

The Ireland Funds Monaco Residential Bursaries

Awarded biannually, The Ireland Funds Monaco Residential Bursaries were established to enable writers born or living in Ireland to pursue a current project during a one-month residency at the Princess Grace Irish Library in Monaco. We are pleased to present these personal reflections written by authors Caoilinn Hughes and Declan Kiberd on their experiences in Monaco.



Caoilinn Hughes

Caoilinn Hughes' debut novel *Orchid & the Wasp* (Oneworld, 2018) was described by The New Yorker as 'a winning debut novel' and by the *Times Literary Supplement* as 'a remarkable, propulsive novel.' It was shortlisted for the 2018 Butler Literary Award. Her poetry collection *Gathering Evidence* won the *Irish Times Shine/Strong Award* and was shortlisted for four other prizes. She won The Moth International Short Story Prize 2018. Her BA and MA degrees are from Queen's University of Belfast. Her PhD is from Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. A fellow of the James Merrill House, the Bogliasco Foundation, Siena Art Institute, Faber and La Napoule Art Foundation, she has been awarded a Literature Bursary Award from the Arts Council of Ireland and The Ireland Funds Monaco Award. Her writing has appeared in *Granta*, *Tin House*, *POETRY*, *The Stinging Fly*, BBC Radio 3 and elsewhere.

My first week in Monaco was a dizzying experience, not only because of the singular, spectacular landscape and infrastructure, and the discombobulation of being financially supported to make art in Monaco(!), but also because of a rotten flu I'd picked up on some plane or other. My residency was to be four weeks—the month of March—and looming in my calendar on April 1st was: 'Send MS to Bill' (MS=finished manuscript; Bill=my agent). The flu would take me out for one whole week of my precious four! I was so sick that I slept with my apartment door open, so that I'd be discovered if I died in the night. Dramatic, but true. The note in my calendar suddenly looked like an April Fools' joke. And yet ... the miracle of a residency—importantly, one with almost no obligatory distractions—is that one can pull off two months' worth of work in two weeks.

I won't detail the project I was working on at the Princess Grace Irish Library, as I'm superstitious about discussing yet-to-be-published work ... but suffice it to say it was a tricky section from my next novel, which will appear in 2020. I had no idea if I could pull off what I was trying to pull off, but I knew that there would be no in-between outcome. It would either work or it wouldn't. It's hard to overstate how much was at stake for me in the work—the whole novel would ideally come into relief through this chapter—but the staff at the library and those associated with The Ireland Funds soon got a sense of that. I was working non-stop: all day at the library and all evening in my apartment in Beausoleil, on the French border above Monte Carlo. Some friends of the library would phone or email, inviting me to so-

cial outings (some of which I did attend—the theatre, a Patrick's Day evening, meals), sure that I was having a dreadful time, working so hard! On the contrary, I only work manically when things are going well. And I'm a very slow writer, so I have to put in all the hours. Towards the end of the month, I rewarded myself by taking the train to Èze to hike the Nietzsche trail, and hiring a road bike to cycle to Italy for a cappuccino!

Géraldine Lance was the unique, wondrous Administrative Assistant there with me every day, and her positive presence enriched my time immeasurably. She arranged a brilliant evening with refreshments and nibbles (the Monegasque mandarincello!), where I read from my then-forthcoming novel, *Orchid & the Wasp* (Oneworld, June 2018), alongside some poems. I also gave a talk about writing as discovery, which hopefully caused just the right amount of controversy! It was heartening to see so many literature-enthusiasts in the region.

The library is an incredible resource and I could very happily have spent the month reading. It was a dangerous temptation. But, thankfully, I found a Beckett novel that was not characteristically brilliant *just* when I needed such encouragement (that even literary legends have off days)! Then I found an Edna O'Brien story collection that was so good I had to stop reading lest I never write another word. I hauled myself from the window-side reading chair to the writing desk chair, and got to work. What a privilege. With huge gratitude to The Ireland Funds.

Declan Kiberd

Declan Kiberd is a faculty member at English Department and Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies as the Donald and Marilyn Keough Professor of Irish Studies and Professor of English at the University of Notre Dame. A leading international authority on the literature of Ireland, both in English and Irish, Kiberd has authored scores of articles and many books, including *Synge and the Irish Language*, *Men and Feminism in Irish Literature*, *Irish Classics*, *The Irish Writer and the World*, *Inventing Ireland*, and, most recently, *Ulysses and Us: The Art of Everyday Life in Joyce's Masterpiece* (2009). He has recently co-edited with PJ Mathews *Handbook of the Irish Revival 1891-1922*, a five-hundred-page anthology of cultural and political writings with commentaries and introductions, published by Abbey Theatre Press in June 2015.

I very much enjoyed spending October 2018 as The Ireland Fund Monaco academic-in-residence, and the opportunity it afforded to study at the Princess Grace Irish Library (PGIL) in Monaco. I am especially grateful to Judith Gantley and Géraldine Lance for the warm welcome they gave me--and much kind care to me and my family members.

The self-catering apartment provided by The Ireland Funds Monaco was very pleasant. Situated 20 minutes from the PGIL by direct bus, my daily commute through Monte-Carlo and around Hercules Harbour was most enjoyable.

It was a pleasure to meet international supporters of The Ireland Funds at various social events during their 2018 Monaco Weekend Celebrations. I was very struck by the Irish-American visitors and by the wonderful dinner in which we participated—it reminded me of a good country wedding.

I also enjoyed the response to my lecture on my recent book *After Ireland*, given to Friends of PGIL—the questions were sharp yet fully empathetic and I learned a lot from all our exchanges.

Later in the month, I took part in the PGIL's biennial two-day symposium sponsored by my own University of Notre Dame. The subject was "Eighteenth-Century Ireland" and my paper on Gulliver's Travels as a precursor of modern children's literature was titled "Honey, he Shrunk the Kids".

My main work, however, through the month was to develop my long-standing research on the prose and plays of Samuel Beckett. For this I found the resources of the PGIL immensely helpful, not only on Beckett but also on Yeats, Joyce and other writers whose work influenced Beckett. I am committed to a book for Harvard University Press, which argued that Beckett was a mystic without God. He wrote from a position of unknowing, seeking a needlepoint in the self which might also have an equivalent point in some sort of deity out there in the universe. My title is *Beckett Unknown: Mysticism Without God*—and I contend that many great mystics, who have had a ravishing vision of a divine experience, often feel themselves to be without God. My conclusion is that Beckett gets mad with God, whilst saying he isn't there, or insufficiently interventionist. He feels a very Irish grudge against God which the merely godless could never feel. He wills some kind of

god into fragile being by the power of his anger with him—and then in the second half of the *Unnamable* allows that God (who is neither perfect nor happy) to speak. How a perfect God could create a flawed universe through which to realise a divine plan is a paradox not unlike that which faces the Beckett writer, who knows he'll leave just a stain on the silence but feels impelled to do so.

I thank everyone in Monaco and The Ireland Funds for the chance to work on this.

