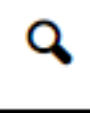


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Cultural Books

'One City, One Book' Festival Celebrates 'Fallen' by Lia Mills

By Rachel Casey - Mar 24, 2016

Now in its eleventh year, 'One City, One Book' is a festival set up by Dublin City Council's Public Library Services to celebrate reading, by encouraging everyone in Dublin to read a book connected to the city during the month of April. Previous books have included *The Barrytown Trilogy* by Roddy Doyle and *Strumpet City* by James Plunkett.

The chosen book this year is *Fallen*, by Lia Mills. I spoke to the author on how it came about that her book was picked. "[It] was chosen because of its link with 1916 – This is a centenary year, and *Fallen* has a lot of potential connections with commemorative events."

As part of the Centenary celebrations, and in a special twist this year, Dublin City Council has teamed up with Libraries NI, the library authority for Northern Ireland, to make 'Two Cities, One Book'. Dublin will be joined with Belfast to make one big book club and celebrate the book.

"[This is] the most thrilling feature of the festival, for me," Mills admits, "I love that readers in both cities will connect through one book, and that book clubs in Dublin have been 'twinned' with book clubs in Belfast and that they'll meet to talk about it. Those connections will continue when the festival is over."

Fallen, by Lia Mills, is the story of Katie Crilly, her family, and their lives during the 1916 Rising. After the death of her brother a year beforehand while fighting for the Allies in World War 1, Katie finds herself in the middle of the events of Easter Week 1916. She is torn between her loyalty to her brother and what he died for, and her loyalty to her country.

Fallen is the story of the Rising told from the perspective of someone who lived through it. It's easy to forget that the people of Dublin at the time had no idea what was going on when the Volunteers marched through the streets and occupied buildings around the city centre. We get caught up in the heroism of people like Pearse and Connolly, but it's with hindsight that they're seen this way. At the time they were looked at as dreamers and the Rising was seen as futile. Mills manages to come away from this epic hero-style story and gives us an intimate and more human view of the Rising.

A walk through the city centre prompted the idea for *Fallen*. "Years ago, in town, I had a sudden sense of today's city receding and the old walls rose up around me." Mills tells me. "I realised that I was looking more or less directly at the place where my mother was born – over the shop, on Parnell Street. That sense of the old city made me see me for the first time that my mother's family were there during the Rising, with the British Army camped outside their door trying to shoot and burn the garrison out of the GPO."

It was this realisation that her family were personally connected to the Rising that provoked the idea for the story. "I had never thought that my family had any connection with the Rising, we have no stories about it, but that day I saw that they were absolutely connected to it because they lived through it. I wondered what that would be like [...] it made me think about the Rising in a different way. Stories often come from that kind of shift in perspective – a *duh!* moment."

It also looks at other social changes happening in and around Ireland that would have been important to people at the time. Suffrage and the First World War were significant backdrops to the character's lives. Speaking about her novel, Mills says, "*Fallen* is not just about the Rising: it's about war and grief, and about all kinds of issues from that period, like women's campaign for the vote and for the right to third level education – and love. It's a love story too."





The book has a very evocative sense of place, reminiscent of Joyce's *Ulysses* in its descriptions of Dublin at the time. It makes the city as important to the story as the characters themselves, and it's this connection to Dublin that makes it the perfect book for this year's 'One City, One Book' festival.

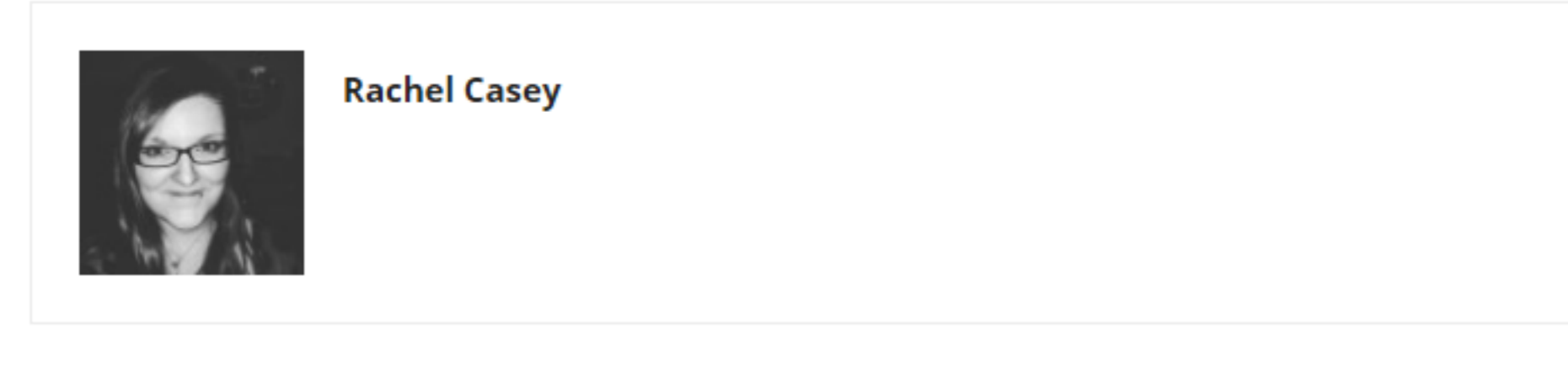
The chosen book (or writer) has to have a strong link with Dublin and it needs to suggest different ways to interact with readers and with the city. And *Fallen* does just that. During the month-long celebration there are many events and talks lined up throughout Dublin and Belfast connected to the Rising, but also to the other aspects of the book. There is a discussion on women's lives and activism during the time of the Easter Rising, a talk about the changes in fashion during the period and a talk about women and art in 1916. As well as this there are discussions about the Rising itself, a docu-drama set during Easter Week and readings from *Fallen* by Lia Mills.

All of this culminates in the flagship event on 20th April. 'All Sorts of Wild Reports' is an evening of dramatised descriptions of the Rising told from the diaries of women including a volunteer nurse, an opera singer and an activist. Most of the events are free to enter and a full programme of events is available on the One City, One Book [website](#).

Fallen is available from Penguin Books and bookshops and libraries throughout Dublin and Belfast.











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Rachel Casey

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