

BOOK LAUNCH FOR WRITERS OF CARRIGALINE

By **ELAINE RHYS-DAVIES**

Carrigaline is the Cork County centre of literary excellence. A quarter of the winning writers, whose stories made up the Bealtaine 2007 anthology, are from Ballea Writers/Carrigaline. The Bealtaine competition, run by Cork County Arts Office, got entries from members of every library in Cork County and, out of this enormous field, Carrigaline got five of the twenty winning stories. The local winners are Mark Treacy, John O'Connell, Paul O'Mahony and Joe Kelly. Joe has two winning stories in the anthology. Carrigaline sprung to the status of a capitol city on the literary map of Ireland at the beginning of 2007 when local writing group, Ballea Writers, won second in the thirty-two counties Writers Group of the Year Award. Three of the four local authors who won in the Bealtaine competition are from Ballea Writers. The fourth, eighteen year old Mark Treacy, son of local librarian David Treacy, is a Leaving Cert student at Carrigaline Community School.

The Bealtaine 2007 anthology, titled *The Barn*, was launched in the Council Chamber of Cork County Hall on May 8th. The book launch was attended by the winners and their families, famous authors, judges, library representatives and representatives of Cork Council and Cork County Arts Office. Ballea Writers were there en masse to cheer on their winners. Extracts from the winning stories were read and one of the judges, Bernadette Leach, commented on what had inspired her about particular stories. She said that the stories transported her and that she was enthralled with the imagery they contained. It was a proud day for County Librarian Ruth Flannigan

who talked of the growing number of entries this year, the third year of the Bealtaine competition. For the last three years the central character of the stories has had to be an older person but Ruth announced that they want future stories to centre on an interaction between an older and a younger person. It was an especially proud day for Carrigaline Librarian David Treacy to see his son Mark and so many of Carrigaline Library members getting their awards.

Author and Bealtaine judge Vincent Mc Donnell, who teaches Creative Writing in the Adult Ed programme at Carrigaline Community School, was delighted to see his former pupils John O'Connell and Joe Kelly among the winners. He said that it was evident from the first heard them that they had the talent but so many of his students have talent but don't have John and Joe's staying power to see their talent through to fruition and overcome rejections. Joe and John, who each started writing just over a year ago, have both faced rejections in other competitions but had the determination to keep on writing and it certainly paid off. Vincent praised Ballea Writers, of which Joe and John are founder members, for their support of fledgling writers and said that support is about the most important ingredient in getting new writers to keep writing. He said that 'the critic who sits on any writers shoulder' tells all writers, even seasoned writers like he, that they aren't good enough and you need great determination to block the critic out and believe in yourself. The support of a writing group is a tremendous help when the critic on the shoulder is doing his worst, which he tries to do every day of a writer's life.

John O'Connell's winning story 'Lillian' centres on an eccentric new resident at a

retirement home who livens things up by introducing the Internet and reintroducing the residents to the outside world. Lillian, who is a chorister, turns a cold environment to warm. At the end of the story, when she is knocked down and killed while trying to save a cat, one wonders if the home will be returned to cold or if she will have changed its temperature forever.

Paul O'Mahony's story 'The Ring' is about an older woman involved with a younger man. While she flits around in indecision and discusses it with another she keeps twisting her wedding ring on her finger. At the end of the story her ring is gone.

Mark Treacy's story 'Binary Choice', set in America, is the story of a contract killer who has long been estranged from his family. He is contracted to kill his family and does so one by one without, we wonder, realising their identity. His mother is a prostitute. It turns out that a priest orchestrated the killings. The story ends with the priest telling the contractor whom he has killed and the contractor killing the priest and then himself.

Joe Kelly's story 'The Little Tic Toc Shop' tells of an

owner of an antique clock shop who loves his grandfather clock. Mr pendulum, on retirement, has no choice but to sell his shop to an adversary who'll replace his treasures with mass market digital and glitz. He is deeply upset at this prospect. The story closes with a vision of him swinging as a pendulum where his grandfather clock used to be.

Joe Kelly's other winning story 'The Old Stone Cottage' tells of an old woman ostracised by society for having an illegitimate dead born baby. She is scorned by the priest and not allowed inside the church. At the close we discover that the priest, by now a Bishop, was the father.

From these winning stories one can see that each had a strong but not overly complicated plot. To keep it simple, limit the number of characters and keep the plot moving forward at an even pace is the essence of a good short story. Add a visual dimension, keep the dialogue tight and avoid adjectives and adverbs and you'll have a winner.

Ballea Writers got a quarter of the winners in Bealtaine this year and aim for half next year. Next year's entries have to be

submitted by June 29th so Ballea writers are running a series of Bealtaine focus workshops in the Carrigaline Court Hotel, 7.30-9.30: May 14th and 28th, June 11th and 25th. Attendees will be guided through the process of achieving a Bealtaine quality story of up to two thousand words. Anyone who would like to have a go at a Bealtaine story is welcome to come along to the Bealtaine focus evenings. These four

workshops are open to anyone and everyone who would like to be supported and guided on this path to writing success. Ballea Writers can be contacted on 086 174 1137 or balleawriters@gmail.com. The Bealtaine 2007 anthology, 'The Barn and Other Stories', is available in all Cork County libraries. Writing groups can request a free copy from Sinead Collins, Cork County Arts Office, on 021 4346210.



Double winner Joe Kelly receives his award. Pictured here with the Deputy Mayor Cllr Derry Canty and Sinead Collins, organizer.



Local winning authors Paul O'Mahony, John O'Connell, Mark Treacy and Joe Kelly pictured at the launch of the Bealtaine 2007 anthology with fellow winning authors and the team of organizers and judges.



Winning Bealtaine authors John O'Connell and Joe Kelly of Carrigaline at the Bealtaine book launch with their former writing tutor and author Vincent McDonnell.



Winning author Mark Treacy of Carrigaline Community School receives his Bealtaine award. Pictured with Ruth Flannigan, County Librarian, the Deputy Mayor Cllr Derry Canty and Sinead Collins, Organiser.