
THE CRANNÓG QUESTIONNAIRE MIKE MCCORMACK

How would you introduce yourself as a writer to those who may not know you.

A writer of short stories and novels whose fundamental impulse is astonishment and who is always looking for new angles, structures and rhythms with which to make sense of this crazy world.

When did you start writing?

In my early twenties. I was studying Philosophy at the time in UCG as it was then but gradually my mind started turning towards writing fiction. I had my first piece of fiction published in The Connacht Tribune by Eva Bourke.

Do you have a writing routine?

Yes, loads of them but they never hold for more than a couple of days – something always happens to interrupt them. Life, in all its rowdy mood swings, keeps cutting across any routine I try to put in place. That said, I always find myself writing late at night....

When you write, do you picture somehow a potential audience or do you just write?

I just write the book that comes to me. As a writer I have always felt that my first obligation is to the book I am writing. When the book is finished then I pray that it will find an audience.

Some writers describe themselves as planners, while others plunge right in to the writing. Would you consider yourself a planner or a plunger?

Plunge straight in, head first, and see what happens. For better or worse that's the way it has always been with me. I sometimes wonder had I been more of a planner would I have written more.

How important are names to you in your books? Do you choose the names based on liking the way they sound or for the meaning? Do you have any name choosing

resources you recommend?

Names are very important – names of characters and names of stories are equally important to me. It is a strange thing, but I can recognise the proper name of a short story or novel the moment it presents itself. It kinda locks into position and steadies the whole thing and never moves thereafter. Characters names are the same – I recognise them instantly, they fit properly and never move or wobble after that. The names of stories and characters always present themselves at that decisive moment in composition when my mind and imagination has clarified and come to terms with the piece.

Is there a certain type of scene that's harder for you to write than others? Love? Action? Erotic?

Love scenes are difficult. Everything delicate and fleet about love makes it hard to pin down in words. I have to approach love scenes very gingerly or else they tend to fly all over the place on me in big glutinous lumps.

Tell us a bit about your non-literary work experience please?

For the past twenty years I have worked as a teacher of writing – undergrad, postgrad and on adult education courses. However, when writing my first book, which took up my whole twenties, I had such a varied selection of under the counter jobs – window cleaner, floorsweep, working on sites, dishwasher.... None of those jobs were very skilled but it was all good work which gave me the headspace in which to think about my first stories. I look back now and realise how valuable that headspace was.

What do you like to read in your free time?

I have a real fondness for short, snappy and well plotted thrillers. I admire any writer who can construct a plot which is a credible, dramatic extension of the characters lives.

What one book do you wish you had written?

Speaking as a writer from within the broad circumference of Ireland and Britain the novel of the last twenty years I admire most

is *Destiny* by Tim Parks. This short novel really pushed my envy button when I read it. It still does to this day.

Do you see writing short stories as practice for writing novels?

No, it is a completely different discipline and it makes completely different demands of the writer. And what is good in the short story is more likely than not bad in the novel.

Do you think writers have a social role to play in society or is their role solely artistic?

My thinking on this swings back and forth. At the moment, I am convinced that writers have an obligation to be decent people, same as anyone else and that decency automatically puts them on the side of social issues like justice and equality. Whether or not that means that writers should be taking to the street leading great social movements I am not so sure- the 20th century is full of writers who took up public positions on issues which, with the passage of time, now look lamentable.

Tell us something about your latest publication, please?

The last thing I ‘published’ was a short story broadcast by the BBC back in March. It was called *I, The Flock*, and it is one of a series of science fiction stories I am trying to write about an alternative Mayo – the world badly needs an alternative Mayo.

Can writing be taught?

No, thank god, and anyone who tells you otherwise is only coddling you. That is the first thing I tell any of the classes I have to ‘teach’ – it can’t be taught. I tell them to lay aside any notion of instruction or guidance and to put in place a working idea of experiment and exploration. Students respond much better to that idea and that is their first step towards finding their own voice.

Have you given or attended creative writing workshops and if you have share your experiences a bit please?

I've never been in a creative writing workshop – they were not really a thing in my generation. Maybe I would have gone if they had been available, but they weren't.

Flash Fiction-how driven is the popularity of this form by social media like Twitter and its word limits? Do you see twitter as somehow leading to shorter fiction?

I am not at all sure how much Flash Fiction is driven by social media. What does interest me is the correlation between this world of digital immediacy and the patience – readerly and writerly patience-needed to pursue the longer narrative art forms. Years of reading the manuscripts of younger writers convinces me that the generation behind me move at a much quicker beat and rhythm which seems to me to be taken from the instantaneous pulse of social media platforms. Sentences are shorter and snappier, scenes fly by in a blur. That is not a criticism of those rhythms, it is an observation that the world moves at a different pace for those young writers.

Finally what question do you wish that someone would ask about your writing, and how would you answer it?

Hmmmm....difficult one. How about 'Would you like a big huge advance for your next novel?' The answer to that is fairly obvious.

Finally, finally some Quick Pick Questions:

E-books or print?

Print, for Gods sake!

Dog or cat?

Dog. I am a fervent loather of cats.

Reviews - read or don't read?

Used to read but don't anymore.

**Best city to inspire a writer: London Dublin New York
(Other)?**

Lisbon.

Favourite meal out: breakfast, lunch, dinner?

Breakfast, now that I think of it.

Weekly series or box sets?

Box sets I suppose.

Favourite colour?

All the blues.

Rolling Stones or Beatles?

Led Zeppelin

Night or day?

Half and half.