

# BIBLIO

A monthly review of Irish Books

## What did you do during the recession, Daddy?

BY DES KENNY

FOR THE last four years, the recession has dominated the media. The prevalent mood has been anger, with the blame game taking pride of place. While there is a solid justification for this, it can become a little overbearing especially when the 'holier than thou' syndrome emerges and the 'finger pointing' become something of a witch hunt.

Recently I was asked for a book that would give an overview of the recession; the situation before the bust; the crash; and what has happened since. I had to admit that, to date, no such book exists.

There are many books about the recession but they relate to a specific aspect of it such as how the country went broke; who the culprits are and what should be done to them; and what the Government are not doing to get us out of it; but none that give a dispassionate and objective account of the Irish experience since

2008.

If the same customer were to ask me today, I would be able to recommend *The Spinning Heart*, Donal Ryan's first published novel. Ryan was born not far from Nenagh, County Tipperary, and within walking distance of Lough Derg. He wrote the first draft of *The Spinning Heart* during summer 2010.

The blurb reads: "The fallout of Ireland's financial collapse provokes dangerous tensions in a small Irish town. As the consequences of greed affect an entire community, a drama of kidnap and murder evolves. Through a choice of unique voices, each struggling with their own version of truth, a single authentic tale emerges."

As blurs go, this is well written but uncharacteristically modest and only gives the bare bones of the book. The fleshing out of the story is pure magic introducing a bright, energetic, and refreshing new voice to the Irish

literary scene.

The novel consists of the personal testimony of 21 different individuals, all affected by a rogue builder's absconding with the PRSI money, beginning with the builder's foreman Bobby Mahon and finishing with his wife Triona, all of whom find themselves in a financial vacuum. That each of these testimonies has its own unique voice is one of the remarkable achievements of the book. As every one of these vignettes moves towards its own conclusion, Ryan manages, without changing a beat, to have that voice progress the overall narrative, thus keeping the plot moving seamlessly without any apparent interference by the author.

Where this novel really scores, however, is the mastery of language demonstrated throughout the text. Not only does the novel consist of 21 different voices, but each voice has its own language, its own accent, and its own rhythm. Ryan moves in

and out of every one of these with a remarkable facility that is quite extraordinary in a debut novel. The text is chock a block with some really delightful turns of phrase such as possibly one of the greatest female put downs of the male: "He's not civilised, he's not even evolved"; while the description of the local gossip machine as the "Teapot Taliban" is one Oscar Wilde would have been proud of.

So when in years to come, his children ask Ryan "Well! What did you do in the recession, Daddy?" he can legitimately say "I recorded it as it really was for the ordinary people without reference to the bankers, builders, or politicians".

*The Spinning Heart* is not just a stunning read and a testament to the real pain caused by the recession it is also a magnificent debut introducing a brave new voice to Irish literature. There is, I believe, another novel in the offing. I, for one, am looking forward to it already.



Donal Ryan.

## Children of The Burning Bush

BY KEVIN HIGGINS

MICHAEL S Begnal lived here in Galway for several years and was editor of *The Burning Bush* literary magazine. Mike was keen to push the boundaries of Irish poetry and impatient with well made but dull lyric epiphanies about family, church, or the field across the road.

Mike's view has been that too many Irish poets are nice boys and girls with excellent degrees who write acceptable little poems more designed to impress the poet's parents than do anything else. He's interested in the wayward strand of Irish poetry typified by the work of the late James Liddy, whose poems are perhaps the place where Allen Ginsberg meets Patrick Kavanagh at his most

raucous.

If you think poetry should rhyme and be about girls with flaming red hair going to school barefoot through the fields, then Mike's new collection *Future Blues* (Salmon Poetry) is definitely not for you.

In poems such as 'Dead Rabbits' Begnal doesn't take the easy route of obvious autobiography, but instead disturbs the reader with images and makes us think: "mouths stained green with chlorophyll/the corpses lined the roadside then/the economy warped in its spasms/died or passed to America."

He really gets into his stride in the longer poems, 'Homage To Allen Kirpatrick' - which runs to four pages - and the Ginsberg style 'Manifesto': WHEREAS/they want to

kill us—/even now when I stand/with my back to the window/it's like I might get shot/through the blinds."

Here and there Begnal shows he shares Ginsberg's weakness for profound sounding, abstract words, such as "transmigration" and "genealogies". All in all, though, a strong collection. If you like Tom Waits' stranger albums, then *Future Blues* may well be the poetry book for you.

Dublin-based poet Patrick Chapman published his first collection way back in 1991, when he was just 23. A *promiscuity of spines: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS* (Salmon Poetry)

*Burning Bush*. His second

collection was *The New Pornography*, published by Salmon in 1996; Chapman is clearly not a poet interested in impressing ma and da, his own or anyone else's.

One of my favourites here is 'Nostalgia', inspired by the late US president, Ronald Reagan, who once, not realising that the microphone was on, broadcast the following words over the radio: "My fellow Americans, I'm pleased to tell you today that I've signed the legislation that will outlaw Russia forever. We begin bombing in five minutes."

From the off the poem is a pop surrealistic tour-de-force: "With the last drop of juice in the batteries/Came the voice: a s e p t u a g e n a r i a n president/Declaring war. Then our radio went

dead..."

His early poem—riskily titled: 'Love'—is written from the point of view of a serial killer: "Later, my floorboards covered other lovers,/But I couldn't cover you in there.Instead, I took you in my arms/And

put your pieces in a bag..."

It is in a sense wrong of me to single poems out in this way, because this book is a treasure chest of deliciously subversive poems: 'The Darwin Vampires', 'Empire Diner', and 'Covetous Foetus', to

name just three more.

Chapman is one of the most original poets writing in Ireland right now; if you have any interest in what words can be made to do, a *promiscuity of spines* is essential reading.

## Loughrea writers to launch new anthology

BY KERNAN ANDREWS

THE LAUNCH of the 2012 *Razzle Dazzle* anthology of short stories by the Loughrea Creative Writing Group takes place next week.

The anthology will be

launched by the Mayor of County Galway Thomas Welby and the Mayor of Loughrea Geraldine Bane, tomorrow at 7.30pm in Loughrea Library.

The collection, edited by Liam Nolan, features contributions from Veronica Creavin-Newell,

Liam Nolan, Eamonn McNally, Pat Lawless, Noreen Garrihy, Mary Lane Heneghan, Joe Conny, Ray Gately, and Johnny Kelly.

There will be readings by the featured writers and refreshments will be served. All are welcome.