



VONA GROARKE'S GOOD NEWS

GOLDHAWK RECENTLY reported on the appointment of **Éilís Ní Dhuibhne** as the new Laureate for Irish Fiction – an Arts Council-fronted gig dished out every three years to a worthy scribbler. A less high-profile post that is also doled out every three years is that of Ireland Professor of Poetry and the new incumbent has just been appointed here too.

Coincidentally, the new prof, **Vona Groarke**, popped up as a member of the selection panel that chose Ní Dhuibhne as the new laureate from a final list of four writers.

Clearly then, Groarke understood all too well the mechanics of landing a role like the £35,000 per annum Ireland Professor of Poetry. In her case, it was a body called the Ireland Chair of Poetry Trust (ICPT) that made the final decision.

When it comes to choosing the fiction laureate, the Arts Council appoints both short-listing and selection committees, which are predominantly made up of outsiders (albeit, crucially, both chaired by council members).

The ICPT itself, however, has total control over the poetry professorship appointment process.

For those unfamiliar with the trust, it was established in 1989 and is chaired by Arts Council chairwoman **Maura McGrath** and includes the chairman of the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, **Liam Hannaway**, as vice-chair.

Both councils contribute to the funding of the poetry professorship, as do the three colleges

at which the professor resides for a few weeks in each of the three years respectively.

They are currently represented on the trust by **Fran Brearton**

(Queen's University), who likes a bit of Yeats; UCD's **Lucy Collins**, whose research interests include "ecopoetry and ecofeminism"; and former Trinity College physics professor-turned-poet **Iggy McGovern**.

The final member is former Belfast judge **Don-**

nell Deeney, the outgoing pro-chancellor of Trinners, who was knighted in 2005.

In February this year, the trust's sextet of members put out an open call for nominations for the new professor of poetry, with anyone free to submit a nomination. Most significantly, however, each of the five funding institutions was also invited to nominate a candidate.

From the 33 poets nominated this time around, a shortlist of three was drawn up by the ICPT at a meeting chaired by Han-

naway, who also chaired the final selection committee meeting.

At that stage, the ICPT was advised by two external poet advisors – former Ireland Professor of Poetry (2013-2016) **Paula Meehan** and Oxford University professor and critic **Peter McDonald** – who attended the final meeting.

In the end, the nod went to Groarke, who officially replaces **Paul Muldoon** as Ireland Professor of Poetry in October, when his term ends.

He was recently elected as a Saoi of Aosdána by the membership of that artists' organisation, which includes Groarke since 2010.

No doubt, celebrating Groarke's accolade with gusto was publisher **Peter Fallon** of The Gallery Press. The well-funded Co Meath-based publishing house, which received €180,000 from the Arts Council this year, is behind the poet's latest collection (her ninth), entitled *Infinity Pool*.

The professorship should help shift a few extra copies to readers who might not otherwise have been all that interested in a book that "tests the limits of spaces poems make for themselves".



DREAL DEAL DELIVERS

DREAL DEAL, a horse with an interesting past and who was once trained by **Ronan McNally**, returned to something like his best form at Killarney recently, winning the €45,000 Boylesports Daily Moneyback Handicap Steeplechase at long odds under **Simon Torrens**.

The Arvico gelding, who landed a monumental gamble when gaining his first success at Navan back in 2020, went on to a sequence of six straight victories in flat and hurdle races.

The Irish Horseracing Regulatory Board referrals committee later disqualified the 10-times winner from his first two

victories and also disqualified McNally for 12 years for integrity breaches.

The Bowler Hats also ordered the trainer to contribute a cool €50,000 towards the cost of the inquiry.

McNally's 12-year ban was the longest ever handed out to an Irish licence holder and, although he later lost his appeal, the final four years were suspended.

This matter is actually before the High Court at the moment. Following McNally's disqualification, *Dreal Deal* moved to the

John McConnell stable in the ownership of **Mark Devlin**, where he won just two races from 18 starts.

The nag's final start for McConnell was an unplaced effort in Sligo, where he came to the attention of new trainer **Philip Rothwell**. The latter bought into him privately after the race, along with joint owners **Mark Devlin**, **Nigel O'Hare** and **Philip Smith**, who then asked Rothwell to train the horse.

It certainly looks like the right move.

PHILIP ROTHWELL also made headlines at Ballinrobe recently, albeit for all the wrong reasons.

His charge, Coolboy Christie, owned by the Geesala Racing Group syndicate and ridden by Tiernan Power Roche, was the subject of a running and riding enquiry following an unplaced finish in the O'Hare's Bar Maiden Hurdle.

The acting stewards on the day, with Anthony Ryan in the saddle as chairman, ruled that the horse had not been ridden to attain the best possible finishing position. This was despite the nag being found by the IHRB veterinary officer to be clinically abnormal post-race.

Coolboy Christie was duly suspended for 60 days, while Roche got 14 days.

Rothwell had stated that his jockey "could have been seen to make more of an effort in the closing stages" and, therefore, was given the all clear.

KIA'S CONSISTENT FORM

HISTORY OFTEN repeats itself and 'Glorious Goodwood' – or not so glorious this year – once

again saw the big-spending owners of Amo Racing remove some of their high-profile horses from trainer **Ralph Beckett**. According to the *Oirish Sun*, the horses removed included *Partying*, a £4.6m Frankel filly.

Four years ago at the exact same meeting, moneybags **Kia Joorabchian** removed no less than 10 horses from Beckett when the two boys were, apparently, "not seeing eye to eye".

Despite the latest move, Beckett insists there is no rift with the volatile racehorse owner and football "super-agent" but did accept that the exit midway through the season was "unusual".

Ironically, while the big spending Amo operation has been having a torrid season so far, the same cannot be said of Beckett, who oversaw a remarkable group race treble at Goodwood's recent Sussex Stakes race day.

Having saddled the fillies *Saqqara Sands* and *Tabiti* to a dead heat in a Group 3 contest (with both fillies gaining valuable black type in the process), the Sussex Stakes field then chose to ignore the Beckett-trained pacemaker *Qirat* in the Group 1 Visit Qatar Sussex Stakes.

This left the unconsidered 150/1 handicapper to come home in front.



Philip Rothwell