

2016 WINNER

THE GLORIOUS HERESIES BY LISA MCINERNEY

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Lisa McInerney's work has featured in *Winter Papers*, *The Stinging Fly*, *Granta*, *The Guardian*, *Le Monde*, *The Irish Times*, BBC Radio 4 and various anthologies. Her story 'Navigation' was longlisted for the 2017 Sunday Times EFG Short Story Award. Her debut novel *The Glorious Heresies* won the 2016 Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction and the 2016 Desmond Elliott Prize. Her second novel, *The Blood Miracles*, won the 2018 RSL Encore Award.

PLOT SUMMARY

When Maureen Phelan is surprised in her home by a stranger, she clubs the intruder with a Holy Stone, and the consequences of this unplanned murder connect four misfits struggling against their meagre circumstances. Ryan is a fifteen-year-old drug dealer desperate not to turn out like his alcoholic father, Tony, whose feud with his next-door neighbour threatens to ruin his family. Georgie is a prostitute who joins a born-again Christian movement to escape the terror of her daily life and to get free of her drug habit. And Jimmy Phelan, the most fearsome gangster in the city and Maureen's estranged son, finds that his mother's bizarre attempts at redemption threaten his entire organisation. Biting and darkly funny, *The Glorious Heresies* presents an unforgettable vision of a city plagued by poverty and exploitation, where salvation still awaits in the most unexpected places.

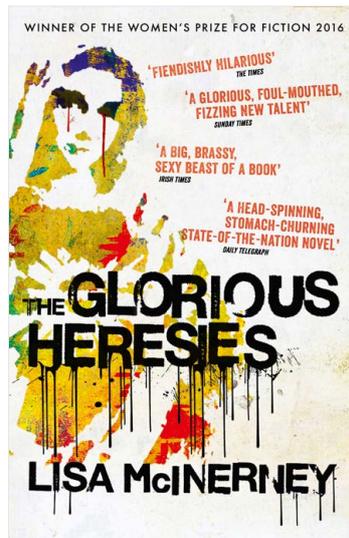
WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

The Glorious Heresies achieves a difficult task by making the reader care about its challenging, flawed characters, especially drug dealer Ryan and Maureen, the mother of the local crime boss. Neither Ryan or Maureen are conventionally likeable – they take part in criminal activity; Ryan is serially unfaithful to his girlfriend Karine, and Maureen murders a man and, later, becomes an arsonist.

However, it's McInerney's insight into their backstory, motivations and their frail humanity that makes us care. Yes, Ryan does sell drugs and has sex with a variety of women other than Karine, the love of his life. Yet he's a young man – a child, when the story begins – who has suffered physical abuse from his alcoholic, violent father, and who has been sexually abused and groomed by Tara Duane. Even later in the novel when Ryan is cheating on

Karine, we are shown his shattered psyche; his mental breakdown, his addiction and his lack of support structures other than a life of crime.

Maureen, too, reveals a sad story that demonstrates how she too has been unfairly treated in a society with rigid rules and a lack of compassion or resources for those that need help. Georgie, too, is a character that desperately needs help, and yet receives little; the only assistance available from a religious cult which, like the presence of the mainstream Catholic church in the story, seems to ultimately prefer punishment over the alleviation of suffering from its followers.



Overall, McInerney guides us to feel that it's not so much that people themselves are evil, than the social structures – poverty, religion, crime and a lack of choices – that hold them in their grip.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Set in Ireland, a country which has only very recently made abortion legal, *The Glorious Heresies* explores the impact of pregnancy, childbirth and abortion on three different women: Georgie, Maureen and Karine. How do the three women's experiences and the experiences of other female characters in the book (Una, Saskia, Tara, for instance) represent the experience of the female body and motherhood? Is it something difficult or pressured? What do you think about what Maureen says about the different roles women are expected to fulfil, and has anything changed for women since she was young?

What do you think about the ways in which McInerney depicts the feelings of her women characters? Is there enough rage, given what they experience – or too much?

QUESTIONS

Is Maureen justified in taking revenge against the Catholic church?

How does *The Glorious Heresies* unpick traditional Catholic ideas about women, pregnancy and motherhood? And how does McInerney depict the fading (but still noticeable) power of the Church in women's lives?

How much sympathy do you have for Georgie? Are there opportunities for her to change her life into something healthier, or is she trapped?

How do you feel about the character of Tara Duane? Is it easier to imagine a man being a paedophile than a woman?

Is there a point when you feel Ryan might have been able to be 'saved'? Or was his life on a set trajectory from the start?



“ I COME FROM IRELAND, SO I CAN SAY THAT THE IRISH DO BLACK HUMOUR BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE . . . YOU GET THAT RICH VEIN OF HUMOUR THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK, WHICH STOPS IT FROM BEING BLEAK ”

MARGARET MOUNTFORD,
CHAIR OF JUDGES 2016

NEXT STEPS

Ryan writes a little about his experience of prison in his letter to Karine, but purposefully doesn't say much, though he narrates more of it later. See if you can write what you think might have happened to him there. What might his

day look like? How might he feel, hour to hour? He says he reads; what does he read and what does he think of it? What does he eat? Who does he interact with? Write perhaps just a 1000-word excerpt from Ryan's time in prison and try and make it as fully imagined as possible.

Lisa McInerney's writing sings with brilliantly observed language, turns of phrase and humour specific to Cork in Ireland. Write a passage of dialogue between two characters using a local dialect or accent you're familiar with; it might reflect the place you live now or somewhere you're very familiar with. Include aphorisms, words specific to that region, ways of phrasing sentences and see how you can depict an accent on the page.

BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

THE BLOOD MIRACLES BY LISA MCINERNEY

THE HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS BY ISABEL ALLENDE

MILKMAN BY ANNA BURNS