

The Ireland Funds Literary Bursar 2025

The Ireland Funds Monaco Bursaries were established to enable literary and academic writers born or living on the island of Ireland to pursue a current project during a one-month residency at The Princess Grace Irish Library in Monaco.

The Bursaries are aimed at writers in each category who have already published some work of note and are currently engaged in a work-in-progress which would benefit in some regard from holding the award.



Cónal Creedon

It had been the darkest winter in living memory. 'Laethanta na Bó Riabhaí' came early – I found myself saying a final farewell to a number of close friends. The age-old maxim, 'Ní bheidh a leithéid arís ann', was uttered so frequently it became more a salutation than an expression of sympathy. And so, I set out for Monaco with a complex confluence of emotions on my shoulders – anticipation underscored by sadness.

The Côte d'Azur was in darkness as I clipped along the coastal highway between Niece and Monaco; pitch-black sky spangled with stars, and the moonlight on shimmering surf set the ink-blue sea twinkling like it was sprinkled with sapphire dust. Hilltop hamlets shone like beacons, and lone street lamps strung out along headlands sparkled bright like a diamond necklace on sumptuous black velvet.

That first morning I awoke in my apartment in Beau-soliel, a neighbourhood where Monaco dovetails seamlessly with France – and as the name suggests it was beautiful, bright and airy. A care package dropped off the previous day by Sile Jackson was so thoughtful and welcoming. So, I made myself a pot of tea, and sat out on the balcony. There in the clear light of day – a blue sky stretched all the way to the horizon where it became one with the Mediterranean. And just like that, I had been transported into the light of a new world. As if a magic wand had been waved above my head – the darkness dissipated, and my spirits lifted. It occurred to me, 'Isn't it a wonderful life all the same ...'

With a resident population of around 40,000 souls, Monaco is a small city. So, I set off on foot to the Princess Grace Irish Library, taking the scenic route; stopping off along the way at my local market – Marché de Monte-Carlo for une tasse de café and an opportunity to test my school-French which had remained dormant, unused and unspoken since my Leaving Cert. And having found my bearings, I headed towards the port where I lucked into a performance by the Hot Coffee Jazz Trio at the Vidéothèque-Sonothèque.

Monaco is an intriguing city, where streetscape, landscape and seascape seem to fold in on itself. There was a familiarity about the winding avenues, laneways, steps, steep hills and steeples. This labyrinth of interlocking narrow streets knits its way from sea level all the way up the towering precipice of the sheer cliffs that cradle the Principality. Monaco is a city that embraces itself – a romantic embrace that invites visitor and Monegasque to join in the tarantella of twists and turns, spins and swirls – in a never-ending tango between architecture and topography.

And so, it was mid-afternoon before I eventually found my way to the Princess Grace Irish Library in Monaco Ville – which is located on an imposing promontory known simply as Le Rocher. La Rocher has a magical charm all of its own, perched on a clifftop in the shadow of the Royal Palace. The Princess Grace Irish Library is set in the heart of this most evocative warren of ancient streets where every alleyway and archway offers a spectacular panoramic vista out over the Côte D'Azur.



I was greeted by Paula Farquharson [director], Géraldine Lance [Administrative assistant] and Síle Jackson who is attached to the Ireland Funds Monaco – I immediately felt at home, it was like a meeting of old friends, the welcome was warm and genuine. We chatted about this and that and nothing at all, we laughed and we made plans for the weeks ahead.

I shared a childhood anecdote about the arrival of a new kitten to our house, and how my mother dipped the kitten's paws into cream – and when the kitten licked the cream from her paws she knew she was at home.

And just like that, Paula arrived out of the kitchen with a pot of Barry's Best, and I was like the cat that got the cream. In time, I came to know Paula, Síle and Géraldine as 'The Three Musketeers' because of their ability to rise to any challenge, get a job done, and smile in the face of adversity. I like to think that I was D'Artagnan – not quite a fully-fledged Musketeer, but always on the periphery willing to join in the fun and lend a hand in the fray. Over the coming weeks, Paula, Géraldine, Síle and I – enjoyed each other's company and we laughed a lot.

The Princess Grace Irish Library [PGIL] is a vibrant epicentre of Irish culture. Laid out in a series of interconnecting rooms, it facilitates the full and diverse gamut of Irishness – from culture and commerce, to hospitality and the arts. The PGIL is both archive and museum with documents, photographs, artefacts and personal mementos relating to Princess Grace and the Renier Royal Family's connection to Ireland. The library also transforms into an events venue, presenting screenings, lecture tours and musical soirées, and on special occasions the library hosts social gatherings. And yet, with all this frenetic activity, the PGIL never loses sight of the fact that first and foremost, it is a busy public library housing the full canon of Irish literature – and there's always a Cead Míle Fáilte Romhat for school tours, readers groups and random drop-in visitors.

My first public lecture had been scheduled to take place the day after my arrival. And so, Paula and Geraldine sprang into action transforming the library into an all-seater venue, with stage, screen and sound system set-up and in place.

My lecture titled "Sense of Place" was a blend of readings and storytelling, exploring the culture of what I call The Spaghetti Bowl of streets of downtown Cork city where my family has lived and traded for generations. The lecture was followed by a book-signing and a social gathering.

Paula's decision to schedule that introductory lecture so soon after my arrival was inspired. It offered a wonderful opportunity to announce my residency to the friends and associates of PGIL – and just like that I was introduced to a most eclectic and interesting cross-section of Monaco life.

Acquaintances made that evening blossomed into friendships paving the way for a busy social calendar during my time in Monaco – including invites to exhibitions and concerts and a number of memorable Lebanese themed gatherings, and a most unforgettable night when I was introduced to Monegasque football culture courtesy of the 'Ladies Who Footie'. We went to see the home-side, Monaco FC trash Niems FC, 3-nil in the cup. It was a cracker of a match and a very special insiders introduction to a select slice of Monegasque life.

Although I don't prescribe to any specific brand of established religion, I was honoured to accept invitations to attend a number of local religious services. On consecutive Sundays, I attended three different churches: St Paul's Anglican Church in Monte Carlo, The Russian Orthodox Church in Monaco, and I accompanied Síle Jackson to the Sacré Coeur Catholic Church at Beaulieu sur Mer, to celebrate a special St. Patrick's Day Irish service. To our great delight and surprise – Paula Farquharson was a member of the choir singing at the service that day – the Irish language extract from The O'Riada Mass resonated with me – Sean O'Riada's mother, Julia Creedon was my father's cousin.

I had mentioned to Paula when we first met – that I am most interested in meeting people, and suggested that I would be happy to play an active part at any events hosted by the library during my time in Monaco – Paula kindly obliged.

The library has a very busy schedule of students visiting from various schools, and the weekly meeting of The Riviera Readers group – so I was delighted when Paula presented me with the opportunity to talk about my creative practice and the essence of inspiration. It was a very special personal honour when the Institution François d'Assise Nicolas Barré invited me to judge what became known as 'The Cónal Creedon Poetry Excellence Award'.

Paula also arranged for me to say a few words of introduction at the Spring Reception hosted by the Monte-Carlo Club at the PGIL. With so many entertaining, engaging and enriching aspects to this residency it is difficult to select one highlight – but the St. Patrick's Day celebrations will be remembered as very special.

At the lunchtime concert I was invited to present a spoken word collaboration with visiting traditional Irish musicians Dubh Linn. This hugely successful lunchtime performance included, music, song, spoken word and a brilliant display of dancing by champion Irish dancers Cara Flannagan Walsh and Kaylee Brown.



St Patrick's weekend coincides with Prince Albert II's birthday – so, the PGIL staged a very special event later that evening. Prince Albert was guest of honour, and it was a great personal honour to be invited to read my poem, 'Come West With Me To Beara' prior to the keynote lecture presented the Ambassador of Ireland, H.E. Niall Burgess, entitled 'A Memory Palace on the Mediterranean'.

I can't overstate the subliminal significance of the Princess Grace Irish Library, how wonderful it was to have Paula Farquharson, Géraldine Lance and Síle Jackson as a cornerstone of this residency. Each one, in their own personal way offered so much. Throughout my time in Monaco, Paula and Géraldine were a constant source of encouragement and positive energy – organising all aspects of my itinerary, and Síle Jackson was so welcoming, I always felt welcome to tag along with her on her various road trips and escapades – an outstretched hand of friendship is invaluable when one is away from home. Paula, Géraldine and Síle offered me that delicate balance of seclusion and inclusion which is perfect for a creative environment.

The magic of a Monaco Ireland Funds – Princess Grace Irish Library Writers' Residency is that it offered me that elusive space to think, uninterrupted by the simple complexities of day-to-day life; that opportunity to view home from a distance without being obscured by the interruption of the white noise of familiarity. It presented me with the invaluable invitation to step off the hurdy-gurdy-merry-go-round of life. It was a home from home, a safe place that gave me time to take stock, reset the clock, and write. It was very liberating and life reaffirming, to be transported to a new place, compelled to engage with new people, a new language, a new culture – it woke up compartments of the brain that usually lie semi-dormant due to the comfortable over familiarity of home. This residency allowed me that rare chance to step back and look at home in a new light with a new set of eyes.

"I would like to thank the Ireland Funds Monaco and the Princess Grace Irish Library Monaco for creating this wonderful life-reaffirming opportunity."

While in residence at The Princess Grace Irish Library Monaco I wrote a one-woman play [Title: It's Not You It's Me]. It was produced by Landmark Theatre Productions and performed during the Cork MidSummer Festival. [First performance was at Theatre for One: Made in Cork, Cork Opera House Emmet Place, Cork – June 13th 2025] It's Not Me It's You, was performed by Áine Ní Laoghaire and directed by Julie Kelleher. The play was well received by audiences and reviewers.

★★★★ – [Ruby Eastwood – The Irish Times]

"It's Not You It's Me – a new play by Cónal Creedon, performed with striking emotional realism by Áine Ní Laoghaire as part of Theatre for One: Made in Cork. The format is simple but powerful: the experience is confronting – and that's its strength. The extreme proximity of the performer, the unwavering eye contact and the impossibility of leaving demand emotional engagement. These are characters unravelling, opening the mess of their private lives to you; it's theatre as confessional."

It's Not You It's Me, was published recently in anthology 'This is What It's Like To Be In Love With Life' [ISBN: 9781871121766]

