

# Cinders

magazine

VOLUME TWO ISSUE TWO

## Empowering each other

STEFANIE PREISSNER \* THEODORA GOSS  
\* SIOBHAN PARKINSON \*





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## HI EVERYONE,

THIS MONTH marked 100 years since some – not all – women won the right to vote. It was a long time before universal suffrage was achieved and women around the world were given the opportunity, and it is an opportunity still denied to some. With that landmark date it makes me think about how far we have to go in our society.

This past year has seen us face the shortcomings of our society, both at a local level and somewhere that most everyone thought they wanted to be (Hollywood). We've seen this with #MeToo and the revelations that have swept through Hollywood in the wake of the movement. When thinking about #MeToo one of the things that has upset me most is that every girl I know has at least one #MeToo story. Including me.

And while there are different degrees to the experiences that I and the women I know have had, I think we can all agree there are too many women who have to tell this story. It's a sad reflection on our culture as a whole. But it's important that they keep on getting told and we stay using our voices to tell them. #TimesUp proves this for the film and entertainment industry, but it's important to try and exemplify this movement in every aspect of society and not just the one in the public eye.

Unfortunately, I don't have any solutions to this. I can only promise myself to listen to the stories of other women, hopefully with respect and compassion. As with so many of these stories - we're stronger if we stand together and believe in each other. It's also important to believe in ourselves. To believe that we have a right to be angry, that we have a right to our own bodies, and have a right to tell our stories.

We have the ability to empower one another. The suffragettes of 100 years ago believed in that.

We can too.

Méabh

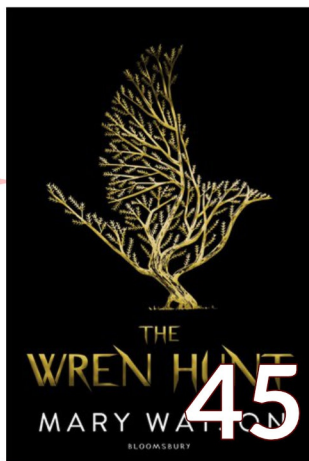


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# CINDERS

## says

From films to art to music to television, *Cinders* magazine looks at what has us clicking our heels this month...

## WE'RE WATCHING

### Derry Girls

*Derry Girls* is the show that we didn't know we needed, sent to us like a little beacon of sardonic light. Telling the story of four best-ish friends (and one English cousin) during the troubles in Northern Ireland, *Derry Girls* manages to be funny, moving and relatable all at once. Four friends who have an unfortunate knack for finding trouble - especially when it comes to life at their all girls - excepting one English boy - Catholic school. Whether it's running a-foul of nuns, witnessing false miracles or reviving 90s dance moves we all thought we had forgotten, *Derry Girls* is a gem, from the music to the acting. The relationship between the four girls is one that will be relatable to many, and the reality of life in Northern Ireland during the troubles will hit home for many who lived through it. It is one that definitely should be on your 'to be watched list'!



### Timeless

*Timeless* returns! Victory for the little guy! We thought the day wouldn't never come when we saw the news that our beloved time travellers may return to our screens. However, once again proving the power of the internet, the outcry of the fans helped to secure a second season for the little show that could. We get to return to the Lifeboat with Lucy, Wyatt and Rufus for season two and we could not be more excited! Season two is returning this month and we have some big questions namely; what's Lucy going to do about her parents, is she going to get her sister back? Is Wyatt going to be allowed stay with them? What's Rittenhouse's plan now? Will Flynn become one of the good guys? Is Jia okay!? So many questions, and so many places to visit! We cannot wait to hop on that rollicking journey once more!

### Jessica Jones

Jessica is back! Our favourite Defender returns to a Netflix screen near you very, very soon. And she's not back soon enough for us! We've raved about Jessica before and her intrepid skills - which we are in constant awe of. We can't wait to see what adventures this season brings us. One of our criticisms of *Defenders* was there just wasn't enough of Jessica in the story. This was understandable considering it was a team-up but still, we've been waiting anxiously to see what's going on in our favourite PI's life since we left her last. This season promises that Jessica is still angry - something that is very understandable, considering what she went through with Kilgrave. This season will hopefully give Jessica a chance to deal with some of the trauma she suffered last season and allow her some closure with the help of her friends - namely Patsy, who deserves to go down in the superhero halls of fame as 'Best friend always.'





# WE'RE READING



## The Girl in the Tower By Katherine Arden

*The Girl in the Tower* is the sequel to the amazing *Bear and the Nightingale* by Katherine Arden. We reviewed *The Bear and the Nightingale* in Cinders Says in our very first issue, and we were delighted with the dark, wintery Russian fairy tale. The story continues with this year's offering, the second in a promised trilogy. *The Girl in the Tower* is exceptional, a beautiful story that envelops you just as well as the *Bear and the Nightingale* did before it. Once again we are immersed in Vasya's world full of stories and adventures. This time she is forced to pose as a male monk with her brother Sasha in order to survive. Vasya has to escape the people's scrutiny having been thought a witch by her community when she left. She has new challenges to face in this installment and Arden leads us through the winter with her usual blend of lyricism and beauty. You'll want to curl up with it on a cold evening with a cup of hot chocolate.

## Twisted Romance by Image Comics

Any regular readers of Cinders know just how much we love a good comic book. Back in Volume One Issue One we raved about *Ms Marvel*, *Fresh Romance*, *Nimona* and *Saga*. We've since raved even more about *Saga*, and talked about Rainbow Rowell and Kris Anka's turn on *Marvel's Runaways* (*Runaways* is excellent by the way - you should absolutely check out the collected edition in April). However this month, with romance back on the brain, we've taken to Image Comic's one off weekly publication, *Twisted Romance*. This takes two love stories in each of its four issues, with different artists and writers and offers them up to the reader. If comics are your thing then you'll really enjoy this foray into the fantastic and the very weird, with it's 'through the wrong side of a looking glass' look at love, and romantic entanglements. It's an unusual addition to the comic book pile, but one you'll be glad you sunk your teeth into.

## The Left Hand of Darkness by Ursula K. Le Guin

If you head on over to page 37, you'll see our retrospective on author Ursula K. Le Guin. Ursula Le Guin is one of the most celebrated fantasy and science fiction authors of this century, filling the world with truly beautiful tales about women, men and what it means to deconstruct gender. She died earlier this year and it has made us take another look at her most famous works. This month we've returned to one of Le Guin's classics, namely *The Left Hand of Darkness*, a sci-fi classic that takes us to a world known as 'Winter' where there are no men and no women - it's an entirely genderless society and lets us see what that might look like. Frequently described as one of the books that 'everyone should read' we enjoyed being able to return to *The Left Hand of Darkness* and see just what a visionary Le Guin was.



# WE'RE GOING TO SEE

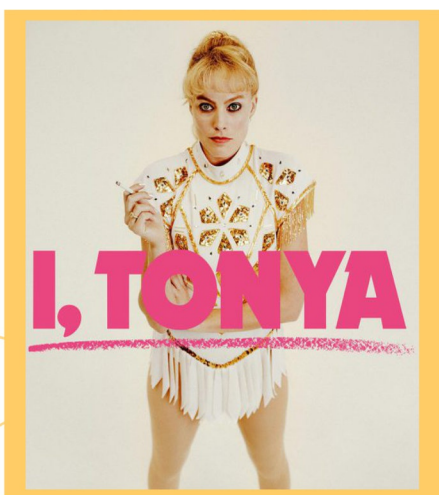
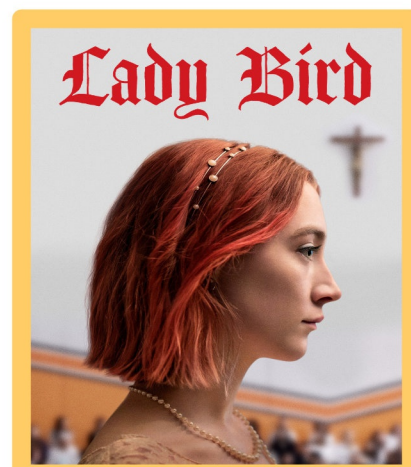


## Black Panther

Since *Wonder Woman* hit our screens last year we have been crying out for more female representation in superhero movies. And *Black Panther*, despite having a male lead and antagonist answered our prayers. It also excels in its representation of people of colour and African culture. It tells the story of T'Challa, as he steps forward to assume the mantle of King of Wakanda, and the Black Panther. The story is compelling, with a brilliantly drawn villain in Michael B. Jordan's Killmonger. The characters who won our hearts were the clever, strong, funny women that T'Challa surrounds himself with. From his capable, clever ex-girlfriend, spy Nakia (played by the wonderful Lupita Nyong'o), his general and right-hand Okoye, and leader of the Dora Milaje regiment (an all female fighting force!) to his genius sister Shuri, who designs all of Wakanda's incredible tech and gets all of the movie's best lines. It is an incredible thing to see a regal character, like T'Challa surrounded by women, capable strong women who are obviously excellent at what they do, treated like equals. It made our little feminist hearts sing.

## Lady Bird

We will never stop laying claim to the brilliance that is Saoirse Ronan. Easily one of Ireland's best exports, the Carlow girl has now three Oscar nominations to her name and after seeing *Lady Bird*, you can see why. Her turn in *Lady Bird* is made even more incredible when you think that that the movie is the product of Greta Gerwig, herself a powerhouse in Hollywood. Between the pair of them they deliver a story that is relatable, kind, and very loud. *Lady Bird* tells the story of the self-titled 'Lady Bird', it looks at her relationship between Saoirse Ronan's Lady Bird and her mother, through all of the pain and hardship that being a teenager brings. The direction, brilliant turn by Laurie Metcalf and Saoirse Ronan and wonderfully on point soundtrack brings the whole story together into a gorgeous movie that will stay with you long after you've left the cinema.



## I, Tonya

Tonya Harding's story may not be one that is familiar to everyone, it may not even be one that you were aware of. Up to about five years ago, I was totally unaware of the most famous story in female figure skating. A chance viewing of a documentary, ESPN's *The Price of Gold* that told the story of Tonya Harding's fight to the top of American figure skating and how it all came crashing down with the pipe that was struck to rival Nancy Kerrigan's leg. I'm not going to tell any more of the story because it's much more interesting that you discover it for yourself. Margot Robbie turns in a vivid performance as the famous ice skater and gives the viewer a chance to view this infamous story from her perspective. The ever-brilliant Allison Janney is fantastic as her caustic mother, giving a window into a troubled childhood for someone who was very, very talented. You'll be glued to the screen from the first moment.



# WE'RE LISTENING TO

## Wyvern Lingo

Cinders favourites, Wyvern Lingo have just made fans wishes come true on the release of their self titled album! The Wicklow trio have brought out their long awaited album to critical acclaim. Their unique sound has swept through the Irish airwaves and we can't stop listening to them! The culmination of two years of work the album collects hits such as I Love You Sadie, Out of my Hands and It's my Nature. Having emerged supporting the likes of Hozier, these empowering ladies are blowing up the Irish music scene. They're currently touring around Ireland - so check and see where they are going to land next - it might just be at a theatre near you! If you aren't a resident of Lingoland yet, you will be soon.



## First Aid Kit

Another all girl group, First Aid Kit have made our little dreams come true by announcing a return to Irish shores this year! The sisters have returned after a long break and they are better than ever. Their new album, *Ruins* dropped earlier this year and for those who are already obsessed with the close-part harmonies of these folk-y ladies, it doesn't disappoint. The songs that will worm their way into your ears are haunting and dreamlike from the first listen. The album is one of sadness and loss that makes itself felt on every bar. The title refers to the break up of vocalist Klara's relationship, which ended while the duo were writing the album. The album features contributions of R.E.M.'s Peter Buck, Wilco's Glenn Kotche and Midlake's McKenzie Smith. No more than Stay Gold, this is one you'll return to again and again.

## Áine Cahill


Another favourite of Cinders, Áine Cahill has been on our airwaves a lot recently. Since Cinders spoke to Áine back in December, she has gone on to enjoy massive airplay on Irish radio, landed herself on even more 'ones to watch lists' and had her single 'Plastic' nominated for a Choice Music Prize. No more than Black Dahlia and Blood Diamonds, Plastic is another ear worm that just won't let you go. Like Áine's other tracks, this one tells the story of a vacuous woman, who lies to the world and tries to sell an image of something that she's not to the world. Just like all of Áine's work, Plastic doesn't pull any punches and tells a story with power and bite. Her voice has it's usual brilliance in sucking you in and drowning the listener in her lyrics. We can't wait to see what this year brings for Áine. We know we'll be listening to her for a long time to come.



Compiled by Méabh McDonnell



# COPING WITH THE FUTURE

A photograph of Stefanie Preissner, a woman with long dark hair, wearing a bright red sweater and black pants. She is sitting on the floor, leaning back on her right arm with her hand resting on her head, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is a solid light blue.

Stefanie Preissner is not a new name to the Irish writing scene, but is one that's getting called all the more frequently. Through her work in theatre, her critically acclaimed series, *Can't Cope Won't Cope* and her new book, Stefanie Preissner has gone from 'one to watch' to someone we're all watching closely. We sat down with Stefanie to discuss writing, advice and the new season of *Can't Cope Won't Cope*.



1. Can you remember the first time you thought 'I want to be a writer'?

No. I don't think I have, even to this day, thought that sentence. I still feel like 'writers' are very serious, intellectual people and I'm just here in a café on my laptop. I wanted to be the first female Garda Commissioner, then I wanted to act, and now... while I still see myself as a performer I feel like I have too much to say to speak someone else's words. The world is chaotic and the only way I can process it is to write. I'm just fortunate that I get the luxury of being able to combine what feels like a contribution to society and my passion.

2. Did you feel more pressure approaching season two of *Can't Cope, Won't Cope*, given it's success in Season One? If so, how did you combat this?

Of course. I think that Season One hit a nerve and while it was good, I think it was received as 'great' because people hadn't seen young Irish women represented on screen in that way. In season one, I was free to sort of write whatever I wanted but in Season Two I had to respond to the reaction to Season One. I think it's inelegant and a sign of hubris to rebut every single criticism of your work, so I take criticism seriously. I don't always react but I always consider it. And I had issues with Season One too. So I looked at what worked, and looked at how Ireland of 2018 is markedly different to that of 2015 and I went into the scripts with the intention of writing a show that was relevant and provocative.

3. Who do you identify with more, Aisling or Danielle?

I identify strongly with different parts of each of them. I identify with Aisling's impulsiveness and her impatience. I identify with Danielle's wishes to be a good friend, to be a good student, to put other people's plans and needs ahead of her own.

4. What advice would you give them if you could speak to them?

I wouldn't bother trying to give advice to Aisling, I'd be wasting my breath. I'd probably encourage Danielle to be a bit gentler on herself which would inevitably make her see the world and other people with more sympathetic eyes.

“

The world is chaotic and the only way I can process it is to write. I'm just fortunate that I get the luxury of being able to combine what feels like a contribution to society and my passion.





Nika McGuigan and Seána Kerslake in *Can't cope, Won't Cope*  
courtesy of RTÉ image by Karl Hussey

**5. What was it like unveiling your innermost thoughts in 'Why Can't everything just Stay the Same?'**

It was a beautiful luxury. Writing for TV, the scripts have to be so lean and the writing so sparse. It was a luxury, and - let's be clear - an exercise in indulgence. I have always been paralytically indecisive. I ask my friends to confirm my opinions and to guide my tastes so it felt strange to commit opinions, feelings and thoughts to print but that's why I have the caveat in there that I reserve the right to change my mind. And in one of the chapters "GENERALISATIONS" I actually change my opinion half way through the chapter but I didn't delete the first half because I think it's crucial, if society is to progress in a meaningful, functional and empathetic way, that people are not held to things they have said in the past and they are allowed to change their views and grow if they choose.

**6. Do you find you have to get into a different mindset when writing fictional series like *Can't Cope, Won't Cope* versus writing about your own experiences, like you did for your book?**

Not really. They both come out of my head, my experiences and my imagination. It's more fun being able to construct a false narrative but it's important in this day and age that we have books and art and theatre that use extreme truth. There's too much fake news and lies out there. You don't have to look further than Instagram filters to see it.

“It's more fun being able to construct a false narrative but it's important in this day and age that we have books and art and theatre that use extreme truth. There's too much fake news and lies out there. You don't have to look further than Instagram filters to see it.”



7. You've spoken frequently about mental health and bullying, do you think creative outlets like writing have helped you deal with these experiences?

I mean, they help as much as a nice hot bath helps. But I think it undermines the experience of being bullied or depressed to think that creative outlets can solve the problem. It helps of course, to talk and process but the psychological weight of those things shouldn't be undermined or underestimated.

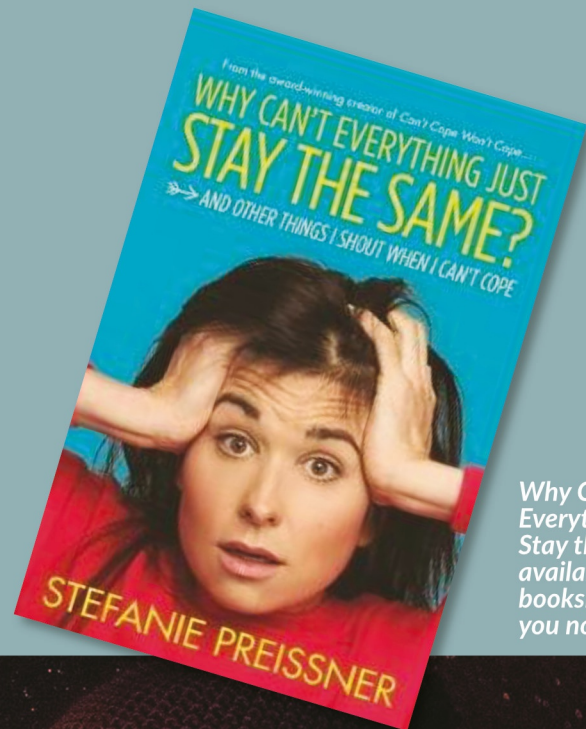
8. What's the best piece of advice you were ever given?

What other people think of you is none of your business.

9. What would you like to be working on next?

I have loads lined up for 2018 so I'm going to be working hard on taking breaks. I love my work. But I love not working too.

“What other people think of you is none of your business.”



Why Can't Everything just Stay the Same is available in a bookshop near you now.

Can't cope, Won't Cope courtesy of RTÉ. Image by Karl Hussey





# THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

For *Cinders* co-editor, Grainne Coyne, body positivity on television and online is more than just tokenism, it's telling a story about women that so often get over-looked. Here, she talks about her own journey with her own body and how different TV shows, singers and actors have made her feel about it along the way.

*STRANGER Things* and *Riverdale* actress Shannon Purser beautifully tweeted recently about the insecurities she sometimes has with her body, what a lot of us deal with on a day to day basis:

*Why do we hold people's bodies against them as if they were a reflection of the quality of the person inside? As if anything other than the "norm" is something to be treated with disgust? And why do I do this to myself most of all?*

In that tweet Shannon reflected something that has endlessly bugged me when it comes to my own demons with my weight and body. How I am judged for it and worst of all, how I judge myself for it.

For me there's a daily voice, that places all of my value in the wrinkles on my face, the freckles on my arms; the roll of fat that dares to spill over my jeans; the grams that might appear on those weighing scales and that desperate need for me to squeeze into those skinny, black, Levi, jeans.

I know my body is not a weapon or a hindrance. I know I am more than all of those things I've listed, but when it comes to those demons, I let them weigh me down every time.

Eight years ago, I went on a journey with my weight, my body, and myself really. I was determined to lose weight. I was determined to be the size 8 I was all the way through secondary school. I was refusing to accept my body had changed. That I was now curvy, which was ironic because all I wanted as a teenager was to be curvy. But the thing is, in my mind, I had to be slim, but still curvy enough to be deemed attractive. Looking back I realise how stupid that sounds, but it was something that has been so ingrained into my self-worth, that even now I find it hard to dispel it from my mind. And how could I not think that way since every form of media I consumed as a child, teenager, and young adult, told me that my appearance was completely inherent in my value.



It said that anything slightly overweight is unacceptable and worthy of being mocked. That every celebrity magazine skewed around my house would show those who were "beach body ready" and jeer at those who were not. And the fat jokes, oh the fat jokes were fair game, especially when it came to the many female driven shows I consumed.

For example, Monica's weight was constantly joked about on *Friends*; the *Gilmore Girls* were slim as could be, and could eat what they want, but it was okay because they had high metabolisms. It didn't stop them from being mean about others who were overweight, especially in the recent revival (the Summer episode). There are also strange jokes, which were bordering on making light of eating disorders: "Juliet hasn't eaten a meal since 1994." Then there is *Love Actually*, where amazing Emma Thompson's amazing character refers to herself as a "walrus", and the constant jibes about Martine McCutcheon character's weight are just plain cruel.

## The fat jokes were fair game, especially when it came to the many female driven shows I consumed.

I won't even discuss the diet tips, fads and adverts that flashed in between. It's only in the last two years, that I have felt some form of acceptance of my own body and that has come with maturity, but it also came with the change in how we deal with representation of weight and body positivity in the media today.

I am grateful for this, but it's something that has taken much time for me to absorb about myself, because comments about weight don't just preclude strangers on screen, they can come from well-meaning family and friends too. In my early twenties I had to go on medication which had many side effects, and one of those was weight gain. I remember how depressed I felt (this was also due to the medication), and how much I hated the skin I was in.





It didn't help that I was in my second year of college and still desperately trying to figure things out. It also didn't help how I spent most of my teens constantly receiving compliments about how gorgeous and slim I was to then, complete silence about my new "shaped" appearance. It also didn't help that every show I watched, every magazine I bought, and everything that I consumed within the media, there were no women who looked like me. No women who had lumps and bumps, stretch marks, and if they were even featured, their weight/size was the joke. They were driven to the side-lines, and you might not think those things have an effect, but they do. Eventually I had enough and for the sake of my health, I took things into control, and joined the gym. I really stuck to it; I had a really strict diet as well. Sure enough over time it worked. It worked fantastically. But then again college finished, I got depressed over the recession and no jobs to boot. I moved home, I gained weight the cycle began again. I wasn't addressing the real issues as you can tell.

Then in the last two years, something changed - I lost the weight.

I lost a lot of weight, in a very short period of time and I was more miserable than ever. It is impossible to explain what it is like to feel like you achieved everything you thought you ever wanted and yet, you are somehow more miserable than ever. I even feel emotional writing about it, because I vividly remember how I felt during that time. I received constant compliments about my new-found figure, and I had people stop mid-walk and literally look me up and down in shock over my new slim like, body. Stating how great I looked, when on the inside I felt anything but. Acquaintances were demanding to know my secret. I don't think they would have been impressed with the answer of anxiety and depression.

I get emotional writing that because it was one of the toughest periods of my life. Like I said I thought I had everything I ever wanted. I was living in Dublin, I had a dream job, and I was "skinny". Unaware of how skinny, I was at the time, in fact. Even now I feel like that was something I was alone in expressing until the subject was also addressed on *This Is Us*. One of the main characters, Kate Pearson, struggles with her weight and appearance throughout the show. This is shown through flashbacks highlighting how it affected her as a child, teenager, and now adult. In a recent episode, teenage Kate decided to go shopping for a dress (this show also brilliantly captures how difficult that experience can be for someone who is self-conscious about their body). In a beautiful monologue, present Kate explains that at point in her life, as a teenager she lost the weight and fitted perfectly into a dress she wanted to wear for prom. However, like me, the shock came that despite the desired weight loss, she was more unhappy than ever.

"I was so sure that being skinny would make me happy. My whole life I had that voice screaming and shouting at me: lose the weight, try harder, you're fat, you're pathetic. And so I did it, I lost the weight. But listening to that voice my whole life, I didn't know who I was without it and then I just felt empty."







The only way Kate could see her worth was through her weight and without it; she didn't know who she was. She couldn't see herself the way her father or mother saw her - she wasn't aware of how beautiful and talented she truly was. The issues were more complicated than a desirable dress size.

While *This Is Us* is a show that displays a realistic representation of weight gain and loss on screen, *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* exemplifies everything that needs to be done surrounding body positivity. In general, it is one of the best shows on air at the moment, and its central character is a "plus sized"(whatever that means) woman. In fact the second supporting central character, Paula, is also "plus sized" and as Donna Lyne Champlin who portrays Paula point's out,

"There has not been one line in this entire show for the entire season that addresses my weight. And we're always eating real food — donuts, burritos. We're always drinking. That's a huge thing for us that we're really eating. We're not sipping [cups] of shit that have nothing in them."

Two "plus sized" characters who are not seen as mere comic relief or are just there as background noise. For me that has been ground-breaking in itself, but to see Rebecca Bunch on screen, so openly comfortable with her curves, has been liberating. It is simple as seeing Rebecca's stomach on screen. Like it's no big deal, whether she's in her underwear in various scenarios, her stomach is not the central part of the scene, or seen in a negative light. It's just a part of who she is and also an attractive part of who she is.

Rebecca is also the most desired character throughout the show not just because of her figure, but the love interests are attracted to Rebecca for Rebecca. She is curvy but she is still stunning, smart, funny and complex to boot. I can't stress how big deal that has been for me to see a female led character like that on screen. I can't stress how wonderful it has been to see Rebecca - a flawed and sometimes unlikeable character - go through a wonderful, nuanced journey with her weight rarely being a central topic. There are the odd comments, like "The Sexy Getting Ready Song), the odd insecure comments she throws about her figure. But again, it's constantly highlighted that this is a result of her own insecurities stemming from her own mental health problems and not her weight itself.





While there is progress, there are still some hindrances when it comes to representation of bodies on screen. Imagine my annoyance that within the first few minutes of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, there was a fat joke. I can make allowances for the continuous obsession Midge has with her size and appearance as it's the 1950s and the double standards women have to endure for their appearance is paramount throughout. But to fat shame Midge's college friend, who says she was a size 12 or 14, for a cheap laugh is just ridiculous.

"First of all, my roommate Petra was friendly, and fat. Which was perfect, since it meant I'd have someone to eat with, who wouldn't steal my boyfriend."

These jokes are boring and shoddy and hurtful. They are, because there are many women like me, who are tired of being represented as the "designated fat friend" on screen. It's a shame because *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel* has so much else to offer.

**Imagine my annoyance that within the first few minutes of *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, there was a fat joke.**

It enrages me because I see what body positive representation can offer, it enrages me because it takes away what else is so beautiful about this show. The journey Midge goes on, the female empowerment that is within Midge's comedy and her wonderful friendship with Susie (who is also the butt of jokes for her appearance). But the show made some improvements towards the end in which Midge calls out the double standards of a rival female comedian where it's implied that Midge should lose some weight. Honestly, I do believe *Maisel* deserved all the accolades it has received. But I am hoping with character growth, Midge will worry less about her appearance, focus more on her comedy. In general, I want most programming to catch up and let the "fat jokes" go.



Something is truly changing though in how we perceive plus sized or just average sized women and even skinny sized women on screen. The best example I think of this is Demi Lovato, who has talked openly about her struggles with her weight. Her own experience with eating disorders is something that has moved me incredibly. She tweets often about how some days are harder than others, that she hates her legs (I don't see it, but shows that we all have our insecurities), but she said she posted the picture anyway because she's learning to love her body for what it is and herself for that matter. I think, that's it, and what any of us can really do when it comes to the perceptions.

But I am grateful to the likes of Demi for sharing her struggles, promoting a healthy lifestyle and even insisting that we should allow ourselves little treats now and then. I am grateful to Shannon Purser for sharing her insecurities online and calling out the double standards that face women who are plus sized.

I am grateful to Charli Howard for calling out the unrealistic goals set in the model industry and the damaging effect that can have. I'm in awe of Miss Eaves for creating a summer anthem for women to embrace their gorgeous hips and thighs, no matter their size.

I'm grateful to Ashley Graham for constantly pushing curvy girls to the forefront in a positive manner. Nothing makes me happier than going into my local shop, and seeing her on the cover of a magazine.

I'm grateful to all of these women and more because I know that their messages are getting through to me to love myself for the skin I'm in. I am hoping that the next generation of young women and girls will soon realise the same.





# Understanding the true impact of OCD



Our resident psychologist, Dr Teresa Mulhern took some time to go through the particulars of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and how this disorder affects people.

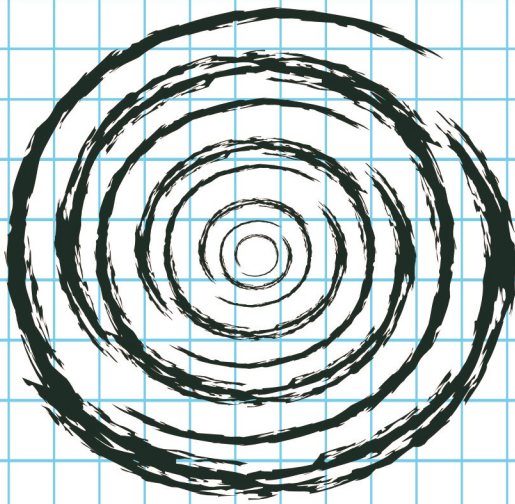
A COUPLE of weeks ago, I was trawling through Facebook at night and I came across a video which showed somebody making a pan of deserts – each in little segments on the tray to form one large super desert. So many comments on this thread said something along the lines of “This makes my OCD so happy”. In that moment, it dawned on me that most people think that this is what obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is – a preference for order, a quirk, an eccentricity. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and with so many people with this diagnosis (it’s estimated to affect 1.2% of the population), we really need to understand this better.

So, what exactly is OCD? It is an incredibly debilitating anxiety-related condition in which the person experiences frequent intrusive and unwelcome obsessive thoughts. For example, these thoughts could be centred around death or harm coming to family members, being abandoned by loved ones, fears of contamination and disease, fears of losing control and harming yourself or others, and excessive focus on religious or moral ideas.

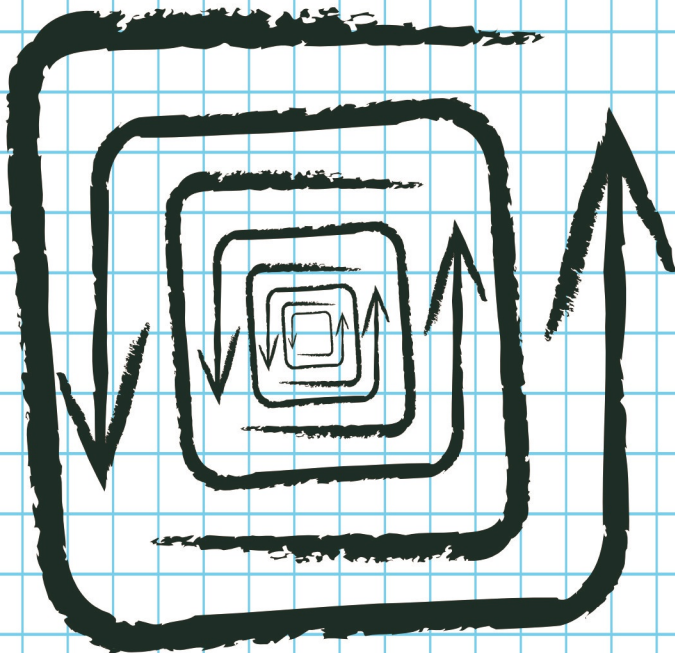
This list, however, is not exhaustive and just touches on some aspects of obsessive-compulsive thoughts experienced by those with this disorder.

These thoughts are often followed by repetitive compulsions, impulses, or urges. These include engaging in mental rituals or thought patterns (e.g., counting, repeating a specific phrase), arranging items in a particular way, avoidance of certain items or excessive cleaning. The important thing to note here is that these behaviours are compulsions – not choices. Furthermore, it is not uncommon that the reason as to why those with OCD engage in these behaviours is due to the intrusive thoughts outlined above. For instance, somebody who has an intense and compulsive thought around losing loved ones, may engage in a behaviour in which they specifically order items in a certain way because they believe that if they don’t do this, somebody that they love will die. Clearly, this is not a quirk, and is a terrifying experience for the person suffering from OCD. In fact, the World Health Organisation once ranked OCD in the top ten of the most disabling illnesses (of any kind).





“It is an incredibly debilitating anxiety-related condition in which the person experiences frequent intrusive and unwelcome obsessive thoughts.”



Although the behaviours are what we can see on the outside, arguably, the most devastating aspect of OCD are the intrusive, obsessive thoughts experienced by the individual. These thoughts are characterised as ego dystonic – so the thought that you experience is completely against your morals, values and identity – and are reprehensible to the person experiencing them. For example, an obsessive thought may centre on harming the people that you love, when this is completely against who you are as a person. This becomes an internal battle between the person themselves and their intrusive thoughts – and often, these intrusive thoughts are what drives the compulsive behaviours. For instance, a person may engage in obsessively ordering items within their home as they believe that this ritual will prevent death or harm coming to a loved one. Such behaviours are hard to break as an individual with OCD is compelled to engage in these behaviours for fear that something catastrophic will happen if they do not. Breaking this cycle is difficult without appropriate supports.

In order to meet a diagnosis, the obsessive thoughts and compulsive behaviours that a person engages in must take up a significant amount of time within their day (i.e., at least an hour), cause a significant amount of distress and anguish for the person and negatively impact their daily functioning at home, school, or work (this also includes social activities and family life and relationships). Typically, OCD begins to manifest during late adolescence for men, while women with OCD generally exhibit these symptoms in their early twenties.

For those suffering with OCD, it can be an uphill battle to maintain mental health. However, there are a number of supports available to those with OCD to help along this road. Therapies such as cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) have proven to be effective at decreasing the severity of OCD symptoms, while approaches such as mindfulness have shown similar success. Some people with OCD prefer to pursue pharmacological help – using medication to reduce anxiety – and this is a decision they come to with the aid of their GP and mental health professional. Although each of these approaches are helpful to those with OCD, it is critical that we understand and appreciate how difficult such a diagnosis can be so we can further supports made available to those with diagnosis, and not pan it off as a quirk or eccentricity.

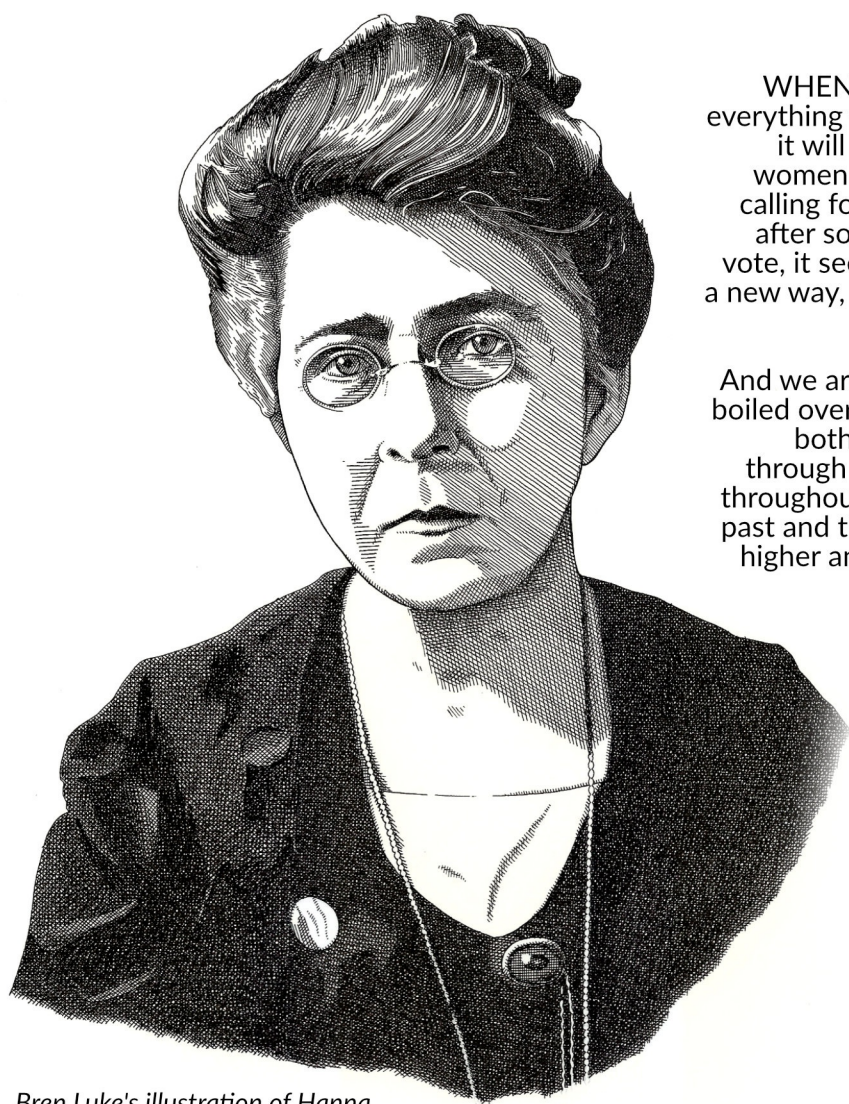
*For a more in-depth view into OCD and what drives this disorder, check out Fiona Healy O'Neill's fantastic blog on this:*

<http://shelterofeachother.blogspot.co.uk/2017/10/the-tangled-webs-we-weave-ocd-and.html?m=1>



# ROCKING THE WORLD

Women of Irish history don't usually get a large amount of pages in school history books. *Rocking the System* is a book that wants to change that. Written by Siobhán Parkinson, *Rocking the System* from Little Island Books, opens a window into the histories of 20 Irish trailblazers. Méabh McDonnell spoke to Siobhán about the empowering figures that made up the book.



Bren Luke's illustration of Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington for *Rocking the System*, kindly provided by Little Island Books.

WHEN we look back on 2017 and 2018, I don't know everything we'll remember about the year, but I know that it will stick out in my mind as a year of revolution. Of women making noise, standing up for one another and calling for an end to unjust systems. One hundred years after some -but not all- of us were granted the right to vote, it seems right that the revolution should carry on in a new way, in a different way. We have shouted, screamed and made new noise.

And we are not done. Part of that revolutionary spirit has boiled over into many different areas including publishing, both for children and young adults. We've seen this through the upsurge of stories about rebellious women throughout history. We are telling women's stories of the past and they are affecting us today, inspiring us to reach higher and keep on telling our own stories to the world.

Siobhán Parkinson and Grainne Clear of Little Island Books were inspired by this idea and wanted to create a book, highlighting some of the trailblazing women of Irish history. "We went to the book fair in Bologna and we saw that lots of different countries were doing this and we thought, 'wouldn't it be great to do this for Ireland?' because we have some amazing women in Ireland and many of them wouldn't be known outside of Ireland'. We also were thinking about the centenary of votes for women coming up and we wanted to do something for that," said Siobhán.





Siobhán Parkinson

Putting together a who's who of significant Irish women was always going to be a challenge, how to narrow down what is a long list of remarkable people. This was something that Siobhán and the team who were researching the women had to face early on, "Some of them were activists, some of them were actively involved in the votes for women campaign, particularly Hanna Sheehy Skeffington and then of course, Countess Markievicz who actually stood for election in that first election where women were allowed to vote, won a seat in Westminster, (which she didn't take) and then went on to be Minister for Labour in the Dáil.

"So you couldn't leave those people out, first because they were important to the suffrage movement along with being very big names."

There is no doubt that female activists have changed the political landscape in Ireland in the last 100 years, but the wonderful thing about *Rocking the System*, is that it's a book that reflects all the wonderful roles women have contributed to Ireland. This is something Siobhán is particularly proud of.

"But we didn't want it to be just political activists, so we also wanted to feature people who had made a difference, made history, people who had changed the landscape. They could be people like Eileen Gray, who was a wonderful designer. After her, design changed. She was inventing wonderful things, she was a woman who changed the way things were done. We wanted people who had done things that had mattered whether it was in the political sphere, the social sphere or in the artistic sphere," she said.

"Every single one of these women, whether they would think of themselves as feminists or not, they were all their own woman. That's the message that I want to give. When young girls read this book, I want them to think, 'They're their own woman, I want to be my own woman.'

"It doesn't matter what your area is, you can be your own person, and make your mark. Now, today it's true girls do have many more opportunities to become their own women, there are much more subtle and hidden pressures on women now than there were. I think these women had to fight to become their own woman, to overcome all of the pressures and prohibitions that were on women, in spite of these obstacles they were able to become their own person. They couldn't vote, they couldn't go to university. If you go back as far as Anna Parnell, she came from a very privileged, upperclass background, but she was out fighting for tenant farmers rights like her brother Charles, but she had much more constraints on her than he had. It was much more difficult for her to do what she did. Yet she achieved so much and afterwards she was sidelined. Most people haven't even heard of Anna Parnell," Siobhán pointed out.

Women of history have had incredible lives in order to overcome this terrible misogyny. In researching their lives new details come to light that make these ideas even more incredible. That's the great joy of historical research. Siobhán learned this with Anne Devlin.

"The one that surprised me the most was Anne Devlin. This woman was always associated with Robert Emmet and the Rising. She was 'his housekeeper'. That was all we knew about her. But when you read the story of Anne Devlin, she was a poor woman who came from a humble background. She was tortured because of her association with Emmet, she was half-hanged, and she was sent to jail along with her whole family. Her youngest brother who was only seven was arrested and sent to jail. He died as a result of his stay in jail. So that, to me was an absolute revelation. She was known because of a recent film made about her but she passed me by. But when the research was done and I looked into her she was a complete revelation to me."

**I think these women had to fight to become their own woman, to overcome all of the pressures and prohibitions that were on women.**





Micheline Sheehy Skeffington launching *Rocking the System* in the Galway Arts Centre with Gráinne Clear.

"Dervla Murphy who is a travel writer was another unusual inclusion. You don't usually think of a travel writer as being an amazing feminist achievement but actually, she was such a brave, fearless, woman. In fact I think it may have been from Dervla that we got the word fearless for the title! I mean, going off to India on her bicycle at the age of thirty five, was just amazing. She, to me, is a woman who is her own woman."

"She just went off and did her own thing, and that's so admirable. I remember my mother reading her books and it stuck in my head. So when it came time to choose some of the women to include, I said, why not pick Dervla Murphy? Someone who flew in the face of convention."

*Rocking the System* shines a light on women from a multitude of different backgrounds, with an incredible breath of stories that inspire them. Some of these are less well known, such as Dervla Murphy, and others are downright dramatic, such as Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonnaill, who wrote *Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire*, a famous love poem. After being widowed, she fell in love with Art Ó Laoghaire and married him for love.

This wasn't something her family approved of, but she did it anyway. A few years later Art Ó Laoghaire was killed and she rode off to find his dead body. "Apparently, she was so grief stricken that she knelt down and sucked his blood!" said Siobhán. "It would have been as a kind of ritual to give her strength maybe. But she then wrote this wonderful love poem about him. It's just so brilliant and moving and romantic, I feel like she was an important figure in the book."

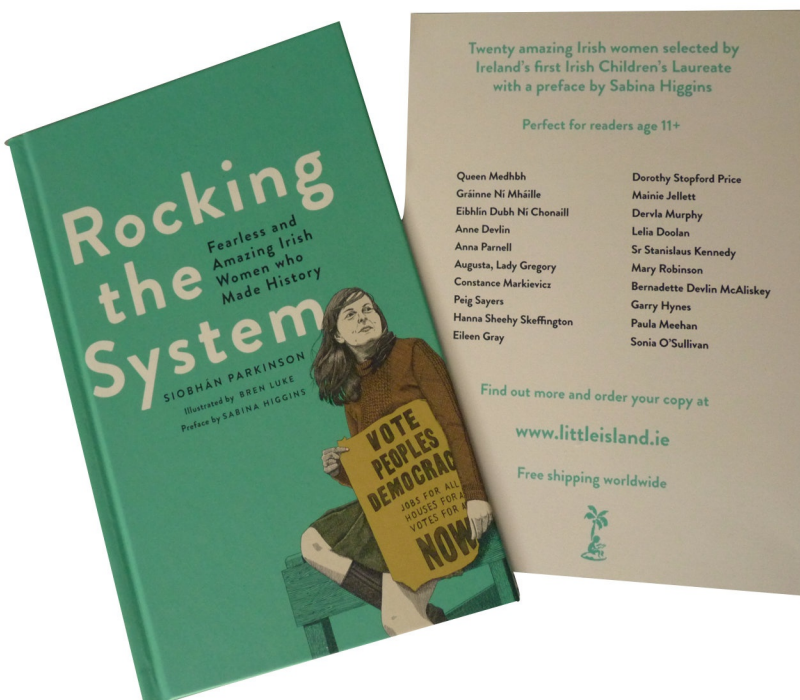
She might seem unusual feminist, a woman who wrote a love poem, but when you read into who she was and what she did you see that she was unconventional, but by god was she her own woman!



A happy fact is that young women in Ireland are themselves trailblazing new exciting opportunities and building their own unique paths to success. One of the challenges involved in putting together *Rocking the System* was deciding whether to include younger Irish women or not.

"A lot of the women that we have been focusing on are from the 20th century, we have about five women before the 20th century, which touches on different points in Irish history. We made the decision to stop at the 20th century. There are some younger women who we would love to have put in as well, from Saoirse Ronan to Joanne O'Riordan, who are incredible young women. But we made the decision that we wanted to be able to include someone's whole career, from childhood to adulthood through to retirement. That's a story in itself. The youngest person in it is Sonia O'Sullivan, who is not old by any means! But she has finished her running career. It was a hard decision to take."

**The democratic process is hard won, and that's important to remember, it's only when you realise how hard won it is, you realise how precious it is.**



## FINDING OUT MORE

WOMEN like Eibhlín Dubh Ní Chonaill and Dervla Murphy aren't often found in our history books in school. That, to me, is what makes *Rocking the System* important, and why I always want to find out more about them. For those - like myself - who can never get enough information about an important historical figure in one book, Little Island provide a book guide that can be used in schools and readers privately on their website. If you go to <http://littleisland.ie/book-guides/> and select the book you are interested in, you'll find a whole host of resources and information to satisfy your most avid reading curiosities! "I wrote the book guide for *Rocking the System* myself," said Siobhán. "For every essay, there are questions that people might want to discuss and there are suggestions of what you can do, places you can go associated with people in the book."

In recognising these women who fearlessly changed history, we can take stock of just how far we've come as women in Ireland. 100 years on from the first Irish women to get the vote, I asked Siobhán what that landmark date and legacy meant to her, "Well, it was really only the beginning because it wasn't universal suffrage by any means but what it means is women got the vote as a result of enormous pressure from women and women who sacrificed themselves, women like Hanna Sheehy Skeffington who was in and out of jail and on hunger strikes and Countess Markievicz as well. They really did put their lives on the line and they put their health on the line and they really had to agitate the system. It shows the vote for women was won at a cost, it was really fought for and we have to remember that, how hard won it was. The democratic process is hard won, and that's important to remember it's only when you realise how hard won it is, you realise how precious it is," said Siobhán. She continued, "Women and girls should regard their vote as a precious thing. Every time I vote I feel like I'm exercising an important right. For me it is a very precious thing, the vote."

We're sure the women of *Rocking the System* would agree.

*Rocking the System* is published by Little Island books and available in all good bookshops.







# Far to go

The 100th anniversary of the suffrage movement achieving the vote for women (some not all) has been acknowledged and marked as a significant moment in our history. Editor Méabh McDonnell mused on what that movement meant to her and to the women who have gone before.

LAST month marked the 100th anniversary of women gaining the right to vote in Ireland and the UK.

It was a day that marked a victory in a significant campaign that had been raging for decades before it and represented paving the way towards a future that they would have a more equal hand in deciding. They paved the path towards a society where all women would one day have the right to vote and make decisions in the running of their countries.

For the likes of Hanna Sheehy Skeffington, Emmeline Pankhurst and Constance Markievicz the Representation of the People Act, 1918 represented the culmination of a fight they had sacrificed for and a world they had rebelled against. However it's important to remember that the vote for women that was legalised in 1918 came with large restrictions.

Only women over thirty who were landowners or possessed a university education had the right to vote. This meant that only 40 per cent of women were actually entitled to the vote.

In Ireland women over 21 didn't win the right to vote until 1922.

*"All citizens of the Irish Free State (Saorstát Éireann) without distinction of sex, who have reached the age of twenty-one years and who comply with the provisions of the prevailing electoral laws, shall have the right to vote for members of Dáil Éireann, and to take part in the Referendum and Initiative."*

Over the 100 years that have passed and we have gained the full right to vote, to decide in referendums, to vote for our president and to vote for our political leaders. We have gained the power of choice. And on days like this it is important to remember that to women 100 years ago that choice was a something that needed fighting for. Something that had to be decided for them. Something they had to hope came true.

We must remember that although we have this right there still are many who don't. And there are those who have had to fight for much longer to achieve it. We have come a long way, but there's still a way's to go. So next time an election or a referendum arrives, make sure you use that right. Vote.



we can be  
**HEROES**  
JUST FOR  
*One day.*  
DAVID  
BOWIE

Life in the wake of  
# Me Too &  
# Times Up



If #MeToo and #TimesUp have taught us anything it's that everyone, no matter who they are and what industry they are in, has a story to tell. A story where they were made to feel small and unsafe. We have learned how important it is to share those stories. In this issue Grainne Coyne shares her experiences with #MeToo and why she believes in the movement.



LAST APRIL in a fit of rage, I wrote something deeply personal about myself in a piece for *Cinders*. It wasn't intentional, I was supposed just to write about the importance of *Wonder Woman*, but instead I wrote about something that was simmering beneath the surface for me and I guess, a lot of women now in the wake of #MeToo. The incident seems like an age ago, but it made me very angry at the time, it still does. What happened? I was groped on the behind by a complete stranger on the Luas last April.

Back then I told myself, in the grand scheme of things, it was deeply insignificant and something I had no intention of sharing. But even now, I remember what happened that day clearly. I was running late, I was hot, and I remember this vividly because I was wearing a long, knee length jacket. So instead of walking, I decided to grab the Luas. At the time, I was unaware of my surroundings on the Luas, where I was standing and who was standing near me, because I was panicking about many things in my head. I was listening to Miley Cyrus and trying to figure out my next move after I got off the Luas. These thousands of thoughts were drumming on through my brain, when out of nowhere I felt something touch or arguably rest, well, on my arse. It was a hand.

Again bear in mind, I had my long knee length jacket on, and looking back I now realise he had to put his hand under my jacket to touch my arse. It happened so fast. I jumped, confused about what happened, because as far as I was concerned there was no one near me on the Luas. But there was. I saw him, in a business suit, but I couldn't look at him in the eye. I moved away in the corner. I didn't look at anyone else in the Luas and I hoped that he would get off in the next stop. He did. I waited on the Luas until I reached my stop.

I walked around Dublin in a daze, finding a little hard to breathe and confused as to why. But half an hour after being groped, I met my friends, I smiled, I laughed, trying my best to forget what just happened. They didn't notice anything was wrong and why would they?

I told no one, because I didn't want to think it happened or didn't want anyone to judge me. I told no one, until I wrote that piece. It's one of the reasons I feel I understand the numerous articles about #MeToo, the shared personal stories on Twitter, Facebook. Sometimes it's easier to vocalise our pain, our frustration in written word as opposed to trying to express it out loud. But that's just one #MeToo story for me. Just one.



That is not the worst one either, but it felt like a tipping point. So why am I so mad? Why is Uma Thurman so mad? Why did Sharon Stone burst out laughing at being questioned about ever being abused in Hollywood? Why did Oprah's speech at the Golden Globes inspire so many, to the extent that there were rumours of a presidential run? Why did Halsey's poem about rape, abuse and reproductive rights at the Women's March become viral and resonate with so many? Why did Kesha cry on stage at the Grammys? Why did America Ferrara have to highlight that we should spend this time focusing on the victims as opposed to 'the redemption of predators'? Why have over 70 women in Irish theatre called for the Gate inquiry to be replaced with someone that victims can 'trust'? Because harassment, assault and abuse has been so normalised within our culture, that the idea that a woman in your life hasn't been affected by it in some shape or form, is a shock in itself.

For me, my first memory of it began with rejecting a boy at the age of 13. I didn't like him and he was also continuously harassing me by leaving creepy voicemails on my phone. In my immaturity, instead of telling an adult, I changed my voicemail to one yelling at him to "leave me alone" and that I didn't like him etc.

Instead of fixing things, it made things worse. He left more threatening messages on my phone, creepily saying not to leave messages like that again. I eventually told my father and sister, and he was told to stop, and he did. Looking back what was more frightening was that he felt entitled to my attention, harassing me about it with voicemail messages and when I rejected him, I got threatened as a result. But most importantly what I remember from this was that I was scolded for not being nice in my way of rejecting the boy, who was harassing me constantly on the phone.

From there, there have been many other incidents. Incidents of being bullied and harassed for about two years at school because someone liked me, and I did not like him back. Incidents of waiting at Luas stops where I have been sexually harassed and threatened, and felt too paralyzed to do anything about it for fear something worse might happen. Instances of being yelled at for my appearance, being cornered against a wall by a group of guys as other people walked by, being called a whore by complete strangers (not that it's okay to be called it by someone you know) and then being compared to my friends (random guys trying to chat me up) for being great because I don't 'act like a whore' (that happened to me more than once).







These stories of mine are just a few of the things I've have experienced. I've suppressed them at the back of my mind for a long time, but these past few months have returned them to the surface. They're all troubling, unsettling and infuriating. It makes Uma Thurman's startling account of sexual harassment and assault in Hollywood ring painfully true, "Personally, it has taken me 47 years to stop calling people who are mean to you 'in love' with you. It took a long time because I think that as little girls we are conditioned to believe that cruelty and love somehow have a connection and that is like the sort of era that we need to evolve out of," she said.

It's literally like that Saoirse Ronan SNL sketch (the good one) about sexual assault and harassment, we've been saying this for years. It's only now, people are listening, really listening. We've trained ourselves to keep quiet and smile, we've trained ourselves to think we are the ones at fault. This has been something that has been instilled in me, in all of us. This cultural shift, a shift in how we talk about sexuality and how we express our sexuality is something that is not going to happen overnight. But it is happening.

For every articulate exploration of what has been occurring in the last few months, there are so many articles on how are men supposed to deal in the new world of #MeToo?! But for those who are confused about #Me Too and #Times Up, or just simply not sure what to do or even how to respond. I give you *This Is Us* actor, Sterling K. Brown's brilliant answer to this question at the Screen Actor Guild Awards:

"For me, it has been a wonderful opportunity to take stock that I actually have privilege — that I have male privilege and recognising that I take a lot of things for granted."

He continued, "It's always the responsibility of the minority to understand how to negotiate the majority's world — black people have to know how to live in a white world. Gay people have to know how to live in a straight world. Women have to know how to live in a man's world."

There is a responsibility that we have to make sure that our work environment is comfortable for all, because it's not always about malicious and nastiness," he says. "Sometimes it's about downright thoughtlessness, and we can all stand to be a bit more thoughtful."

This should be a time to reflect, try to understand the power structures that have existed for so long, change them, break them, rebuild them and make something better, safer and on equal levels for everybody. And #MeToo is a big part of that. #MeToo is not a movement that is perfect and is not just based in the world of Hollywood. It is a movement full of pain, change and even just a little bit of hope. But mostly importantly, for victims of sexual harassment, assault and rape, it highlights they are not alone.

It says this is just beginning, that the time of silence is over, and the time of listening has only just begun.



# Why do we forgive our friends?

New England writer **Jasmine Harris** was inspired by her recent trip to see *Lady Bird*, to consider why friends forgive each other despite tendencies to fight and hurt each other. But forgiveness tends to wander through in the end.

WATCHING *Lady Bird* was a hop straight back into my days of high school. The growing pains, wonder of the world outside of the suburbs, and the many mistakes brought me into a hazy mix of nostalgia and storytelling.

After I left the movie theatre, shared my thoughts on Twitter and wiped the running mascara that was left on my face, a question popped in my mind. Why did Julie forgive Lady Bird? Though the progress of events of their falling out and ultimate forgiveness never felt wrong in the moment, my mind was a bit slower on the uptake. I was left wondering what makes us forgive our friends, even when they hurt us? Friendship becomes so important to your life because your friends see you at your messiest.

They are the first, or maybe the only, person to see you for all your opinions, personalities, and faults. For one reason or another instead of repulsing us, that intimate knowledge brings us closer together. A friendship that is strong and supportive is reliant on the fact that you both know and understand the others' story. That means they know the parts of us even we don't want to acknowledge.

*Lady Bird* awkwardly and naively makes her way into a new clique for a boy, as so many of us have done before. As she sets aside Julie for this new romance, we see Julie clearly become confused, angry, and heartbroken. It's hard for us to watch, especially as you look back in hindsight and remember being on either side, or both, of the same situation.



When they confront each other, their insults are rather funny, but true nonetheless. They know each other and know how to hurt each other. We have to laugh to avoid remembering similar fights we've had with our own friends.

We see the girls reunite in the end and I know immediately it's what should happen. There is no need to rebuild their friendship, they simply apologize and pick up where they left off. As you see them head to prom and enjoy being friends once again my mind catches up and I know why Julie forgave her.

We forgive our friends because we don't view them as just a moment. It has become common practice to cancel someone over a moment they have publicly displayed. Though I've cheered on this nature before, and still do when it involves heinous crimes, I wonder if that trend has made me dismiss forgiveness a little too much.

It's easy to focus on the anger between Lady Bird and Julie. It's an awful thing to do, but it's harder to think of each of them as messy human beings with history. I don't think our judgment is always clouded when we think of our friends. Rather I think it can be the clearest view. We know so much about them, and we know that some of our actions don't erase all of the good. We know how to view them with compassion.

Their friendship in the movie is heartwarming not because they stayed friends by ignoring their mistakes, but because they were able to overcome this mistake. Ultimately, the joy of friendship is worth more than the exacting nature of cancelling someone out of your conscious. Lady Bird's actions were petty and wrong, but they were forgivable. It's our job as friends to pay attention, and *Lady Bird* reminds us love and paying attention are quite alike.



Illustration by Méabh McDonnell

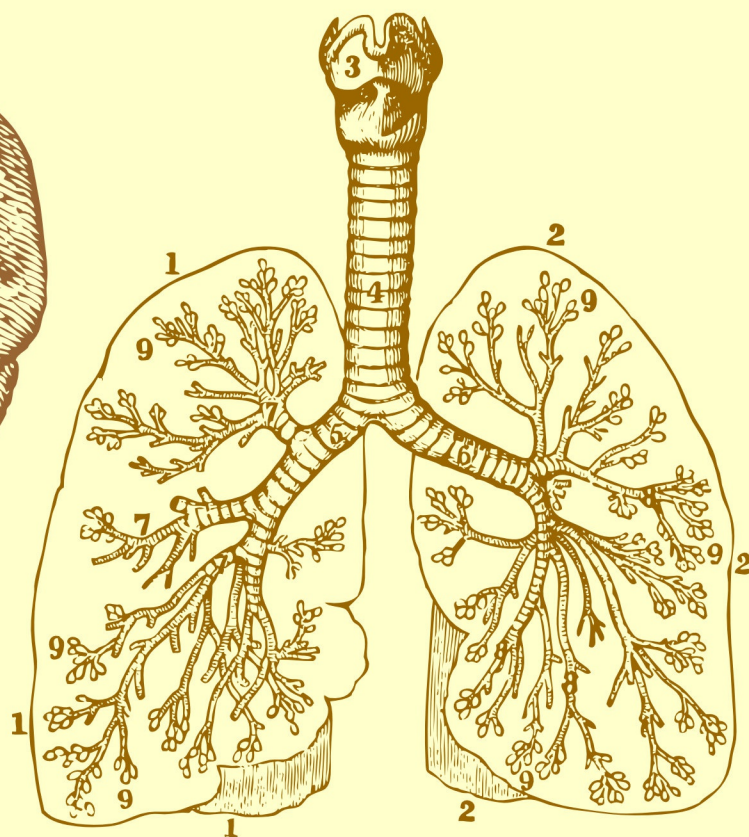
We forgive our friends because we don't view them as just a moment. It has become common practice to cancel someone over a moment they have publicly displayed

Jasmine Harris -- I'm a writer currently living in New England and a lover of books, cruelty free beauty, and vintage denim. When I pull myself away from work or my latest Netflix binge, I'm blogging about nerdy fashion with a warm drink in hand. You can find me on Instagram under @fishoutofcloset.



# Rewriting THE Story

Theodora Goss is an author, poet, and fairytale professor. Cinders editor, Méabh McDonnell spoke to Theodora about heroines, fables and the adventures of her 19th century feminist series, *The Strange Case of the Alchemist's Daughter*.





### 1. Can you remember when you realised you wanted to be a writer?

No! I must have been very young, though. Some writers always knew they wanted to be writers, and some come to it much later. I was one of the former--I always knew. I still have a folder full of poems I wrote in high school, and my very first publication was in the high school literary magazine. It was a poem on Icarus. I kept writing through college, but my family wanted me to have a practical profession, so I went to law school. After a few years of being a lawyer, I realized it would never give me enough time to write--so I went back to graduate school and got a PhD in English literature. Now I teach both creative writing and composition at the university level. It's still a lot of work, but I have enough time to be a writer!

### 2. As a fairytale professor, can you give us any insight into why fairytales remain so popular and why they still are a natural part of our cultural language?

I think it's partly because they're about the most important things in our lives. Most fairy tales were originally told rather than written down--they were originally oral tales. Why do people tell tales? Because they are important not just to one person, but to entire communities of people. So fairy tales are about things that are important to many of us: hunger, jealousy, revenge, justice, love. They are about the relationships within families, about marriage, about journeys into the dark forest. They are about very real, concrete things like bread, apples, shoes, as well as things that can be read metaphorically, like throwing frogs against walls. When you get into literary fairy tales, such as those of Hans Christian Andersen, they become more sophisticated--they can be about the soul, or the relationship between the artist and society. But the old oral tales collected by the Brothers Grimm and other folklorists were about our most basic needs and emotions.

### 3. Your blog series on the fairytale heroine's journey struck a chord with a lot of people - what was it about the journey that inspired you?

I was surprised when I first noticed the pattern! I thought of stories like "Snow White," "Cinderella," and "Sleeping Beauty" as very different. And yet, when I started looking at them closely, I realized that they shared a series of common events. For example, in all of them, the heroines receive gifts, face trials, and undergo a real or metaphorical death. It was interesting to study and then try to describe an underlying pattern of twelve stages. What inspired me to explore and write about this journey was the way in which I could see these stages in my own life and the lives of my female friends. My hypothesis is that these fairy tales reflect real events in women's lives at the time they were told and written down--they are symbolic representations of an underlying reality. And women's lives often still follow the same pattern, although in more modern ways. But there are also fairy tales that provide alternate patterns--they're just not as popular in modern culture. They haven't been made into Disney films!



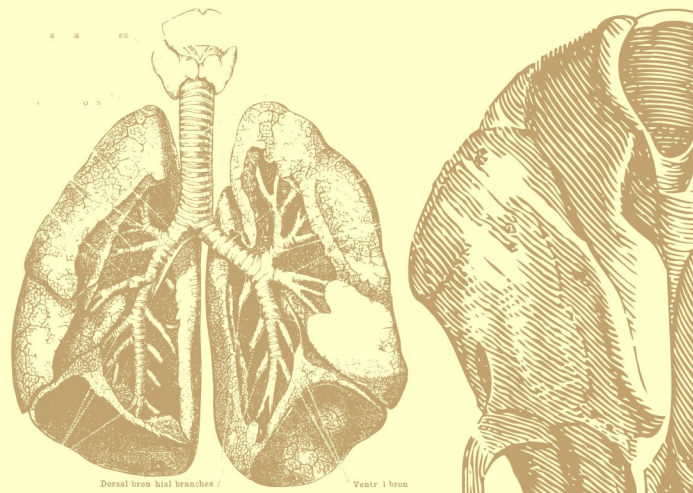


**4. For readers who want to read about fairytale heroines they may not have heard of can you give us your best recommendations?**

I'll give you three of my favorites! The first one is Vasilisa, in the Russian fairy tale "Vasilisa the Fair." She has to confront the fearsome Baba Yaga, who lives in a house on chicken legs. Luckily, she has the help of a magical doll left to her by her dead mother. The doll helps her in Baba Yaga's hut, but in the end it's Vasilisa's ability to weave and sew the finest linen shirts that wins her the hand of the Tsar. The second is the heroine of a beautiful Norwegian tale called "East of the Sun and West of the Moon." She marries a white bear who comes to her at night in the form of a man, but when she tries to see his face and accidentally wakes him up, he tells her that he was under a spell, and if she had just waited a little longer, she would have broken it. Now he must go marry a troll who lives east of the sun and west of the moon. He disappears, leaving her alone--but rather than falling into despair, she sets out to find her husband and goes on a long journey to win him back. The third might not be considered a heroine by most people, but I would argue that she is one--the cat princess in Madame d'Aulnoy's "The White Cat." She helps the king's youngest son bring home the finest linen, then the smallest dog, and then the most beautiful bride (herself, in her human form), so she is a sort of magical helper--but if you read the fairy tale closely, you'll notice that she has her own story, in which she was turned into a white cat. She gives the king's son what he needs in part so he can disenchant her and she can resume her human form. Each of these heroines works for her happy ending. I suppose that's why I admire them so much!

**5. Your fantasy stories take place in beautiful worlds that are full of possibility and myth- do you use any aspects of the real world to create these?**

Thank you! And yes, absolutely. In his essay "On Fairy-Stories," J.R.R. Tolkien said that "*Faërie*," which was his word for the world of fantasy and fairy tale, "contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted." I think all the fairy lands we can imagine rest on a solid foundation of the real. That gives them what Tolkien called "the inner consistency of reality." In order to make you believe in an enchanted castle, I must show you the grayish stones of which it's made, and the ivy growing up its walls to the arched windows. Fantasy is built out of reality, and in order to write it well, I have to experience reality in as much depth and detail as a writer of entirely realistic novels. But I will say that I see the possibility and myth in the real--I'm bringing it out, rather than spreading it on top, like butter. If you look at an average tree, for example, you will realize that it is an entirely magical creature, not average at all.



**Fantasy is built out of reality, and in order to write it well, I have to experience reality in as much depth and detail as a writer of entirely realistic novels**



“I started noticing that there were an awful lot of female monsters in nineteenth-century literature, and they all died! Well, I had to do something about that. So I wrote my own story.

6. The Strange Case of the Alchemist's Daughter is such an enjoyable- and unusual - story; can you remember the first idea you had that led to the novel?

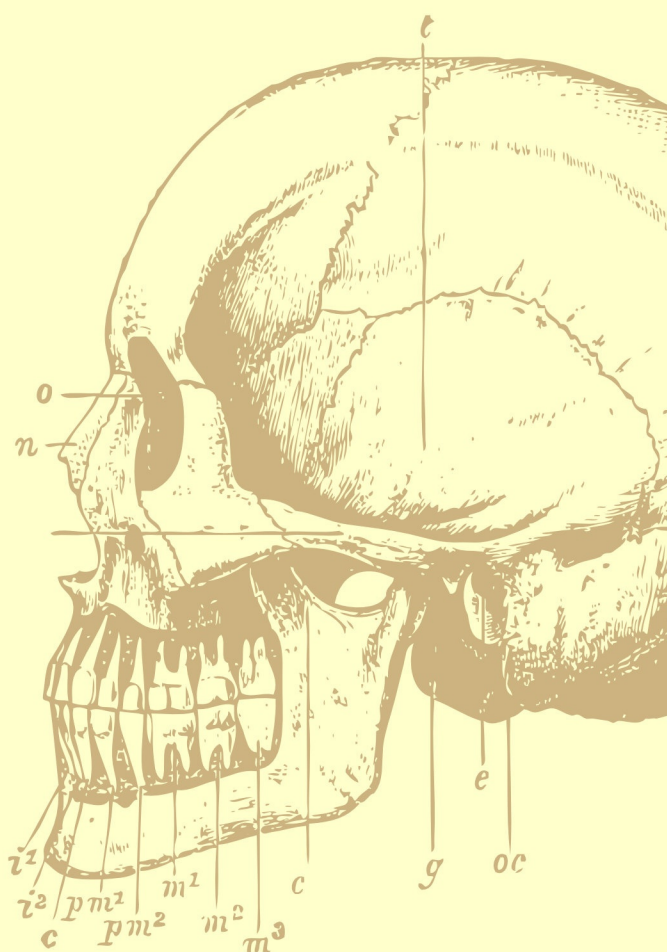
It wasn't an idea yet, but a particular passage--the one in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* where Victor Frankenstein, who has started to create a female monster, takes her apart again and throws her body parts into the sea. I thought, *Hey, wait a minute!* It was so unfair . . . He's afraid that she and his male monster will mate, to produce offspring that may outcompete mankind. So he doesn't even create her. And then I started noticing that there were an awful lot of female monsters in nineteenth-century literature, and they all died! Well, I had to do something about that. So I wrote my own story.

7. You took some very well known characters and re-cast them in your story, was it difficult to re-imagine them in your own way?

Not really! I think that was because they get so little say in their original narratives. Frankenstein's female monster isn't even created. Dr. Moreau's Puma Woman does not say anything--she just kills him and is killed in turn. Beatrice Rappaccini does get some lines of her own, but her story is told entirely from the perspective of her lover, Giovanni. It's not primarily her narrative. And I made up Mary Jekyll and Diana Hyde. I really just asked myself, knowing what we know from the original narratives, what would these characters be like? What would Catherine be like, as a Puma Woman created on Moreau's island?

8. One of the most enjoyable aspects of the book is how realistically it portrays 19th century life - did you have a very rigorous research process?

Yes and no. It wasn't rigorous in the sense that I knew exactly what I needed to research, and then I went out and researched exactly those things. But I did go to London several times, specifically to walk the streets where my characters walked so I could figure out where the action of the novel would take place, how long it would take to get from one place to another . . . I went to Regent's Park, the Royal College of Surgeons, even the Sherlock Holmes Museum because I wanted to see how large the average parlor would have been in one of the houses on Baker Street. More than anything else, I wanted to get a sense of where my novel would take place. I have a PhD in nineteenth-century British literature, so there were a lot of things I knew about the nineteenth century, but that wasn't enough to write a novel with. I needed to see things, hear things, smell things, so I could describe them for my reader. I looked at a lot of photographs from that time period, and while I was drafting, I read only late nineteenth-century prose. The research process continued throughout the time I was writing the book. Sometimes, to write a sentence, I had to crawl around on my office floor, comparing a contemporary map of London with one from the nineteenth century, to make sure I knew where my characters were going . . .







**9. The five members of the Athena Club are a refreshingly feminist crime fighting team - was this a response to the lack of women in 19th century science fiction and horror literature?**

Yes, absolutely! And when there are women, they tend to be killed off, as in Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* or Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*. The rare exception is Mina Murray in *Dracula*: she survives, but only because she does not become a vampire. Most of the nineteenth-century narratives I read for my dissertation were focused on the lives of male protagonists. I wanted to change that. I wanted to write about the women, and not just the monstrous ones. I wanted to make sure that a housekeeper like Mrs. Poole also had a voice. Honestly, if it were not for Mrs. Poole, I have no idea how the Athena Club would sustain itself. She is absolutely central.

**10. Which of the girls would you say you are the most like?**

Mary, I'm afraid. All of the girls have something of me in them, because when you write, you're always drawing out of yourself. But I'm most like practical Mary, who can be annoying sometimes--she could use some of Catherine's imagination, Beatrice's artistic sense, Justine's sense of justice, and even Diana's impulsiveness. But of course, if any of them were perfect characters, they would not be interesting--they all have their flaws. Mary has many of mine.

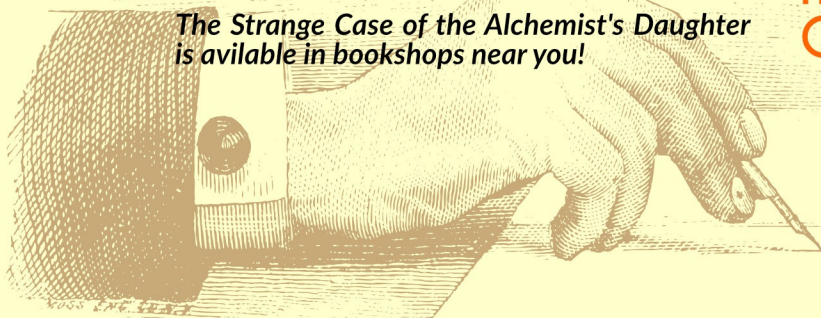
**11. Can you tell us anything about what adventures the Athena Club will get up to next?**

In the second book, *European Travel for the Monstrous Gentlewoman*, Mary, Diana, Beatrice, Catherine, and Justine must rescue Lucinda Van Helsing from the evil machinations of her father, Professor Van Helsing. Summoned by Mary's former governess Mina Murray, they travel to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where they meet new friends, confront even more dangerous enemies, and eventually face the fearsome Alchemical Society! Also, Mary learns to like coffee and Diana eats a lot of cake . . .

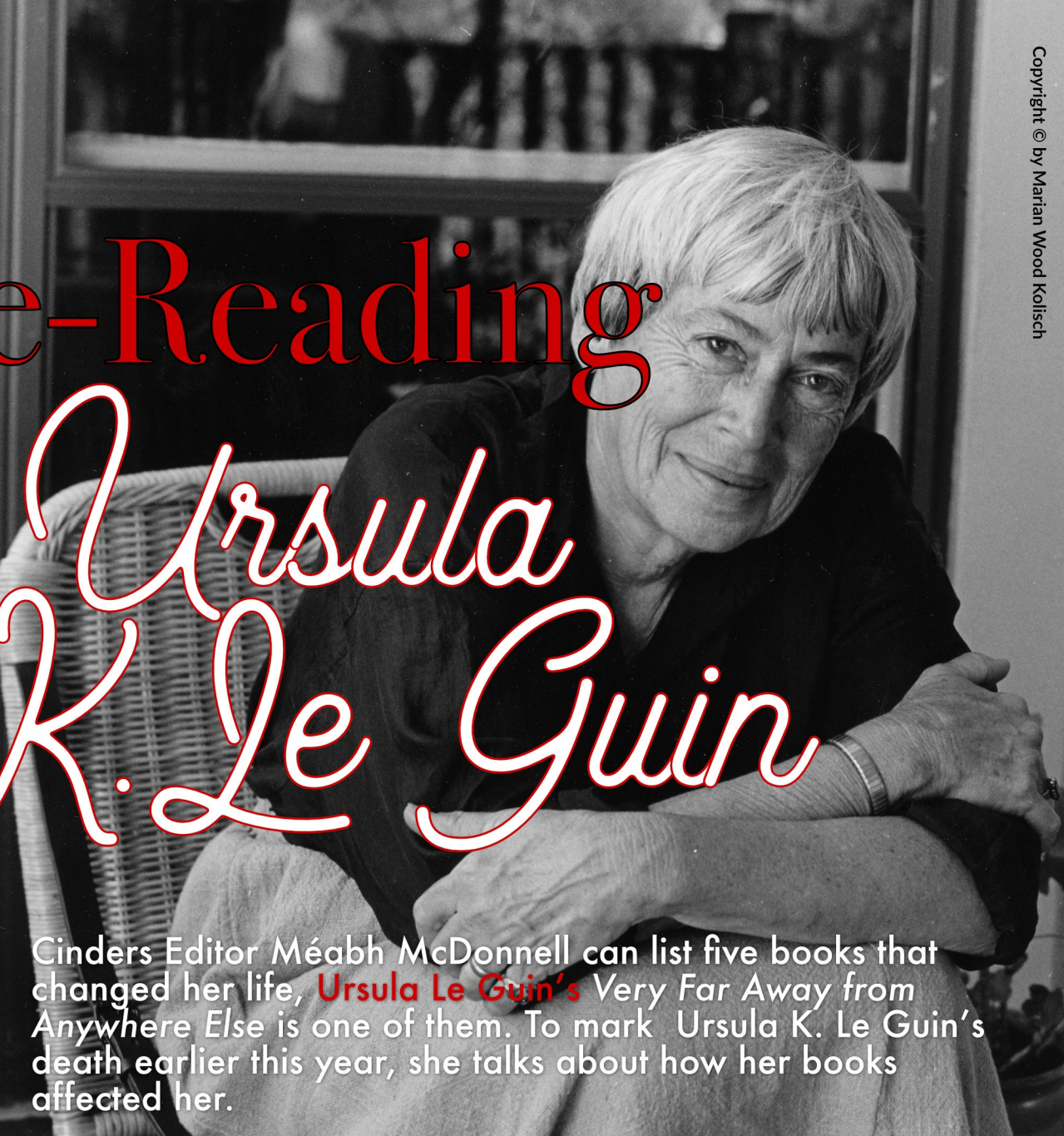
*The Strange Case of the Alchemist's Daughter* is available in bookshops near you!



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# Re-Reading Ursula K. Le Guin

Cinders Editor Méabh McDonnell can list five books that changed her life, **Ursula Le Guin's** *Very Far Away from Anywhere Else* is one of them. To mark Ursula K. Le Guin's death earlier this year, she talks about how her books affected her.

*"It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end."*

THOSE are the words of the late, great, Ursula K. Le Guin, a writer of fantasy, science fiction, brilliant short stories, and one of my favourite books of all time. She wrote more than 20 novels, over 100 short stories, collections of poetry and was an all-round literary master. She was a wife, a mother, a feminist and a very wise person. She died in January at the age of 88 and is someone who will be remembered for a long time. I'm not going to eulogise Le Guin here because there are many people who have done the job better and more articulately than I can. Since I never knew her, I can't say that I will miss her, but what I will miss is knowing that she's somewhere out there in the world.

And I'll miss knowing that there are new places for the worlds she has written to go.

I first discovered Ursula Le Guin's writing when I was about 14 and read *The Wizard of Earthsea*, the first in her novels about fictional land of Earthsea, where wizards wield incredible power both for good and ill. I was fresh from *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* and going through what I now refer to as my 'High Fantasy phase'. If it had a poorly painted figure glowing on the cover, and was over 300 pages long, then I was all over it. Le Guin's wizard Sparrowhawk - whose true name is Ged - was one of the first of those I encountered. Reading her books - although aimed at teenagers - felt like reading something 'for adults'.

Le Guin doesn't talk down to her readers or treat them like they aren't smart enough to understand her writing. She trusts, and delves into the depths of story with us. Just like Ged has to delve deep to discover his talent as a wizard, so have we. I continued them with the *Tombs of Atuan* and *Tehanu* (which are both excellent).



Earthsea gave me a fantasy that was rich but was also filled with flawed people. Ged and Tenar are by no means perfect, they struggle with doing the right thing and they both commit atrocities because of the power that is given over to them. But Le Guin shows us that this is how we learn. Earthsea places great power on education and learning from mistakes.

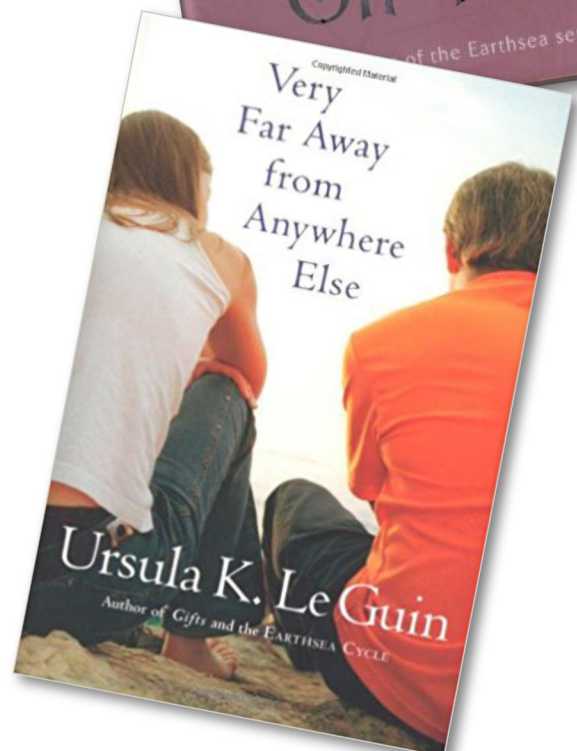
Earthsea was a story that woke me up to what great fantasy could be, and gave me an interest in fantasy that is clever and complex has stayed with me ever since. I returned to Le Guin with her fantasy series *The Annals of the Western Shore*, *Gifts*, and in it found a wonderful story about power, restricting oneself from power, and the tragedy of not living up to our parents' expectations. The series continues with *Voices* and *Powers*, two stories which examine religion, power and its place in society and is one I've found wandering back into my reading list over the years.

**Reading this tiny book - just barely longer than a short story - changed me. It changed my outlook on life and my perspective on where I wanted to be in the world, and how my own feelings might be too much for me to understand right now.**

But it was a tiny little novella, written in the 1970s, rarely mentioned when people talk about Le Guin that meant the most to me. I found *Very Far Away From Anywhere Else* (an overly long title if there ever was one) inside of Charlie Byrne's Bookshop in Galway when I was about 15 years old. And reading this tiny book - just barely longer than a short story - changed me. It changed my outlook on life and my perspective on where I wanted to be in the world, and how my own feelings might be too much for me to understand right now.

*Very Far Away from Anywhere Else* tells the story of Owen, who is a mostly normal teenager, excepting all of the ways he isn't normal. Owen is good at science, he creates his own -wide reaching fantasy based on a fictional land that he creates and he has trouble talking to other people. And boy did my socially awkward teenage self understand that.

It's important to note that Owen is privileged, he's white, he has an education and he has a car - but he just can't quite get people. And that's what makes him compelling. Owen meets Natalie, who's a musician, and just like Owen doesn't seem to understand people, but unlike Owen, Natalie doesn't want to. Natalie is the type of musician who is dedicated to what she does, so dedicated in fact that she doesn't seem to know how to deal with other teenagers, because they don't share her passion, her seriousness.







“I was on the high mountain with a friend. There is nothing, there is nothing that beats that. If it never happens again in my life, still I can say I was there once.”

But, despite thinking that and finding other people difficult, Owen and Natalie somehow manage to figure each other out. They become friends, and then Owen wants to be more and Natalie doesn't - or rather she doesn't want to rush into the intensity of a relationship. Owen then goes off the rails - because he's a teenager and that's what they're want to do when they don't understand how they feel. Owen's reaction is by no means a good one - but it feels like a realistic one.

Owen and Natalie find themselves going back and forth between each other because even though they don't know how to deal with anything else in their lives - they know how to deal with each other. And it gives us one of my very favourite lines in all of literature to prove this:

“See, I don't understand how you play the piano. But when you play it, I hear the music.”

Le Guin doesn't talk down to Owen and Natalie, she treats what they are going through as something legitimate and real. I have never identified with characters so much. As a teenager I felt like I didn't know anyone like me - but thanks to books like *Very Far Away from Anywhere Else*, I knew those people were out there. I just hadn't met them yet. It's 88 pages of hope and it is still one of my very favourite novels. I'll always be grateful for that.

Thanks to Ursula Le Guin I felt a little less lonely on bad days. And that means so much more now that I'm not lonely anymore.

“I was on the high mountain with a friend. There is nothing, there is nothing that beats that. If it never happens again in my life, still I can say I was there once.” – Ursula K. Le Guin



# TRAILBLAZING

## women of the past

Our interest in trailblazing women from history is never ending. This month we look at some of our favourite pioneers, writers, innovators, artists and monarchs.

### ARTEMISIA GENTILESCHI

ARTEMISIA Gentileschi was an Italian Baroque painter. She is thought of today as one of the most accomplished painters of the generation that followed Carravaggio. In an era when women painters were not easily accepted by the artistic community or patrons, she was the first woman to become a member of the Accademia di Arte del Disegno in Florence.

She painted many pictures of strong and suffering women from myths and the Bible.

Her best-known work is *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (a well-known medieval and baroque subject in art), which "shows the decapitation of Holofernes, a scene of horrific struggle and blood-letting". That she was a woman painting in the seventeenth century and that she was raped and participated in the prosecution of the rapist long overshadowed her achievements as an artist. For many years she was regarded as a curiosity. Today she is regarded as one of the most progressive and expressive painters of her generation.



### NETA SNOOK SOUTHERN

NETA Snook Southern was the woman who taught the famous Amelia Earhart how to fly. She was the first woman aviator in Iowa, and the first female aviator to run her own aviation business.

She had difficulties finding an aviation school that would accept her as a student, on account of her gender, but in the end she graduated from the Curtis-Wright Aviation School. Briefly, in 1918, she worked for the British Air Ministry in Elmira as an expeditor putting her mechanical skills to good use, inspecting and testing aircraft parts and engines on their way to combat in Europe. She worked as a mechanic during WWII, inspecting and testing combat airplanes. In 1921, she was the first woman to enter a men's air race. "Snooky", as her friends called her, was fated to be remembered for her relationship to Amelia Earhart. Her autobiography, *I Taught Amelia to Fly*, aptly captures the essence of her fame, she was forever linked to the Earhart mystique as her first instructor. Neta Snook became the first woman to enter a men's air race at the Los Angeles Speedway in February 1921, finishing fifth and telling the media, "I'm going to fly as cleverly, as audaciously, as thrillingly as any man aviator in the world."





## QUEEN ANNA NZINGA

QUEEN Anna Nzinga, was a 17th-century queen of the Ndongo and Matamba Kingdoms of the Mbundu people in Angola. She came to power as an ambassador after demonstrating an ability to tactfully defuse foreign crises, as she regained control of the Portuguese fortress of Ambaca. Being the sister of the king, Ngola Mbande, she naturally had an influence on political decisions, when the king assigned her to represent him in peace negotiations with bordering countries. Nzinga assumed control as regent of his young son, Kaza. Today she is remembered in Angola for her political and diplomatic acumen, as well as her brilliant military tactics. A major street in Luanda is named after her, and a statue of her was placed in Kinaxixi on a square in 2002, dedicated by President Santos to celebrate the 27th anniversary of independence. The National Reserve Bank of Angola (BNA) issued a series of coins in tribute to Nzinga "in recognition of her role to defend self-determination and cultural identity of her people

## MURASAKI SHIKIBU

MURASAKI Shikibu, was a Japanese novelist, poet and lady-in-waiting at the Imperial court during the Heian period. She is best known as the author of *The Tale of Genji*, written in Japanese between about 1000 and 1012. It is considered one of the first novels ever written. It is uncertain when she began to write *The Tale of Genji*, but it was probably while she was married or shortly after she was widowed. In about 1005, Murasaki was invited to serve as a lady-in-waiting to Empress Shōshi at the Imperial court, probably because of her reputation as a writer. Murasaki wrote *The Diary of Lady Murasaki*, a volume of poetry, in addition to *The Tale of Genji*. Within a decade of its completion, *Genji* was distributed throughout the provinces; within a century it was recognized as a classic of Japanese literature.

Scholars continue to recognize the importance of her work, which reflects Heian court society at its peak.



## ELIZABETH HOLLOWAY MARSTON

ELIZABETH Holloway Marston was a psychologist and the developer of the systolic blood-pressure test used to detect deception. This was the predecessor of the polygraph test. She is also assumed to be the inspiration for *Wonder Woman*, a character created by her husband, William Moulton Marston. She has also contributed to the development of the character!

Both William and Elizabeth joined the psychology department at Harvard, with William in the doctoral program and Elizabeth the master's program at Radcliffe College. Elizabeth worked with William on his thesis, which concerned the correlation between blood pressure levels and deception. He later developed this into the systolic blood-pressure test used to detect deception that was the predecessor to the polygraph test. Although Elizabeth is not listed as William's collaborator in his early work, a number of writers refer directly and indirectly to Elizabeth's work on her husband's deception research. She also appears in a picture taken in his polygraph laboratory in the 1920s, reproduced in a 1938 publication. Marston died on March 27, 1993, just a month after her 100th birthday.





# Sign Language for beginners

This month we are continuing our regular feature, learning Irish Sign language with Aisling O'Halloran. We continue this education by learning further phrases that we associate with springtime and food. Be aware that this is just a basic introduction to a vibrant language. If you would like to find out more about ISL log on to [www.irishdeafcommunity.ie](http://www.irishdeafcommunity.ie).

## Weather



**weather**



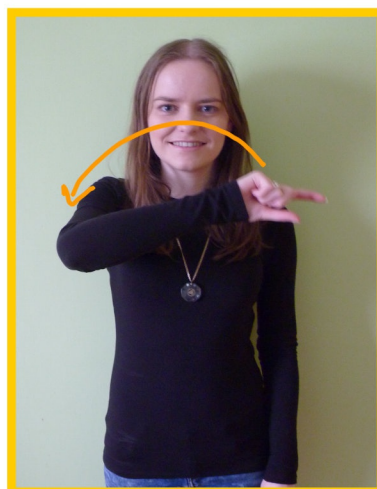
**sun**



**sky**



**shine**



**rainbow**



**rain**



# Animals

Cinders | 43



dog



bird



cat



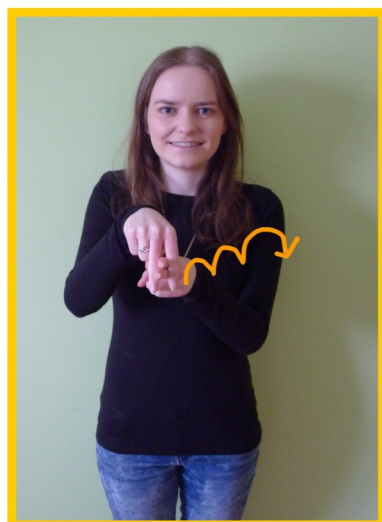
cow



mouse



rabbit



horse



pig



fish



# Springtime



flower



grass



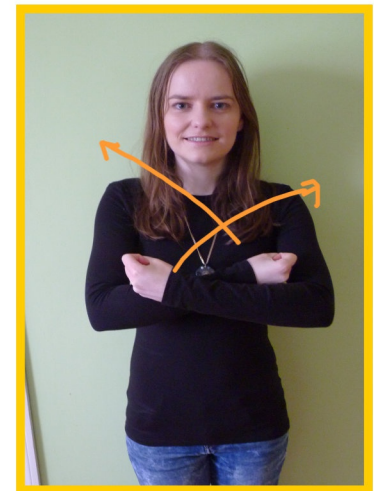
clouds



butterfly



farm



spring



sweets



tea



biscuit



# BOOK REVIEW CORNER



## THE WREN HUNT BY MARY WATSON

In our new look review corner, we will be looking at more than one book this year, investigating the new reads that come our way.

THE WREN HUNT, you might have heard of it? Or the Wren Boys? If you're from outside of Ireland you probably won't have - and even if you're living in Ireland, the chances are slim... They're boy's who hunt the wren the day after Christmas. Nowadays the wren boys chant and sing and parade through towns on St Stephen's Day, a fun, if old-fashioned tradition. But for the characters of Mary Watson's *The Wren Hunt* there is much more to the tradition than meets the eye.

Every St Stephen's day Wren is tortured, because of her name and more importantly because she's an augur. And the boys who torment her are judges. They hunt her for the sport, or so they think. Really, they are drawn to hunting her because of her magic. Wren has a secret - a big one - and it's up to her to keep it a secret. The only way she can save her family and her people is if she turns spy among the boys who treat her like their personal plaything. If she doesn't, her world as she knows it will never be the same. But the longer Wren uses her magic in secret, the looser her grip on reality becomes.

It's rare that a story about Irish magic doesn't involve mythology that is ancient or fairies who are benevolent. *The Wren Hunt* takes a sinister song and weaves a complex mythos all of its own. The characters are relatable and the Ireland feels familiar rather than a poorly drawn copy. If unusual fantasy with determined heroines is your thing then you'll enjoy the unique perspective of *The Wren Hunt*. Mary Watson will have you racing through the woods all night long.

## NOT IF I SAVE YOU FIRST BY ALLY CARTER



How many times have you thought - life as a secret service agent must be fun? Many? Me too. Well, Maddie Manchester knows exactly what it's like. Because her father was one. He isn't anymore, because, well, that's what happens when your father takes a bullet for the president. He tends to re-think his priorities and move himself and his teenage daughter to Alaska. Far away from the president and far away from the president's son Logan, Maddie's best friend.

Six years go by and Maddie is left in the depths of nowhere - acquiring all of the skills a typical teenager possesses, chopping wood, skiing, hiding out. Life is quiet and peaceful. That is, until Logan shows up on her doorstep, bringing his own brand of trouble right along with him. There's nothing like the president's son to arrive and throw your life into complete disarray.

Ally Carter's newest adventure is fun from top to bottom. The sheer enjoyment that comes with following Maddie's adventures is infectious. Ally Carter takes the typical teen romance and injects it with a fun dose of adventure and mayhem.

*Not if I Save You First* is not a book to be taken seriously, however it is very enjoyable and will give every reader a fun weekend of imagining running for your life and falling in love.



# *Eight empowering quotes* for your bedroom wall

*"We all fight over what the label 'feminism' means but for me it's about empowerment. It's not about being more powerful than men - it's about having equal rights with protection, support, justice."*

**Annie Lennox**

*"It took me quite a long time to develop a voice, and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent."*

**Madeleine Albright**

*"Power can be taken, but not given. The process of the taking is empowerment in itself."*

**Gloria Steinem**

*"I love to see a young girl go out and grab the world by the lapels. Life's a bitch. You've got to go out and kick ass."*

**Maya Angelou**

*"Those 62 million girls who are not being educated around the world impact my life in Washington, D.C., in the United States of America. Because if we aren't empowering and providing the skills and the resources to half of our population, then we're not realizing our full potential as a society, as mankind."*

**Michelle Obama**

*"When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."*

**Audre Lorde**

*"Empowering women means trusting them."*

**Isabel Allende**

*"Women belong in all places where decisions are being made... It shouldn't be that women are the exception."*

**Ruth Bader Ginsburg**