

Jennifer O'Connell: This book is luscious. It draws you in. Tackling two essential truths: a long marriage and the struggle of the creative. We recognised truths in it of relationships we know. We understand the selfishness of creative people, a kind of ruthlessness we see in the artist, exploring how he gets the work on canvas. It is a beautiful book. I recommend it. I was engaged emotionally, I was transported, I loved it.

Fiach MacConghail: Christine Dwyer Hickey creates an extraordinary atmosphere. My tummy was in knots reading it. I came out of it wrecked! I didn't want to finish it. I was totally subsumed and consumed by the loneliness and despair of the older couple and the anguish of both children. Grief, disappointment, darkness, jealousy, rage, and the complexity of relationships. Enthralling.

Judge's comments about *Constellations* by Sinéad Gleeson

Caolinn Hughes: *Constellations* is a highly distinctive, beautifully-executed essay collection that exposes the body as a site of infinite conflict; the extent to which that conflict is external might surprise half of the population, but to every reader, there will be copious revelations here. Through generosity of detail and contemplation, Gleeson darkens the page with hard-earned experience and insight. In that

darkness, she makes so much glimmer—from the life-saving scalpel to thousands of strangers' eyes in a night-time field, moving to the same music.

Gary Jermyn: A personal story extremely well told. An intriguing memoir, issues of ill-health, education, relationships, suicide, repeal the eighth referendum, parenting are dealt with sensitively, and with a healthy dollop of good humour. There are rambling detours down highways and byways – Blood Groups, Hair Loss, Frida Kahlo, Derbhla Murphy to name a few – all diverting, all interesting and with a positive outlook. When she is diagnosed with leukaemia in her teens Sinead Gleeson tells her parents “I’m not going to die, I’m going to write a book”. And we are the better for that.

Rick O’Shea: Easily one of the standout books in any field over the last 12 months. A debut series of essays on her and her body, her health (and lack of it at times), motherhood, reproductive rights, and what it's like to experience all of these things as a woman growing up in the Ireland of the last couple of decades. Seminal.

FAQs

Prize: The total prize fund is €30,000. The winner of the Novel of the Year award receives €20,000 and the winner of the Emerging Writer award receives €10,000.

How do the Dalkey Literary Awards work? The Awards support writers resident in, or born in Ireland, and published in Ireland or the UK in 2019. There are two categories: Novel of the Year and Emerging Writer. There is a Nominating Panel made up of 14 nominators including writers, literary agents, booksellers, academics and journalists. The Nominating Panel together nominate books published in 2019 by Irish writers and arrive at a shortlist of up to six books for each category. There are two distinct judging panels, one for each category, both made up of three members, typically an author, a journalist and a person in the public eye with a love of reading. Each judging panel then reads the shortlisted books for the relevant category before meeting on two occasions to agree one winner.

What is an “Emerging Writer”? An Emerging Writer is widely defined as (and includes, but is not limited to) writers of fiction, non-fiction, literary history, biography, memoir, collections of poetry, essays and short stories. Emerging writers may include writers of more than one published book and emerging writers may be of all ages.

What is an “Irish” writer? Authors need not be Irish but if not then they must have been resident in Ireland for at least six months in each of the previous three years.

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