Book Title: **IRISH LIVING LEGENDS: 14 Baaaddasss SHEROS & HEROS**

**to discover before you die**

Intro page

The Irish folk heroes and sheroes in this book have, in one way or another, left the world better than they found it. They have stuck their necks out, taken risks, and rebelled against the orthodoxies of their age with unrivaled wit and charm. These fifteen individuals have dared to be original, to lead instead of follow, and to be aggravatingly unpopular in a world where most people prefer to blend into anodyne obscurity or chirp from the group-think hymn sheet. For me, a world without the likes of these people would be akin to a soup without salt, or song without dance. So this wee book is a sort of personal tribute. Although the selection is very personal, I hope my choices will inspire you to find out more about these unique characters and to discover for yourself the richness of their contributions. I use the designation “Irish” loosely in this book, to refer to people of Irish descent who may or may not have been born in Ireland. To my mind they represent something of an Irish sensibility, if such a thing can be said to exist. They are bards, humorists, raconteurs, pioneers, fighters and dreamers. They make the world better not by making it easier, or glossing over rough edges, but by confronting adversity with more boldness, courage, and imagination than the average man can muster.

**Brendan O’Neill** - Brendan reminds me a bit of Larry Flynt. (If you haven’t seen the Milos Foreman film *THE PEOPLE Vs. LARRY FLYNT*, you really should. It is Woody Harrelson’s best performance, and he totally deserved an Oscar but got robbed by a politically conservative Academy. Co-stars Edward Norton and Courtney Love were also outstanding.)

According to *The Guardian*, O’Neill is *“A sub-Danny Dyer obnoxious intellectual wind-up merchant.”*

O'Neill is editor of ***Sp!ked***, the online magazine with the modest ambition of making history as well as reporting it. He has also been a columnist for *The Australian* and *The Big Issue*. In January 2006, O’Neill co-founded the [Manifesto Club](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Manifesto_Club&action=edit&redlink=1), an organisation "with the aim of challenging cultural trends that restrain and stifle people's aspirations and initiative".

Brendan has authored several books, including *A Duty to Offend: collected essays by Brendan O’Neill* and *Defying Fate, Defendig Free Will: the Case Against Determinism* (co-authored with Frank Furedi).

In a speech given at the Oxford Union Society titled ‘Freedom of Speech and the Right to Offend’ O’Neill claimed, “Today’s student leaders aren’t protecting individuals. They’re protecting an idea, and it is the most mainstream, status quo idea of the twenty-first century: the idea of human vulnerability – the poisonous notion that humans are fragile and therefore our speech and our relations must be monitored and policed. It is this misanthropic, orthodox idea that they promote and which they protect from criticism as surely as priests once ring-fenced their beliefs from ridicule. In this choking climate we have got to move beyond talking about a right to offend; we have to talk about a *duty* to offend. Anyone who cares for freedom, anyone who believes that humanity only progresses through being daring and disrespectful now has a duty to rile and stir and outrage, a duty to break out of the new grey conformism, a duty to ridicule the new guardians of decency, a duty to tell them: “F\*@k your orthodoxies.”

**Jesse-Jane McParland**

At only nine years old, Irish ninja warrior Jesse Jane McParland took the world by storm when she exhibited her astonishing martial arts skills on *Britain’s Got Talent*, Series 9. The judges and audience were stunned by her masterful Samurai swordsmanship, acrobatics and lightening-fast choreography. She ended her performance with a front flip and an exuberant roar. She sailed into the next round with Simon Cowell jokingly offering her a job as his personal security guard. In the semi-final she entered the stage wearing a red dress and hood, and her performance this time involved her “fighting off” Ninja warriors with her sword. In the final, her performance was styled as a ‘computer game’ in which she fought off a number of fictional characters. She placed eighth in the grand final, having by then won a huge public following. McParland has capitalised on her talent by acting in films, such as *The Martial Arts Kid*, as well as appearing on the Ellen DeGeneres show. McParland grew up in County Armagh, Northern Ireland, where she tried ballet, Irish dancing and basketball before finding her real calling in martial arts. She also practices kickboxing, Kung Fu and Tae Kwon Do. She has competed and won awards all over the world. She trains intensively in Ireland with her coach, sensei Gary Kelly. If you haven’t already seen it, don’t miss her stunning first appearance on *Britain’s Got Talent* here:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEjGQB9BKWA

This clip always provides a little inspiration or, if you’re feeling depressed at the endless “Princess” images churned out in our culture, repeating the message that girls should be “pretty” rather than athletic or powerful, McParland’s video furnishes the perfect antidote to that shit.

**Charles Curran**

Curran is an American-born theologian who was ordained a catholic priest in 1958. He earned two doctorate degrees in theology in Rome before taking up a professorship at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. in 1965. In April 1967, university trustees voted not to reappoint him to a tenure-track position, mainly because of his dissenting views on contraception. Students and colleagues rallied to his defense, and two weeks later the trustees reversed their decision, not only reappointing him but promoting him to associate professor with tenure.

In 1968 Curran was among 87 Catholic theologians who penned a dissenting response to Pope Paul VI’s encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life) largely because its traditional ban on contraception, extra-marital sex and condemnation of homosexuality. Over the course of the following two decades, Curran stood in defiance of official Vatican teachings on contraception, homosexuality, divorce, abortion, moral norms and the proper role of the hierarchical teaching office in personal moral matters. His vocal opposition made Curran fall afoul of The Congregation for the Docrtine of the Faith, headed by then-Cardinal Josef Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI). As a result of the Vatican’s adjudication that Curran was not suitable to be a professor of Catholic theology, he was removed from the faculty of the Catholic University of America in 1986 and has not been hired by any Catholic university since. Curran continued teaching theology, however, taking up a professorship at Southern Methodist University. In 1989 Curran filed suit against Catholic University of America for breaching its own employment policies. The court ruled that the university had the right to fire him for teaching views contrary to the school's religion.

Among other things, Curran objected to the official Catholic line against homosexuality, noting that church teachings placed disproportionate emphasis on norms and laws while excluding the importance of sexuality for interpersonal relationship. Along with other catholic dissidents, he objected to the church’s image of the human being as primarily an assembly of biological parts. This approach, he thought, treated human individuals more like biological machines than rational agents. He saw the Vatican’s ‘physicalism’ as over-emphasizing physical structures of acts, to the exclusion of the interpersonal, psychological, and emotional aspects of human sexuality. Curran has authored at least six books and dozens more journal articles. As a “dissident insider” Curran was to the catholic theological establishment of the 60’s and 70’s what Daniel Ellsberg was to the American political establishment. In speaking truth to power with the authority of an insider expert, he gave a voice to many Catholics who wanted to retain their faith while jettisoning the dead weight of dogma.

**Maureen Dowd** (born Jan 14, 1952 in Washington, D.C.)

Maureen Dowd's list of journalistic achievements is too long to trot out fully in this wee book, so suffice it to say she is a Pulitzer Prize winning columnist who has written for a dazzling array of publications, but is best known as a *New York Times* Op Ed columnist since 1995. Dowd wields the pen with as much agility as Jesse Jane McParland wields a Samurai sword. Dowd peppers her writing with quotes from other great Irish bards like Oscar Wilde. Here are some piquant quotes from her book, *Are Men Necessary?* (don’t panic: its satire):

*“. . . women would move from playing with Barbie, to denouncing Barbie to remaking themselves as Barbie. Maybe we should have known that the story of women’s progress would be more of a zigzag than a superhighway, that the triumph of feminism would last a nanosecond while the backlash lasted forty years.*”

“*I’m continually astonished, provoked and flummoxed by the odd and stunning trajectory men and women have traveled from the Big Bang of the Sexual Revolution to the big busts of the Plastic Revolution*.”

“… *Hollywood’s remake of* ***The Stepford Wives*** *stumbled because it was no longer satire but documentary.”* I love this quote. If you have never watched the original *Stepford Wives*, now is a great time to do so, because even the original looks less like satire than prophecy.

“*Whether or not American feminism will be defeated by American Conservatism, it is incontrovertibly true that American feminism was triumphed by American narcissism . . . We’ve become a nation of Frankensteins, and our monster is us. With everyone working so hard at altering their facades, we no longer have natural selection. We have unnatural selection*.”

Dowd doesn't only write about feminism, she is mainly a political commentator. Friends say that her writing is largely inspired by her mother, “the source … of Maureen's humor and her Irish sensibilities and her intellectual take.” (Ariel Levy, New York magazine)

**Mary Robinson** was born in 1944 in County Mayo Ireland. She served as the first female President of Ireland from 1990 – 1997, astonishingly getting elected without the support of Fianna Fáil (Ireland’s Republican Party). She was a hugely popular president and is widely regarded as a transformative figure for Ireland, and for renewing and liberalising the office of the presidency. In her capacity as president, she signed into law several historic Bills passed by the Oireachtas, including one that fully liberalised the law on access to contraceptives, and another that fully decriminalized homosexuality and made the age of consent for homosexuals equal to that for heterosexuals. Despite her liberal image, she requested an audience with Pope John Paul II during a visit to Rome and maintained a close working relationship with the Church. When Fr. David O’Hanlon tried to slut shame her in the *Irish Times* for the outfit she wore during her Vatican visit, Vatican officials and Ireland’s Roman Catholic Bishops stood by her and said she had complied with their updated dress code.

Following her presidency, Robinson worked as the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, from 1997 to 2002. During her UN tenure she became the first High Commissioner to visit Tibet, and criticised capital punishment in the United States.

She presided over the 2001 World Congress against Racism in Durban, South Africa, but members of the Jewish-American lobby began an intensive campaign in the American media demanding that the United States withdraw from the conference unless certain language harshly critical of Israel for its policies in the Palestinian territories and its treatment of Palestinians, was removed from the Asian regional draft declaration. The Bush administration also had a beef with another proposal on the table for the Durban conference – namely calls for a discussion of reparations and an apology for slavery and the slave trade. Ultimately, pressure from the US forced her to resign her post.

After leaving the UN in 2002, Robinson continued her global human rights work, focusing her energies on equitable trade, healthcare and humane migration policies, strengthening women’s leadership and improving corporate social responsibility. Her *Mary Robinson Foundation - Climate Justice*, aims to secure global justice for victims of climate change through leadership, advocacy and education.

Robinson is Chairman of the *Institute for Human Rights and Business* and served as Oxfam's honorary president from 2002 until 2012. She is a founding member and Chairman of the *Council of Women World Leaders*. In 2004 Amnesty International awarded her its Ambassador of Conscience Award for her assiduous work in promoting human rights around the globe.

**Bernard Lynch** - Born in County Clare, Ireland in 1947, Bernard Lynch became perhaps the first openly gay Catholic priest to actively campaign for the dignity and compassionate treatment of homosexuals. In 1982 he co-founded New York City’s first AIDS Ministry program at *Dignity* *New York* and later served on mayor Ed Koch’s task force on AIDS. In 1986 Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI) released his infamous ‘Halloween letter” by the Vatican, stating that gay people are ‘disordered in their nature’ and ‘evil’ in their love. Lynch was denied canonical rights by the Archdiocese for refusing to give up his ministry to the sick and dying. He was subsequently banned from serving as a priest in the U.S. and left without any source of income. In June 1987 he was ordered to Rome for sabbatical leave and given time 'to reflect on his future'. When later the Archdiocese of New York acted in conjunction with the F.B.I. to try to railroad Lynch on phony charges of child abuse, the 14-year-old student from Mount Saint Michael’s they had coerced into giving false testimony cracked, admitting he had been forced to testify against his will by the F.B.I. Due to the state’s flimsy case, the judge took the unusual step of exonerating Lynch finding him not guilty of all the charges. A full account of the trial is given in "A Priest on Trial" which Lynch wrote and published in the U.K. (Bloomsbury 1993). Lynch later moved to London, UK and in 1992 became the first minister of any religion to march in the LGBT parade. He founded the first support group for Catholic gay priests in the Archdiocese of Westminster London. Mary Robinson, President of Ireland welcomed him to the Palace of the President in 1995, making him the first ever openly gay priest to be welcomed there. In 1998, he and his life partner, Billy Desmond, had their relationship publicly blessed. In 2007, they became legally married as the first Catholic priest and partner in a civil partnership. “Jesus said ‘*The truth shall set you free’*. He forgot to add, ‘*It crucifies you first*.’ ” – Bernard Lynch

**Macklemore** is the stage name for Ben Haggerty (born 1983), an American hip hop artist of mainly Irish descent from Seattle, Washington. Haggerty started writing lyrics at age 15, drawing inspiration from *Digital Underground* and, later on, other East Coast Underground hip-hop artists. While still in high school, he formed a hip-hop band with other students called *Elevated Elements* and released an album (“Progress”) with them at the tender age of 17. That same year he also recorded an EP titled 'Open Your Eyes' under the name 'Professor Macklemore', a name he had invented as a kid when asked to make up a superhero for a school art project. He distributed 'Open Your Eyes' himself, and later shortened his name to 'Macklemore' before releasing his first official full-length album, titled *The Language of My World* in 2005. The following year he met Ryan Lewis, and began collaborating with him in what was destined to become a hugely successful duo. In 2009 Macklemore released *The Unplanned Mixtape* which reached no. 7 on the iTunes Hip-Hop chart. In 2009 Macklemore & Ryan Lewis released “Irish Celebration”, a song any self-respecting Paddy ought to listen to at least once. Their debut studio album *The Heist* was released in October 2012 and featured the single 'Same Love', a song promoting LGBT rights with vocals by Mary Lambert. The track was recorded during the campaign for Washington's Referendum 74, which was later approved and legalized same-sex marriage in Washington state. The song reached number 11 on the Billboard Hot 100 and made it to number 1 in both Australia and New Zealand. It also won a 'Song of the Year' nomination at the 56th Annual Grammy Awards. Here are some of the lyrics:

*The right wing conservatives think it's a decision  
And you can be cured with some treatment and religion  
Man-made rewiring of a predisposition  
Playing God, aw nah here we go  
America the brave still fears what we don't know  
And "God loves all his children" is somehow forgotten  
But we paraphrase a book written thirty-five-hundred years ago*

In the same song, Macklemore put his neck out to chide hip-hop artists for their homophobia, calling out the genre for its collusion in the normalisation of homophobic discrimination and epithets. And in these lyrics he exposes the double-standards: “Its the same hate that's caused wars from religion, gender to skin colour, the complexion of your pigment, the same fight that led people to walk outs and sit ins, it's human rights for everybody, there is no difference!” and concludes with the ponited, “I might not be the same but that's not important, No freedom till we're equal, damn right I support it!”

In his twenties, Macklemore struggled with drug addiction and alcoholism, and has been in rehab on several occasions. Beyond all of his musical successes (too numerous to list here) he has maintained a sense of personal integrity that can be gleaned in an interview he gave in a 2012 documentary, where he says, “I want to be someone who is respected and not just in terms of my music. I want to be respected in terms of the way I treat people. . . . Music is my creative outlet in terms of expressing what is important to me; what has importance, what has a value.”

**Emma Donoghue** is an Irish-Canadian author. The youngest of eight children, she was born in Dublin, Ireland. She is most famous for her bestselling novel ROOM, which was nominated for the Man Booker Prize and made into a motion picture for which she also wrote the screenplay, earning her an Academy Award nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay. Donaghue earned her BA from University College Dublin and later went to Cambridge University where she earned a PhD in English. To date she has written nine novels, many collected short stories, stage plays, screenplays and historical fiction. When Donohugue’s first novel *Stir Fry* about a young Irish woman discovering her sexuality debuted in 1994, it was a finalist for the Lambda Literary Award, which she later won for her historical novel *The Sealed Letter* in 2009*.* I could go on and on about all of the various and sundry literary awards Emma ha snatched up for her literary prowess, but I think this page space is better used to explain why you should read her most famous novel ROOM. The story is narrated from the perspective of a five-year-old boy, Jack, who lives in a small room with his mother, who had been abducted at the age of nineteen and impregnated by a sexually abusive predator (“old Nick”) who has held her hostage for more than seven years. Donoghue’s story was based on the boy Felix from the bizarre Fritzl Case, which came to light in 2008 after it emerged that an Austrian woman named Elizabeth Fritzl had been held captive by for 24 years by her father, Josef, who kept her in a concealed basement area of his house. During her imprisonment, Elizabeth was assaulted, sexually molested and raped repeatedly by her father, which resulted in the birth of 7 children, four of whom were held in captivity with their mother and the other three of whom were raised as ‘foundlings’ by Josef and his wife. Donoghue’s fictional first person account of what it would be like to be born and raised with four walls and a TV set as the only ‘world’ you’ve ever experienced, and your Mum and rapist ‘father’ the only real people you’ve ever met, is a masterpiece of creative genius. It is as though this adult woman has crept into the psyche of a five year old prisoner who is unaware of his situation and is about to risk everything to discover the real world outside for the very first time. This is a work of sheer literary genius from the pen of a woman who fully deserves to be ranked among Ireland’s most talented bards of all time.

**Andrew Sullivan** (1963 - ) was born in South Godstone, Surrey to a Roman Catholic family of Irish descent. He later studied modern history and modern languages at magdalen College, Oxford. Sullivan emigrated to the U.S., where he completed his graduate work at Harvard and later served as editor of *The New Republic* magazine from 1991 – 1996, during which time be became a maverick journalist, leading national coverage of a number of controversial public issues and sparking high-profile debates. Despite being a self-described Conservative and author of *The Conservative Soul*, and having supported Republican candidates between 1980 and 2002, Sullivan has dissented from traditionally conservative stances on a range of issues including same-sex marriage, progressive taxation, social security, anti-discrimination laws, the Affordable Care Act, the United States government's use of torture, and capital punishment. He supported John Kerry's campaign in 2004, having lost confidence in the Bush administration following the invasion of Iraq, and also endorsed Barak Obama for the Democratic nomination in the 2008 presidential election, calling him the most realistic prospect for “bringing America back to fiscal reason” and identifying him as someone who could “restore the rule of law and Constitutional balance”. Over the course of his career, Sullivan has written for The New York Times Magazine, the Sunday Times of London, and later (in 2000) began his own blog, The Daily Dish (which won the 2009 Weblog Award for Best Blog), a platform from which he has disseminated his core commitments to fiscal conservatism, limited government, and classic libertarianism on social issues. In 2007 he took up an editorial post at Atlantic Monthly, where his arrival is deemed to have elicited an immediate upturn (of possibly 30%) in traffic to the magazine's website. In 2011, he moved on to The Daily Beast, which he left in 2013 to launch his own stand-alone website The Dish, charging subscribers 20.00 per year. He retired from blogging in Jan 2015.

Sullivan came to my, and just about everyone else's, attention in 1995, with the publication of *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality*. The book was a manifesto for social change and sent shock waves through the Vatican and America's conservative Christian think tanks. Appearing on the heels of Simon LeVay's and Dean Hamer's scientific revelations about the likelihood of a 'gay biology', Sullivan's book laid down the gauntlet to those who still claimed that homosexual behaviour was immoral. Most powerfully, Sullivan drew on his familiarity with Catholic doctrine to spell out the logical consequences of the Church's 1975 response to the growing evidence that homosexuality is an essential part of some peoples' inherent emotional and sexual nature. Sullivan demonstrated, in eloquent detail, why the church had failed in its attempts to formulate a coherent argument for their continuing condemnation of homosexual activity. He pointed out that the Church had a duty to explain how harmless activities that occur in accordance with a person's nature are somehow against human nature in general. Sullivan has been described as a proponent of “legitimation” or mainstreaming of gay and lesbian people, as opposed to radical social change associated with identity politics. He wrote that “old fashioned liberalism brought gay equality to America, far faster than identity politics leftism.” Some establishment journalists have suggested that Sullivan is the most influential political writer of his generation, largely because of his early eloquent support for same-sex marriage. In a groundbreaking 1989 article in The New Republic, Sullivan penned one of the first substantial arguments in the United States advocating for gay people to be given the right to marry. Despite some prickly reactions from the “gay left” accusing Sullivan of assimilationist politics, his arguments became widely accepted and formed the basis of the modern movement to allow same-sex marriage. Oh, and on top of all of these accomplishments, he's a very dishy lad.

**Katie Taylor**

If you ever wondered why they call them “the fighting Irish”, look no further than Katie Taylor. She is the living incarnation of what it means. Weighing it at 60 kg, Katie Taylor is (at the time of this writing) the reigning Irish, European, World and Olympic boxing champion and is widely regarded as the best female boxer in the world. After bearing Ireland’s flag at the London Olympic games opening ceremony, Taylor went on to win a gold medal with the visible support of a huge Irish following. Among the seventeen medals she has clinched at major championships are five consecutive World Championship Golds. In her youth, Taylor was an all around athlete, and played Gaelic Football and Carnogie competitively for local clubs, as well as enjoying success in soccer and athletics. Taylor’s father, Pete, had been an Irish boxing champion. Her older brothers boxed at a local club, and younger sister Katie tagged along and began learning the sport. But in Ireland there was no competitive outlet for her talent, as the Irish Amateur Boxing Association did not allow women’s boxing. So her father organized exhibition matches at club shows where she would be listed simply as “K Taylor” and matched up against boys of the same age and weight category. Her break came in 2001 when, at age 15, she made Irish boxing history, having earned the right to box professionally. She boxed Alanna Audley from Belfast at the National Stadium in Dublin in the first ever women’s boxing bout officially sanctioned by the Irish Amateur Boxing Association. International success soon followed in 2005 when she took her first Gold at a major championship, becoming European champion at Tonsberg, Norway. She has worked tirelessly to raise the profile of women’s boxing ever since and today is the sport’s official ambassador for the IABA.

**John Michael McDonagh**

Born in London in 1967, John Michael McDonagh is an English screenwriter and film director of Irish descent. Among his most notable achievements was his directorial debut *The Guard*, a police comedy starring Brendan Gleeson and Don Cheadle, which became the most successful Irish independent film of all time. But what really knocked my socks off was his much more substantial film, *Calvary*, released in 2014 and also starring Brendan Gleeson. To my mind, this was the best film of the year bar none and must be one of the most underrated films of all time, despite its generally positive critical reception. My favourite accolade was from Fr. Robert Barron, who wrote that “the film shows, with extraordinary vividness, what authentic spiritual shepherding looks like and how it feels for a priest to have a shepherd's heart.” Astonishingly, *Calvary* manages to deal with a rich array of sensitive and weighty moral issues without ever waxing didactic or becoming predictably sentimental. McDonagh's masterpiece manages to be both serious and profound without coming across as contrived. It touches on child sexual abuse by the priesthood, forgiveness, parent-child relationships, guilt versus blame/shame, empathy, the value of art, and atheism. If this book does nothing other than inspire the reader to go and watch this film it will have been well worth the purchase price.

**Lisa Dwan**

OK, I have to confess that I never heard of actress Lisa Dwan until my Irish friend Gabi told me about her. Dwan was born in 1977 in County Westmeath, Ireland. The youngest of four, left home at age 14 to study ballet in Leeds. Later she started getting parts in TV and film but her real breakthrough came in 2009 when Director Nathalie Abrhami cast her in Samuel Beckett's *Not I* at Battersea Arts Centre. The piece is a nine-minute monologue at breakneck speed by a disembodied mouth. It reminds me of the opening of the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* but much faster and more poetic. Dwan continued to perform the piece to rave reviews for the next ten years. In a 2015 interview with Guardian writer Liz Hoggard, Dwan explained what she thinks is so amazing about this role: “I’m not a woman, I’m a consciousness. It’s stretched me intellectually, emotionally. To get out of my blonde hair and body and be this thing, I can’t explain the gift.”

Link to *Not I* here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4qaRp4t4jg>

Meanwhile, Dwan had to make a living, so she created a “fictionalised” CV and worked in publishing and PR, where she launched the “onesie”, partly by persuading Harry Styles to wear one. Who else can boast of such a unique accomplishment?

Later she collaborated with Director Walter Asmus, who had worked with Beckett in theatre and television until the author's death in 1989. Asmus suggested that Dwan play in two other Beckett plays, *Footfalls* and *Rockaby,* to make up a trilogy together with *Not I.* The result was a theatrical masterpiece that took London by storm both at the Royal Court and the West End before touring globally. Dwan has become Beckett's global ambassador, facilitating the resurrection of his work for modern audiences.

**Kate Manning**

Kate Manning's ***My Notorious Life*** has been described by critics as “Dickensian” and as an “essential novel for our time”, and protagonist Axie Muldoon has been described as a character “as fierce and alive” as any in recent history. Although it is set in late nineteenth century New York City, it represents, from an intimate perspective, the struggle women over the centuries have faced to control their own fertility and to own their sexual agency. If I could make only one novel mandatory reading in the high school curriculum, it would probably be this one. Yet reading this book never felt pedagogical. It is a mesmerizing page-turner that drew me in to the particulars of the characters' lives through powerfully visceral and vivid storytelling. Here's a wee passage to whet your appetite:

* We'll have the baby from you, she says. --- He'll sleep in the nursery.
* That's our brother! He sleeps with us.

But the hag lifted him up under the arms.

I pulled his legs. She pulled back. Joe was stretched like a taffy between us,

twisting himself and screeching.

– He's our brother, we cried, as I hammered her.

In a blink, two more apron ladies had a hold of me.

– She's a hellcat, cried Mrs. R. – Keep her down.

– PUGGA MAHONE, alla yiz, I said, which is Irish for kiss my \*ss.

– None of your papist curses, said Mrs. Rump who now had a grip on my hair.

I bit her.

By the way, Kate Manning also wrote the critically acclaimed novel *Whitegirl* and was already an accomplished twice-Emmy Award winning documentary producer for WNET-13 before she became a novelist. I reckon she can comfortably recline on a nice clump of laurels.

**Neil Jordan**

Neil Jordan was born in Silgo, Ireland in 1950. His achievements are so numerous that to list them all here would be impossible. Among other things, he won the Guardian fiction prize for his book of short stories, NIGHT IN TUNISIA (1976), has penned three novels, written and/or directed over a dozen films, and produced several others. Needless to say he has firmly established himself as one of Ireland's national treasures. His contributions have also won him recognition in France, where he was awarded the distinction of Arts et Lettres, as officer in the order, for his contribution to cinema. Jordan also won a Silver Bear for Best Director at the 1997 Berlin Film Festival for his screen adaptation of Irish novelist Pat McCabe's *The Butcher Boy*.

Perhaps his most celebrated film, and the one that brought him to international attention, was *The Crying Game*, a gender-bending crime thriller set against the backdrop of Northern Irish politics. Jordan stayed committed to the project through many set-backs and rejections, until finally he found others (notably Stephen Woolley, Channel 4) willing to collaborate with him to bring his project to fruition. Jordan’s tenacity paid off when the film was nominated for six academy awards and won him an Oscar for best Original Screenplay. The story is one of moral complexity, pitting protagonist Fergus's Irish Republican commitments against his own humanity, when confronted with the task of personally executing an English soldier for the cause. The film then shifts, threading into another strand that leads Fergus to the Spitalfields area of London, where he is drawn into the same English soldier's past life and relationship. Long before the transgender movement became a trendy, self-confident and clinically-funded movement, Jordan's film humanised transgender individuals, offered them a dignified representation and – perhaps most important of all – showed straight audiences an alternative, tolerant way to respond to people who do not fit sexual social 'norms'. If you have not yet seen the film, you have missed one of the true cinematic gems of the 20th century. This film is so special because it takes political and social conflicts, respectively, and transforms them into compassion and humanity.