

Emer Martin

Author



Books

Agent

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Biography

Emer Martin is a radical, vital voice in Irish writing, as she challenges the history of silence, institutional lies, evasion and the mistreatment of women across mid-to-late twentieth-century Ireland through her fiction. She is a Dubliner who has lived in Paris, London, the Middle East, and various places in the U.S. *Thirsty Ghosts* is her most recent novel published by Lilliput Press and *The Cruelty Men* was nominated for Irish Novel of the Year 2019. Her first novel, *Breakfast in Babylon*, won Book of the Year 1996 in Ireland at the prestigious Listowel Writers' Week. She studied painting in New York and produced Irvine Welsh's directorial debut *NUTS* in 2007. She was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship in 2000. She now lives between the depths of Silicon Valley, CA and the jungles of Co. Meath, Ireland.

Current publication:

THIRSTY GHOSTS (The Lilliput Press, 2023)

Two families inhabit this immersive polyvocal work, an intergenerational saga announced with *The Cruelty Men* (2018) and continued here as punk rockers and Magdalene laundries spiral into a post-colonial Ireland still haunted by its tribal undertow. Scenes surface from Ireland's mythological past, Tudor plantations, workhouses and industrial schools, the Troubles laid bare, the transformative pre-digital decades playing out in this propulsive narrative. *Thirsty Ghosts* is epic in scope while intimate in focus.

The Lyons, professionals in a newly independent state, are attacked by paramilitaries in their family home in Tyrone. The eccentric O Conaills of Kerry, traumatized by displacement, find themselves in leafy Dublin 4. We encounter a servant who meets Henry VIII, a Lithuanian Jewish family who become part of the fabric of Dublin, and a wild young girl who escapes the laundry only to stumble into a psycho pimp.

Related with dark humour, verve and high literary style, *Thirsty Ghosts* is a revelatory exploration of Ireland combining themes of power, class, fertility, violence and deep love, forces as universal as the old stories that permeate and illuminate each character's life.

Praise:

'An untamed dreamtime held together by stories, this is a wild river-run of a novel about Ireland's dark histories, narrated in the merry voice we associate with Emer Martin, one of our truly original writers. Her wry humour gives the grimmest stories an exuberant buoyancy. And seldom has English as spoken in Ireland – from rural Tyrone to south Dublin suburbia – been so perfectly conveyed on the page.' – Éilís Ní Dhuibhne

'Emer Martin casts a cold eye on Ireland and the Irish in this layered narrative which ranges from myths to myth-busting over the comforting fictions we tell ourselves.' – Martina Devlin

'Inventive, freewheeling and utterly fearless, *Thirsty Ghosts* delves into the Irish psyche with no holds barred. An incisive and intriguing novel.' – Christine Dwyer Hickey

'There is ambition and then there is the Great Irish Novel kind of ambition that is in Emer Martin's *Thirsty Ghosts* ... It is a fine balance of the savagely funny and heartbreaking.' – The Bookseller

'To say Emer Martin's fifth novel is epic would be an understatement. With the literary flair and love of language to match its ambition, it is breathtaking in its scope ... The writing and the tangled, intergenerational stories flow beautifully. Each sentence, each word is in service of the tragically comic, the wonderfully epic story of Ireland.' – Sunday Independent

'I was entranced by Martin's voice, which melds painful Irish history with political insights, personifies tragedy through the heart-wrenching stories of abandoned children and heartless clergy, and – despite the children's perilous existence – contextualizes it with humour mixed with ancient myths in language bordering on the poetic.' Sally Barr Ebest,

'A new book from Emer Martin is always a big deal ... Emer is a singular voice' Derek O'Connor, RTÉ

Praise for THE CRUELTY MEN (The Lilliput Press, 2018):

SHORTLISTED FOR THE KERRY GROUP IRISH NOVEL OF THE YEAR 2019

'*The Cruelty Men* is a tidal wave that drags you like a piece of debris through Irish history from the ice age to gangland Dublin. A bible of f-cked up Irishness.' – Irvine Welsh

'Martin is a natural storyteller with a finely tuned ear for language and symbolism.' – Irish Independent

'[The Cruelty Men] should propel an already proven and prodigious talent to the forefront of contemporary Irish letters.' – Irish Bookseller

'In the scale of its ambition, and the centrality of its subject matter, it could be said that what Martin is writing could be called the great Irish novel, if such a thing existed. What is certain, however, is that it is an essential Irish novel.' – Dublin Review of Books

'The dark multi-generational chronicle highlights the importance of storytelling and the innate desire for belonging. Martin, herself a wonderful storyteller, has an acute appreciation of language, symbolism and lost folklore.' – The Sunday Times

'The veracity and authenticity of this novel appear to be without question.' – Sunday Independent

'There's an incandescent rage at the heart of *The Cruelty Men* that burns so brightly, it will sear itself onto the

consciousness of all who read this powerful and moving novel.' -Sunday Business Post

'Emer Martin has written a beautiful alternative history of Ireland ... a book that traces the meaning of storytelling, mislaid culture and the boundless quest for belonging. The prose is captivating and seductive, it left me exhilarated and breathless, with new eyes on what it means to be Irish.' - June Caldwell

Further praise:

"Wry, trenchant. . . . Sharp-witted. . . . Movingly reveals the harm of clinging to the past, even in the name of family." -New York Times Book Review on *More Bread or I'll Appear*

"A work of uncommon intelligence. . . . Martin's voice is strong and vibrant, her vision acute." -Boston Book Review on *More Bread or I'll Appear*

"Martin's inventive control of incident, her ability to create eccentric characters who are also convincing, and her acerbic, obliquely comic style steadily divert the reader. They also delay the realization that her novel is either a black comedy or a lament about the combination of Ireland's history and modern condition which produces a lunatic in every family's attic." -Atlantic Monthly on *More Bread or I'll Appear*

"Martin has put her generation into one of the world's oldest stories: the quest to bring the beloved back home." -Seattle Times on *More Bread or I'll Appear*"[An] audacious second novel. . . . Startling, distinctive work." -Kirkus Reviews on *More Bread or I'll Appear*

"Winner of Ireland's prestigious 1996 Book of the Year award, this startling debut delivers a gritty, knowing transatlantic response to the current U.S. trend in "tough girl" writing. . . . Despite the grimness of her subject, Martin enlivens her work with dark, often hilarious humor, and disarming compassion. . . . Like the work of a latter-day, punk Breughel, Martin's large tableau encompasses a whirl of memorable characters in beauty, brutality and humor." -Publishers Weekly on *Breakfast in Babylon*

Publications

Fiction

Publication Details

THE CRUELTY MEN

2018, The Lilliput Press

Notes

Abandoned by her parents when they resettle in Meath, Mary O Conaill faces the task of raising her younger siblings alone. Padraig is disappeared, Seán joins the Christian Brothers, Bridget escapes and her brother Seamus inherits the farm. Maeve is sent to serve a family of shopkeepers in the local town. Later, pregnant and unwed, she is placed in a Magdalene Laundry where her twins are forcibly removed. Spanning the 1930s to the 70s, this sweeping multi-generational family saga follows the psychic and physical displacement of a society in freefall after independence. Emer Martin's mother-and-baby homes and Magdalene Laundries are the Irish cousins of Dostoyevsky and Solzhenitsyn's Gulags; her dispassionate depiction of the ordinary psychotic violence at the heart of families and society in rural Ireland is akin to that of Ferrante's Naples. In *The Cruelty Men*, two Irelands run in stark parallel: a gentle land of fairy rings, blackberry picking, and poker evenings with the local priest, and a system in which the Church and State incarcerate the vulnerable for profit. The intimacy of the first person accounts draws the reader into the world of each character. Their stoicism makes their suffering all the more moving and dignified. A delightful abundance of poetic and surreal phrases, quips and curses in this book give it a vitality and authenticity. Poignant and swift, *The Cruelty Men* tells an unsentimental yet emotional tale of survival in a country proclaimed as independent but subjugated by silence.