

The Brian Moore Short Story Award 10th Birthday



Lionel Shriver

The 2006 Brian Moore Short Story Competition was launched on Monday the 27th March at noon in the John Hewitt Bar on Donegall Steet. The Creative Writers' Network would like to thank everyone that attended the launch and hope that they will all enter the competition.

The Brian Moore Short Story Competition was held for the first time in 1996, ten years ago. Since then the competition has become one of the major literary competitions in Northern Ireland. It is also one of the most prestigious. Only the Orange Northern Woman Competition approaches the same literary status as the Brian Moore Short Story Competition. The Brian Moore, however, is not gender-specific. It is open to everyone who lives in or was born in Northern Ireland. Over six hundred people entered the last competition – won by Brian Steele with *People Power, Schopenhauer!*

The Creative Writers' Network hopes that this year, to celebrate the Competition's birthday, the competition will be more successful than ever.

THE PAST

The Brian Moore Short Story Competition is a highly prestigious literary award. It is judged, every year, by a respected member of the literary community in Northern Ireland. Past judges have included Maeve Binchy, Carlo Gébler and Colin Bateman. There is no question of the literary standing and judgement of these authors. To have your story selected by them is something to be proud of and a stamp of quality.

The worth of the award can be seen in the careers of the winners who have gone on to write professionally.

Belfast-based Sam Millar won the Brian Moore Short

Story Award in 1998 with his short story, 'Rain'. Since then he has gone on to write his autobiography, *On The Brinks* (Wynkin de Worde, 2003) and the novel *Dark Souls* (Wynkin deWorde, 2003). His second novel, *The Darkness of Bones*, is out now in bookshops. The short story, 'Rain', that won the Brian Moore competition has gone on to be published elsewhere.

'I recently was asked to describe what winning the Brian Moore meant to me – in one paragraph! Surely ten pages? How would a mere paragraph suffice for such a life-changing event? Well. Read on. Winning the Brian Moore Award did a number of things, and apart from boosting my rather large ego, it gave me the confidence I needed to truly believe in myself and my work as a writer. Since winning it, I have gone on to win other awards plus seeing two of my three books, *On The Brinks* (bought by Warner) and *The Redemption Factory* reaching the coveted number one spot on the best-sellers list. Yet, despite all these fine things, nothing will ever please me as much as The Brian Moore Award.'

BREAKING NEWS

The deadline for submissions to the Brian Moore Short Story Award has been extended to Monday July 31 2006. Get your entries in now!

Marilyn McLaughlin won the first Brian Moore Short Story Competition in 1996. Since winning the award she has gone on to write an anthology for adults, *A Dream Woke Me* (Blackstaff Press) and a series of children's books following the adventures of *Fierce Milly*.

'Winning the Brian Moore competition affirmed my belief in myself as a writer and scared the wits out of me. What did a person do now? So I got to be published, and I wrote some more and I won some other prizes, and I wouldn't have done any of that without that first win. So it has been a starting point, a challenge, and reassurance. Yes, I can write. I am a writer. That's what it means.'

However, the competition isn't only open to aspiring authors. If you write for fun, as a hobby or even if this is the first time you have written a short story the Brian Moore Short Story competition is for you. Two of our past winners won with the first story they had entered anywhere.



Brian Steele, BMSSA Winner, and his Writing Group.

Brian Moore Short Story Award

James Meredith had always wanted to write. However, he never quite found the time to get around to it. The story he wrote for the Brian Moore Short Story competition was the first he had submitted anywhere.

'I heard about it when I was on holiday. I thought the deadline would help me finish writing the story.'

It worked. Not only that, but James has continued writing. His work has appeared in *The Stinging Fly* and *the Black Mountain Review*. His short stories were included in the anthology *Breaking the Skin: twenty-first century writing* and his poetry is to appear in a 2006 anthology.

'Winning the Brian Moore Short Story Award gave me the confidence and conviction to submit my work (prose and poetry) to various magazines and anthologies. It meant a lot to me that the judge that year, a writer whom I respect so much, Dermot Bolger, thought my story had literary merit. And on those lazy days when anything seems a better idea than sitting in a room with pen in hand, the award gives me a figurative kick up the arse.'

Brian Steele took up writing as a hobby after he retired from a career as a civil engineer. His short story, *People Power, Schopenhauer!*, proved that it's never too late to start writing. It saw off stiff competition from other entrants to take the prize.

'...the immediately obvious benefits, viz the £500 prize, the personal gratification, the pleasure it gave to my children and my writing friends, were great. (The £500 lasted about half an hour, the rest considerably longer.) It also gave a tremendous boost to my self-confidence which resulted in my actually finishing a few stories thereafter (previously I specialised in starting stories with no idea of an ending and usually arrived midway in the same state, at which point I gave up and started another one).

The reason I was specially pleased about winning was that it made my wife Liz happy, and I hope proud of me, because she died last year after a relapse of the leukaemia against which she'd battled for over three years. That thought means a great deal to me."



Lionel Shriver and Mark Madden

THE PRESENT

Martin Lynch, playwright and chairman of the CWN board, introduced this year's judge, Lionel Shriver, at the launch. Lionel Shriver is an American citizen who spent years living in Northern Ireland. She is currently resident in London and, last year, won the Orange Prize for her novel, *We Need to Talk about Kevin*.

Lionel gave a short speech in which she told everyone that she was always pleased to be invited to judge competitions like the Brian Moore.

'A prize such as this,' she said, 'can make all the difference to someone. To have your work noticed and acknowledged is always something to treasure.'

The winner of the award will get to meet Lionel again at the Awards Ceremony in the Linen Hall Library. It will be held on the 15th October 2006 at in the evening.

After the launch Lionel was interviewed by both U105 and the *Ulster Tatler*, one of the Brian Moore Short Story Competitions generous sponsors, before returning to England.

THE FUTURE

The Creative Writers Network wants to make sure that this year's competition is a memorable one. We have been lucky enough to acquire Lionel Shriver as a judge for the competition. She will be back in Belfast in September for the Awards ceremony where the winner will be announced.

We are delighted to be able to announce that this year the winner's short story will be published in the *Ulster Tatler*. We would also like to thank all the generous sponsors who support both CWN and the Brian Moore Short Story Competition; Arts Council of Northern Ireland, Belfast City Council, Linen Hall Library, Belfast Telegraph, Blackstaff Press, Lagan Press and the *Ulster Tatler*. (Photos used with permission of the *Ulster Tatler*)



From left to right - Mark Madden, Lionel Shriver, Martin Lynch and Fred Brown outside the John Hewitt.



Martin Lynch, Chair of CWN