



## NOIRELAND International Crime Festival

### PANEL:

Jane Casey, Liz Nugent, Gary Donnelly and Alan Judd with Paul Waters.

PW: Welcome to crime of the times with NOIRELAND on this virtual Literary Festival, NOIRELAND supposed to be taking place in March and like many literary festivals, it's now postponed till October. So I hope to see people there in person when that comes, but in the meantime NOIRELAND 's an international crime fiction festival that takes place in Belfast, it was originally set up by Catherine Armstrong, Angela McMahon, and David Torrans of the No Alibis bookshop on Botanic Avenue, which is my favorite bookshop. And at the minute it's closed, like book shops all over the country, but it's still delivering books, operating online and it's managed to send out 1000 books to children in care and foster care. So we have a fantastic panel to talk about crime fiction today we have Liz Nugent. Our Little Cruelties. We have Jane Casey. We have Gary Donnelly, Blood will be Born, and we have Alan Judd. And I would like to ask everyone to begin with a little bit of a self isolation quarantine confession or how you're coping. Mine is it's been far too long since I had a haircut. Liz, what about you?

LN: And my confession is that I quite like it quite like, I quite like my husband, fortunately. So, it's been quite a pleasure to spend this much time with him. I did venture out yesterday, but I was stopped by the police, and they said, 'Where are you going?' And I had to confess that I was going to buy a blender. And they said, 'now would that be a necessary item ? And I said, 'Well, I'm trying to make pesto'. And the guard said, 'Would you not buy a frozen pizza instead?' And he sent me home. So I wasn't allowed to go out and buy a blender.

PW: Jane, what about you?

JC: Oh, I just find it the rest of the world is basically living the way I live my life usually, this is this is pretty normal for me to just stay and not see people work from home and try and ignore everything that's going on as much as possible. So that's basically where I am, like everybody else is just operating at my speed for once.



PW: Hmm. Gary Donnelly, I see you've been growing a beard.

GD: Well, I have to say, Paul, I've always been a part of the bearded membership, you see. So it's just it's just sort of finding a life of its own until my wife puts her foot down.

PW: Okay. And Alan, what about you?

AJ: Well, like others, I find it no great difference to normal life. I'm lucky enough to live in the country. We've got woods and fields all around us, limitless walks, you can carry on as normal.

PW: Okay, well, let's talk about some of the books and I'd like to start with you Liz if that's okay. And your book, *Our Little Cruelties*. Would you read an excerpt from it and then maybe tell us a little bit about what it's about.

LN: Okay, I'll read just a very short snippet from the from the prologue.

All three of the Drumm brothers were at the funeral. Although one of us was in a coffin, three is an odd number, so there had always been two against one. Although we all switched sides regularly. Nobody would ever have described us as close. As the service began, I became tearful. My living brother and I stood side by side at the top of the crematorium, while people lied to us about what a brilliant man our brother had been. All the usual meaningless cliches. His death was sudden, horrific. The investigation was quick and conclusive. I was not a suspect. I had a sense of freedom and relief I hadn't felt for quite a while. I didn't expect that this air of serenity would last. But I thought I would enjoy it while I could.

PW: Thank you very much indeed. Tell us a bit about *Our Little Cruelties*, there are brothers involved.



LN: There are brothers involved, there are three brother is one of them the coffin, and one of them killed him. You have to go through the entire book to find out which brother killed which brother and why. So it's a why done it, It's a who knows, and who is it? Because you don't know who the murder victim is. You don't know who the murderer is, and you don't know why the murder happened.

PW: And you managed to sustain that right to the very end. Very good twist.

LN: Thank you. Thank you. It's set in Dublin; contemporary Dublin and it spans the life of the three boys from the kind of early 70s right up to present day. So kind of spans my lifetime and I'm 52 so the oldest brother I think 51 by the end of the book, so it spans their lifetime and it takes in some seminal moments in Irish cultural history, and

PW: I remember going to Slane

LN: Yes, there's a trip to Slane to the Bob Dylan concert, there's a trip to the Phoenix Park to see the Pope's mass. And there's all kinds of ,it is the equal marriage referendum, which was huge here in 2015. So all of these things are little markers that are used to mark the passage of time and take in the big events that would have happened during my lifetime in Ireland.

PW: And there's a bit of glamour in Cannes and the United States as well.

LN: Yes, there's the Oscar ceremony and the Cannes Film Festival feature. And because one of the one of the brothers is a very successful film producer, another brother is a very successful pop star and the other one is the jealous, school teacher turned agent.

PW: Okay, well, thank you very much indeed. And Jane, I suppose I should have said that all of us are from Ireland, except for Alan. It's fair to say, worked in Ireland. And but Jane, your book is The Cutting Place. And would you read a bit from that and tell us a bit about it?



JC: Yeah, absolutely. And before I before I start reading just a tiny bit of context. It is the ninth in the Maeve Kerrigan series of police procedurals, which are all set in London. And this one is, it begins with the discovery of some body parts on the banks of the Thames. So, very quickly, the police work out who the body parts belong to. It's a young freelance journalist. And she's been investigating a very privileged gentleman's club it transpires. But at the beginning of, at this point, we don't know what her investigation is, and we don't know what she found out that might have put her life in danger. So this is a bit from two years before the action of the beginning of the book.

To his great disappointment, he wasn't dead. He just felt that way. A bird had woken him singing frantically in the tall trees that screen the house from the road, throwing an alarm call into the still silence. And how did he know about the trees? It had been dark when they got there, piling out of the car onto the gravel drive, and he had been drunk already. Whose house, whose idea to go there, who had been with him in the car jammed up against his legs, a high heeled sandal digging into his instep when the girl moved carelessly. Who had stolen the champagne, handing him a bottle that he tipped down his front in the dark on the motorway.

Waking up properly with slow, a process of adjustments. He had a temperature, but no he didn't. It was the room that was hot. He felt dreadful. He was ill. No hangover. The thumping headache, the nausea, the felted surface of his tongue, the burning dryness of his eyeballs. All of that was a hangover. There was someone lying beside him. But no there wasn't. It was a coverlet rucked up into a ridge that pressed against his thigh companionably. His watch had been stolen. No, he hadn't worn a watch. He had dreamed such a strange, exciting dream, weird and utterly wrong. Not a dream. He sat up. He remembered. The bird was quiet now. Stunned into silence by the heat of the day. The curtains were open, limp in the airless warmth. The sun struck into the room across the floor. And here came fear like an unwanted guest swaggering into the room to sit on the edge of the bed and chatter.

PW: Thank you very much. And it's kind of nice to have a book that portrays journalists in a vaguely positive light. Not that they come to a good end. And tell us a bit about it. There's this picture of the suspicious club. How do you pronounce it? Is it the Chiron Club?



JC: The Chiron club. Yeah, it's the Chiron Club. It is a club for the children of the wealthy and privileged and advantaged. Basically they're recruited when they are too stupid to know better. And then it's a club for people who don't really fear the consequences of any of their actions because they know that people can always be paid off. They think they can buy their way out of anything or use their kind of personal influence to get out of any situation that they find themselves in. So it's a fairly dark world. But Paige Hargreaves, who's the journalist who ends up in pieces in the Thames. She sort of is determined to pursue this story. And, you know, it is a positive view of journalists. I was really interested by the idea that because so much journalism is freelance now, you, you take your life into your hands to get the story before you even can get the support of any kind of editor or news organization. So, that was a big thing for me. I always I'm always interested in how women might experience the world differently. And I think for her, she puts herself in harm's way to do her job instead of doing the fashion journalism that people felt was suitable for a young woman. She really wants to go and find a big story and she thinks she's found this with this one.

PW: That's quite a nice insight into Thames life, mud larking and that sort of thing.

JC: Yeah, well, I went mud larking going to do my research for this and it was absolutely fascinating. The Thames is just like nothing changes in it. So when we went looking, we found kind of bits of Victorian pipes and I mean, ancient things that have just been thrown in there and stayed there for the last 1000 years. 2000 years. You find Roman bits and pieces, I found a bit of Roman tile that I would not have known what it was. I was with someone who was a guide to the Thames and showed us the whole thing but it was it was an extraordinary thing to do. And then great fun to write about.

PW: Is it smelly?

JC: It's one of the nicest places I've ever been in London. It's really fresh and clear. And the water is is amazing. And when you're down below the traffic, you don't get the fumes and everything. So we were we were by St Paul's Cathedral, and it was the quietest and most peaceful place I've ever been and you can just hear the water lapping against the forshore.



PW: Sounds lovely apart from the body parts. But moving on to Gary Donnelly, *Blood will be Born*, set in Belfast. Hello, Gary, tell us about or tell us about the book and then read us a bit

GD: Thanks very much. I think it's probably worth saying that, you know, I'm a relative newcomer to this esteemed field. And it's been my real pleasure in some ways during this lockdown, to be able to devote more of a full time focus to writing. So I think for any of our listeners or viewers today, who have had the switch routines, just remember that actually, there's the strength through your flexibility at this time, as much as anything else. You know, going back to *Blood will be Born* here. To introduce it *Blood will be Born* really is, as you say rightly so it's a Belfast based crime and mystery thriller. And it's set in my own sort of slightly tweaked version of contemporary post conflict, Belfast. And it follows really the four intersecting stories of the lead protagonists, particularly DI Owen Sheen, who arrives from London, on a secondment from the Metropolitan Police, and his ostensible role is to begin a sort of serious historical investigations units. But in fact, you know, he has a particular agenda, which is to determine and find out who murdered his brother many years before when they were both children in Belfast. Really from that little seed, the rest of the story kind of begins to unroll and grow. The other lead characters kind of twist and turn in a fairly organic way around Sheen's core agenda. And, and that's where we that's where we grow it from.

PW: Okay, would you read a bit for us, please?

GD: I'd be delighted to Yeah. This little section comes not long after Sheen arrives back in Belfast. And he revisits the almost totally, totally gone neighborhood of Sailortown which has been reclaimed and rebuilt upon near the dockside in Belfast.

Place has been in decline since the 50s then after the bomb here in the early 90s, that was really it. Terrible. It's sort of killed off what remained of the community, not just the kids who got murdered. The bomb that killed his brother, he had been in Belfast for less than an hour and already it was mentioned. The past it was an invisible presence here a ghost in the works, which meant the truth was here. All he had to do was look, my name is Sheen, Gerard, I need a driver on call this weekend. Someone reliable, discreet. I can pay you well. It only be a few runs. He said. Gerard's pale, gray eyes remained on Sheen and he did not reply. Sheen added 'All above board, purely for my convenience' he said. Gerard nodded ever so slightly. I



work for the company and I'm on duty this weekend. Their calls have to come first and if they find out, they won't be happy. Sheen reached into his pocket, got his wallet and took out the money 'Discretion is my middle name. I don't want to get you into a jam. If you're busy. I can wait' he said. 'If you call, I will come ,agreed.' he said. Before Sheen could say anything else. Gerard turned in his seat and started up the engine. Quickly putting the Saloon through a tight U turn. He took the same route back to the motorway. As they climbed the slip road Sheen looked back at the sorry line of houses, at the slouching ruin of Muldoon's. A single gull was perched at the apex of the warehouse at the end of the street. Beyond Sheen could see the well planned newness of a Belfast reborn. The gull spread it's gigantic wings, flapped once, flew away. Sheen watched the remains of Sailortown until it dropped out of sight. He was thinking about his dead brother, about finding the man who left the car bomb, about reclaiming some justice from the past no matter what the cost.

PW: Thank you very much. It's lovely hearing about Sailortown because I used to drink there in the Rotterdam Bar and Pat's bar, gone now. And there's also a kind of an Old Testament feel that I kind of sort of miss and sort of don't miss that seems to be influencing what you've got there.

GD: Yes, I mean, I think it's an interesting challenge writing a book, as you say, about a place, which in the case of, much of Sailortown doesn't exist and indeed for me personally, a place that I haven't lived in for 20 odd years. Do you know, I'm based in London and I live and work here. But, you know, I'm minded of what a US historian, I can't remember his name said, you know, 'we don't live in the past, but the past lives in us.'. And I think that's a that was a really pervasive kind of funeral in a way that propelled things forward when I was writing this book. And I think just emerged as a very strong theme as well.

PW: Okay, thank you very much. And then Alan Judd. Alan Judd's book here is Accidental Agent. And before we were all being driven mad by Coronavirus, we were being driven mad by Brexit. Brexit pops up in this Alan tell us about the book and read us a bit please.

AJ: Well, I suppose about half my novels are spy novels. This is I think the fifth. They feature a central figure who runs throughout called Charles Thoroughgood. Charles Thoroughgood has the enviable ability of not aging as he should age, unlike his author. Because each book wasn't planned to have a successor so when I



started out with him, he was quite new in MI6 and on his training course, now he's chief of MI6 and he's coming up for retirement at the start of this novel. It has a Brexit context, when it was written last Brexit was going on. It's not about Brexit. And nor does it take sides because I thought that would be fatal because whichever side you take, you lose half your readership and straight away. So it starts with showing, trying to show, that for people in intelligence services like MI6, they are ordinary people like us they have private lives. They have families, and the personal and the professional often interact. So I'll read just the first couple of paragraphs.

Reflecting on it afterwards, it seemed to Charles Thoroughgood, that that the whole sad affair began with a wedding reception. The origins long predated that, of course, germinating secretly in the characters and careers of the principal actors. But it was at that sunlit reception on the lawn of a large house in southwest London, that it all began to unravel. Or come together. Depending on how you looked at it. There was it turned out no pattern in the carpet that Charles hadn't spotted because he wasn't looking. Even if he had looked, it would have seemed fanciful to perceive such an emergent shape. It was his failure. He had to admit afterwards, as Chief of MI6 part of his job was to be alive to such possibilities, but he had allowed familiarity and friendship, enemies of vigilance to cloud his sight. Not to mention complacency and harder to admit age. The pattern was in the carpet all along, but he did not see it until was too late. Almost.

PW: Thank you. And so spy novels, we're used to spying on the enemy, whoever they are, a State or an organization. But in this, the spying that's going on or might be going on is kind of with our allies or, at least, our spy friends.

AJ: Yeah. And that is a real problem for spies. I mean, spying on the enemies is what you expect spy organizations to do of course, spying on your friends is actually a much more dangerous activity and not something to be undertaken lightly. And the problem posed in the book, the question posed in the book is, what do you do if you think your friends are spying might be spying on you? Or what do you do if your friends offered to spy for you? It's a difficult one, and you have to tread very carefully and probably the answers are the same time both right and wrong.

PW: There is no right or wrong answer. Well, let's broaden things out a bit. I want to talk about some different approaches to crime. And beginning with, I guess, the times that we're in the Coronavirus. And so crime fiction reflects very well, the lives



that we lead and society, it's maybe one of the best genres to do that. But I've heard different attitudes about writing about the time that we're in now. So on the one hand, we have, Peter May has a book out, Lockdown, about London in the grip of quarantine and a pandemic. Perfectly to be fair to him he wrote it a long time ago, but it's just been released now. Perfect timing. On the other hand, Tony Kent who has his third book, Power Play out at the minute. He was writing his fourth one, halfway through it and there's a pandemic theme in it and he thought. He was struck down himself with Coronavirus for a while and has recovered thankfully. He thought, I'm scrapping this I can't profit from other people's misery or be seen to profit from it, maybe sometime in the future, but not now. So he scrapped it and he's writing something else. Is there an ethical question about writing about Coronavirus? Or how should we do it? Or do you think how will we do it and will people want to read about it?

Liz?

LN: I think it's a difficult one because we don't know what the final result is going to be. We don't know whether it's going to end in civil unrest, civil rioting, an uprising of some sort. We don't know if it's how much of the globe it's going to wipe out, we don't know if Africa is going to be decimated. So I think, I think it's tough. But I mean, there are plenty of opportunities within this. I mean, you could kill a lot of people under cover of Coronavirus, and just, you know, you because if you say, for example, if I wanted to kill my husband (which I don't) if I wanted to kill my husband, and I could say, you know, well, he was coughing for a long time, but he didn't want to go to the hospital. And I just smothered him and put a pillow over his head. I'm very strong. But if I did that, and then called the doctors, or whatever, I don't think they would test a dead body, who I'm saying had all of the symptoms. Do you know what I mean? So, there's lots of opportunities for crimes to happen. That wouldn't necessarily be taking advantage of it. But I think it's too soon for those books to be written. I think, I think we'd have to wait quite a while, maybe a year before people are ready to read about the effects. Because the effects might be far more devastating than we know now. Sorry,

PW: Alan - you're nodding. What do you think?

AJ: All right, me. He's saying, Oh, yeah. Well, I agree. I think it would be very silly or unwise anyway to right now, because you're living in the breaking of the waves, and you don't know what the case is going to look like. And most novels of any good about the two world wars were written within five or 10 years after those wars. They



weren't during it. And as Liz says, We don't know where this thing is going. It might turn out not to be anything like as bad as people think. You never know. You just don't know. But it is, as you say, excellent cover for committing murders, if it's murder we're talking about. And I'm sure people will make use of it. But in the immediate aftermath, people might want to read about things that are completely different, different period, different times even.

PW: What do you think, Jane? Is it? Is there almost a duty to cover it in some way?

JC: I think that crime fiction in particular is very quick to respond to things that happen in the world. I always feel like you get a response to major events in crime before you find it in other genres. I feel like the literary authors, maybe sit back and sit with it for a while and then write about it as you were saying, Alan, 10 years down the line. And maybe we tend to be quite good at taking a snapshot of society at a particular moment. I mean, I think crime is all about society. And new crimes come up all the time based on what's happening in society. So there are opportunities for writing about how different things are. As, as Liz was saying, you know, without knowing the ending, you can't really construct a good story in the middle. But I could see, I would love to write a short story set during this time about what's happening at this moment, because that's all that we can look at. But I think in terms of writing a novel, I'm not sure I would want to live with it for that long as well. I'm not sure whether I would want to relive this experience at the moment, I might need a little bit of distance between myself and you know, this very strange, stressful time that we find ourselves in.

PW: Gary, you've written about times in a way that you've been through but with maybe a safe space of years that have gone by, do you think it needs that time as well?

GD: Well, there's, there's two questions here isn't there, really, there's the question of whether we can and there is the question of whether we ought to do so? In terms of whether we can, I'm of a mind if anyone can we can. We who are up at the sort of wonderful creative edge of an industry which hinges and lives and dies upon our imaginations as much as our quality of our research. So, you know, I'm of the mind that if, you know, you certainly can do it. And regardless of the practicalities of the outcome, there's always the kind of escape hatch, which is 'ah but', you know, in the parallel universe, very similar to the one in which you inhabit but which my writing



describes. It is a kind of unpredictable and slightly sort of at variant outcome, term permitting, my characters to kind of experience. So you know, I think there's that and to give an example of that in my book I really wanted, I needed in a sense, a mental health institution in Belfast, rather than on the outskirts of Belfast, and I just kind of made it really and, and, you know, no one's brought me up on that. And then in a similar way, I've heard other authors, you know, respond to criticisms from those who catch them out on little factual what they viewed to be factual inaccuracies or inconsistencies. And the argument simply can be batted back. Well, you know, what, in my parallel world, that's how that's how it rolls. In terms of whether we ought to look - , I think, someone told me a really important piece of advice, when I started writing, which was don't write with your mom on your shoulder, or looking over your shoulder because you'll never write anything, in a sense. And I think, you know, whether we have a responsibility to kind of keep away from certain issues, I think it's a dodgy thing whenever those of us who are involved in any form of fiction, in particular crime fiction, begin to kind of create holy cows or sacred cows that we don't touch on them. I'm minded of the time Stephen King wrote a really long short story, I think was Apt Pupil which dealt with issues surrounding the Holocaust and issues surrounding war crimes, and he was taken aside by someone within his own camp and they said ' you shouldn't be doing that really you're not you're not from a background that has a right to express that story or to articulate that. Not unlike a current debate in American literature at the minute and he disagreed and I, I tend to disagree. I think if not us, as writers, then then who? Who can kind of create a place in which we can imaginatively explore and express some of the issues this really terrible time presents for us in a way.

PW: One of the books, I don't want to say which one, that prompted this thought. We're stuck at home. Are we more likely to be writing books in which we're killing off our neighbors or are we hating our neighbors or are we are we liking our neighbors at the minutes pick somebody at random - Jane?

JC: One of my neighbors has chosen this time to learn to play the drums. And he practices every day, between one o'clock and three o'clock. And then later on, perhaps in the evening between seven and nine, he practices with the window open. And if that man can survive the Coronavirus lockdown, any of us can, because I really feel people are going to be going around to his house and burning it down very shortly. Yeah, I mean, I think any anything that puts us under stress is, can produce extreme violence is my feeling. Like a lot of the time something changing is what provokes us into, into lashing out because humans are not great at changing, they're not. We're adaptable, but it takes us a little bit of time to come around to that and our



initial instinct is panic and fear. And so yeah, it's the potential for this to sort of spill over into more extreme action is always there.

PW: Liz, are you wanting to kill a neighbor?

LN: Not particularly I do have some feelings of matricide at the moment because I'm delivering shopping to my mother. And much as I love her, she does have a complaint every single time. And the latest one was 'Did you not know I am allergic to the Saint Emillion grape.' And the time before it was 'They're the wrong size binbags. And the time before it was, 'well, I liked the pie. The pastry was lovely, but the inside was too dry'. And you know that kind of drives me to distraction. But I do think it's very tough for her, you know, she's not allowed out of her house, the over 70s in Ireland are not allowed out of their homes at the moment. And luckily she has a garden but at the same time, she's very social at 70 year old and would normally be down in Nice with her friends at this time of year. So it's it's very tough for her to be locked in and locked up. So I'm trying to be patient, but she is trying my patience.

PW: So that's your husband and your mother.

Alan, I know in yours you kind of mix domestic with the great international stage and spying and that but are any of your family or immediate neighbors in danger from you? Maybe in your next book.

AJ: We're lucky enough as I said to live in the country and the problem for us is really finding a neighbor. I mean, we can go out and find one and maybe wave across fields, but generally we're not, we're not bothering each other at all. So it's quite nice to see someone and be able to talk across the hedge or across the lane or something like that. So no, not much danger here in Sussex at the moment.

PW: Okay, Gary, I don't know - maybe you've got a class of children, you might want to finish off.

GD: Well, I've got to be very careful. I've also got two fairly young children at home. I've got to say, actually, you know, I'm blessed with wonderful neighbors here. And thankfully, my parents in Belfast are also very, very fortunate in that way. And a tremendous amount of good has come from this tremendous amount of, of cohesion



and sort of nodding to one another and talking to that stranger, would be stranger over the fence or over the way. I think from a sort of writing point of view, it's a kind of anxiety isn't it for, for better or worse. I've been kind of sitting on anxiety that you know, what, what if everything that comes out of this, from a creative perspective is a little bit same same. You know, it will lack the kind of access to a wider social palette, that so often, at least for me, and I don't know about you guys who are with us today. Very frequently, it's something that I can find I dip into. I remember, I can't remember the name of the musician, but there was a famous musician in the 90s, who, you know, he could have worked from home but he decided to go in and out of Soho in London every day. And you know, he said the very the very kind of cadence from the train and the and the sounds and the kind of background vibe that he got going on the tube, kind of fed into the music and the beats that he was creating. So I wonder whether, you know, there may well be people writing about murdering neighbours. But I hope that it doesn't create a kind of blandness to the literature which is coming out. I dare say there are a few people, that are going back to our previous question and answer that you know, there will be a quite a few pandemic related themed books, and we'll probably be richer and better for it.

PW: I wonder do the rest of you feel like this helps creativity or a bit of reduced stimulation is a problem? Do you have more time or less stimulation, how does that balance workout? I don't know, Liz?

LN: I'm finding it very difficult, I have to say, to have concentration to write. Because I'm so stuck on news reports and the latest figures and I'm particularly worried about my friends in America and in the UK, to a lesser extent, and cheering for my friends in New Zealand who seem to have really got it under control, and Iceland. And, you know, it's all through the crime writers network that I know these people. But yeah, I'm finding it really hard to concentrate. Also, I'm writing a play. So I don't know whether it's because it's the first time I've written a play, and I'm finding it so difficult, or whether it's because I'm just finding it difficult because of the circumstances. I can't tell. But yeah, just my concentration span is definitely less than it was, definitely less than it was.

PW: Alan, you are in splendid isolation. But it's one thing choosing that and another thing having to stay there being told you have to stay in. How is it affecting what you're writing?



AJ: Well, it's not really a moment and I find I'm much busier than I normally am. I'm busier in ways that I don't particularly want to be busy at. But nonetheless there are things around the place that need doing. I'm not doing new books at the moment because I've just finished one and it's with my editor. It's a novel about Christopher Marlowe the playwright. So in a sense, you could say, a murder novel. And I'm waiting for his editorial suggestions before I get on with the next book. So I'm in a bit of a hiatus, and it's quite a good time to be fiddling around doing other things. But I have one question that I'd like to ask the panel if I'm allowed to do this. And it's something that that has come up with us here in talking to friends. How many of us, here now, know someone who was murdered? *Knew* someone who was murdered? I'll start, I knew, two. And I was surprised to discover that my wife knew two and I thought, is there something suspicious about us, you know, is it, is this very unusual or not? Does anyone else know?

LN: No, nobody? Nobody ever No, never.

JC: Liz and I have met a murderer.

LN: We have

JC: Liz and I met a murderer. But I also met another kind of murderer who was very small and fat and hairy and it was a dog that has tripped up his owner. And she fell. She fell down a flight of stairs on unfortunately right. But he was much loved by the woman who rehomed him. And she looked after him very well, but I couldn't quite feel the same about him knowing that it had killed

AJ: Well, meeting murderers is is a different thing too because many fewer people claim to have known murderers and claim to have known someone who was murdered. Yeah,

PW: Well, I can say yes to both of those.

AJ: You can., can you?



PW: People who have been on the receiving end and people who've doled it out, yeah.

I suppose they might say it was all in a political context. And some of them would say it was legally sanctioned, and they would argue about that and Yeah, it's, it's, it's, it's hard to get past it. The murderers were all very charming, very erudite, interesting, guys. All men, and for a good company. But on the other hand, they had, yeah, they had all killed people. Yeah. And these ones had all done time for it as well. So they had all done their time. Yeah. Yeah.

GD: Yeah, just it's fascinating hearing this really I mean, not knowingly in terms of knowing have I actually have been in touch with anyone who has been a murderer or a killer. No, not knowingly. And I say not knowingly because, you know, do we ever know? do we ever know? I mean, I think this is one of the kind of hanging points of crime fiction you know, obviously, within our immediate family and friends we think we know and yet, you know, A good friend of mine who's actually a London guy, sort of told me over a beer about six months ago I found out that a man that I knew, that he killed his wife and spent some time in a, in an institution. Really? Yeah. I said 'did you ever know?' 'Never knew, never knew' The family didn't talk about it. And I think, you know, again, these are the awesome, unusualnesses of existence, which crime fiction can just thrive on because as soon as you think of something, you say, oh, gosh, that sounds incredible. It sounds a little bit too tenuous. You hear something even more unusual from the real world. I mean, just echoing what Paul has said. I think we're coming from the sort of the context of the troubles and we both have quite clearly. You know, I think the whole, the whole the whole issue of of murder and death, had a sort of a different spin on it. You know that the guy who was my first kind of Santa Claus that I sat on the knee of, you know, that man was murdered. And way, way back, and I knew it at the time and I always, it sort of stuck with me a little bit that that particular man, who also worked as a milkman. Anna Burns will be doubly interested to hear. You know, he has gone down as one of the many, many, many murders that took place in that kind of carousel of violence. When I was when I was in school, you know, one of my friend's fathers was murdered. Do, you know, he was not a political person and it was a sectarian killing. And in the same year, a guy who I used to have my, my Belfast pat and pint of milk with it at lunch time was shot in the back. Again, wrong place at the wrong time. So you know, I think we, and I say we, clearly with what Paul has suggested, our orbit around that central sort of violence makes things slightly different. But nonetheless, I think, going back to Alan's question, which is such a good one, I think I think killing happens a lot more than we think. This is something that often strikes me when I watch documentaries on telly, and it strikes me, do you know, when I when I think



about crime statistics, and all that, I know that, you know. This is what we know. I mean, what, what goes on that we don't know. I don't know. Did you guys hear the fascinating story a couple of years ago, but the woman who, who killed her husband for one reason or another, and she buried him in the back garden, and had kind of joked with family and relatives that she'd bumped him off, and nobody took her seriously, but when she passed away, his body was found. You know, So...

PW I must admit, I used to feel betrayed because I worked as a journalist in Northern Ireland. And my parents would never talk about the various terrible and newsworthy things that were happening. They've talked about, to me inconsequential things, but they wouldn't tell me about all the dodgy killings, killers and murdered people that they knew of. And that was really sensible, because it was, I suppose, protecting us as children and looking on the brighter side of life. But I remember I sometimes I felt a bit betrayed that you had all this good intelligence I could have used but then they kept it to themselves. But I want to talk about a different kind of betrayal. All of you have betrayal as a kind of a central theme of your books. And I wonder, is it possible to write crime fiction without betrayal, like is it an essential intrinsic part of it? Liz, I wonder what you think?

LN: I'm just....

PW: I mean, in your book, there's betrayal all over between the brothers.

LN: All over it, but in the previous book Skin Deep. There is. Yes, there is betrayal, but it's not intentional because the central character Cordelia is a sociopath. So she's not planning on betraying people. It's just what she does, because she is self-interested and doesn't ever consider how other people might feel about her reactions. So when she and gets pregnant by her partner by her boyfriend's brother, she, it's just something that she does, you know, it's just something that, you know, she doesn't see as a betrayal. It's just something that happens and then, you know the consequences of how that play out and her reaction to the son that she bears have drastic consequences for every everybody she meets she destroys in one way or another. But yeah, it's not. It's not in that case. It's not intentional betrayal, but it's certainly in in Our Little Cruelties. Two out of the three brothers go out of their way to betray each other all of the time, all of the time.



PW: It's really terrible and entertaining to read. I was thinking

LN: The books really terrible? How dare you? (laughs)

PW: Terrible behavior.

Jane, I was thinking that in your one, there's so this betrayal that doesn't emerge until later on, and that is kind of understandable in some ways, but I think we'd be so much poorer for stories if there weren't people going around betraying each other in this way. It's a bit like the invention of the mobile phone that you know, spoils plotlines because you can just ring the police to ring for help. And I suppose if people weren't betraying each other so much things would work out much happier.

JC: Yeah, I mean I think I think murder - I've written 10 crime novels now and obviously all featuring murders. I think murder is just a such a selfish act whatever is the origin of it, it's always a very kind of base and selfish thing it's the solution to a problem that the murderer has. They see it as the as the way to fix it. That's kind of always the basic truth behind a murder that it's, it's, you know, 'I hate you. I'm envious of you. You embarrassed me. I need you to not exist anymore so that I can clear my path to do something.' So I mean, I never think of murder as being like a very glamorous thing. I always think it's a kind of, there is something so morally wrong in taking someone's life. And betrayal is, like to me, the big betrayal in a crime novel is always the fact that the life was taken. That's, you know, that's a betrayal of society, and of the kind of life that that character should have had. And I felt particularly writing *The Cutting Place*, it was probably the freelance journalist who is in pieces in the Thames at the start. Is probably the character that I feel most for, of all of the ones that I have killed in my books. I just feel very much like she's very alone, the whole way through her life. She's trying to make a life for herself and she really doesn't get the opportunities that she might have. And so I think her betrayal at the hands of her killer is one that really meant something to me when I wrote it.

PW: Not just her killer.

JC: She's betrayed by, Yeah, she's betrayed by a lot of people. And I think you know, self interest is what motivates a lot of people in that book. And sometimes it's, it's when we look at something like that, and we sort of think, Oh, well, I'd never do that. But then I sometimes wonder, what would make you do the terrible thing,



there's probably something - I would kill for my children. I know that. That's like a given, I would absolutely, you know, have no issues with killing if my children were in danger. I would certainly do that. But you know, would I, but I kill for any other reason, I hope not.

GD: I'm so sorry. I was smiling there because I thought, gee, I actually I thought you said 'I would definitely kill my children' rather than...

PW: Alan, in yours and there's a friendship and there's professional friendship and I wonder does professional friendship mean anything really? Does betrayal of professional friendship count as much?

AJ: I think if the problem with, part of the reason we write about betrayal is it's much easier to write about that and to write about loyalty. And loyalty and humor and motivation are overwhelmingly much more common characteristics in most intelligence services. Certainly in most organizations, than betrayal. Betrayal is always the exception. And, and it's not what characterizes them. Professional friendships, I think, are often quite close. But they often don't extend into the personal arena at all. People compartmentalize quite naturally, I think, in many of their lives. And when betrayal comes into it, you stretch out of that compartment into something else entirely.

PW: I wonder Gary - In your book, there's a lot of betrayal. There's the various different paramilitary factions, there's the police. And is it like the House of Commons and perhaps the Dáil, that your enemies are on your own side, betrayal, you know, comes from your own side, rather than the people sitting across from you.

GD: I mean, I think that can often be the case. And I think also, you know, betrayal is something which, which comes from within, as well, you know. I was thinking a lot about this, just what just as we're listening to these fascinating perspectives. And, and I didn't really, really realize actually how deeply betrayal features within the book, to some extent, and certainly I've done four books now, just under four and betrayal is very strongly featuring in at least two of them, when in terms of Blood will be Born. You know, what's fascinating about it, I think it's not so much the, the kind of surface stuff which I think you're absolutely right about, you know, the sense of, of having been betrayed by an individual or a faction within it, within a sort of, within



one of the conflicting parties. But actually, you know, one of my characters John Fryer, killing was never a problem for Fryer. And he made that pretty clear. But actually it was when he betrayed his own sense of a fairly warped for the, for the individualized sort of moral code. That was when things started to go wrong for him. That, you know, the character that he pairs up with Christopher Moore, you know, he has a perceived sense of betrayal of the memory of his father's legacy. And so, you know, I think you can play around with these things incredibly productively as a writer, it doesn't simply have to be a black and white. No, x betrays y, y, and x seeks revenge, although admittedly I did a little bit of that. And I think one of the things that emerged when I was writing my book what was the growing tension as to whether DI Sheen, who is this metropolitan police detective, he's spotless, he's objective and he's landed into this kind of mess, is he going to betray himself by seeking revenge? And seeking it in a way that the breaks all the rules of the life that he has devoted himself to. So, you know, I look not for not for the surface, the surface kind of presence of betrayal or even the surface presence of revenge, for that matter. But I do look for little coiled moments of tension that could potentially grow up into something slightly better. And I think betrayal and, and revenge are very useful from a crime writing perspective. When, when looking at those, as I said before, in an honest way, looking at those almost human conditions and human emotions. And like Jane said, God, we don't involve ourselves in anything like real crime or real murder. But it is a safe place within which to explore those dark emotions and for our readers to kind of explore them as well. So maybe maybe there's something to do with that.

PW: I want to bring this back to Coronavirus just as we come to the end. So people have been saying it's, it's the great leveler, and you know, kind of everyone is affected by this, but I don't think that is true myself. People, depending on their living arrangements. If you have a garden you can go out and enjoy it or you're in a flat 15 floors up, how noisy your neighbors are, how close you are to your neighbors. And can you afford deliveries, that sort of thing. But I wonder is this a time when crime fiction should be talking about class? And I suppose relative wealth more than ever I know, Jane in your book that's, like right up front, that there's this club of, club or trap of privilege. And is there - Is that something that we do enough about that we write or read enough about? Do you think?

JC: I mean, I think it comes into some books more than others. Like I always think in Ireland class is such a tricky thing to pin down. And Irish people are, they have a very different take on us. One of the things like I live in London, and I'm very aware of how people analyze you depending on your background, and you know, how you



conduct yourself and they feel comfortable if they can place you within a class, which I don't think is as common in Ireland. I think people are more likely to judge you based on other things. No, no better, really bad or worse than class. And I had one review of *The Cutting Place* that said they thought that it was very unbalanced because there were no nice, rich, people in it. And so I didn't realize the rich people were kind of, you know, discriminated against class. But I think the best crime fiction that is contemporary, reflects society and reflects those kinds of stresses. And I would completely agree with you, Paul like, the Coronavirus is picking out those people who are dependent on having to leave their house to go and do their job, the delivery drivers and the people who work in fast food places and like all those people who don't have the privilege of sitting at home, and enjoying watching Netflix. Like they actually have to go out and face the threats that are out there. And that's sort of, that's maybe one of the interesting angles of this, that you have this kind of this troupe of people who are really not regarded as being important, who turned out to be the most important people in our society. And I would love to think that what comes out of this whole period is a complete reassessing of what matters, and who matters and who the heroes are who maybe, you know, we just didn't see before. And so that's kind of my hope that people will change the way that they view the professions that maybe they didn't quite appreciate before.

PW: Alan, In *Accidental Agent*, you've, you've got to have the people at the top echelons. But you've also got people working for them. So people with far less wealth enter their lives and interesting things there, it's not always a happy involvement. But do you think that Jane is right? That things will change and in how we represent society in writing, this will be a kind of a shock to the system and how writers portray our society?

AJ: I don't know, I think we all of us consciously sometimes represent the societies we live in. And also probably in more important, unconscious ways we do it in ways we, between the lines that we're not even aware of ourselves. Whether this current situation will lead to any great change. I don't know. I can't remember who it was. But someone said that 'change in most human affairs is greater and slower than we appreciate.' And I suspect whatever form of normality returns to us eventually will not be so very different to what has gone before, but there might be gradual change.

PW: Okay. And Liz in in your book, *Our Little Cruelties*, one of the brothers in particular Luke, there's lots of glamour, you know, Cannes, the Oscars and Bono



type figures or maybe Gavin Friday type figures, I suppose I should say, but there's also you know, people living in isolation, with hardly any food, loneliness. So it's, there's that span, that spectrum, of living well in company and like having a kind of a hellish time.

LN: Yeah, I think working in the arts is also a great leveler, because it doesn't depend on your background or your education or your social class as to how well you do. And particularly with crime novels, we come from all types of different backgrounds, and before I was novelist, I worked in theatre. And that was a great leveler, because, again, people came from all kinds of different backgrounds. So I'm kind of used to the social mixing thing, and I, you know, I found when I was writing that family, that it would be very useful to have a mother who didn't, who had raised this very middle class family, but didn't come from a middle class background herself. And she had a family that she mostly ignored. And I found that kind of useful in order to explain her neurosis, and to partly explain how she treated her children differently. But going back to the Coronavirus thing, the writer Diana Souhami wrote something brilliant on Facebook the other day, she's approaching 80. And she said, 'I have an underlying illness and it's called life'. And I just thought what a brilliant line. And she was very resentful of the fact that she was being treated, in a way, like a toddler. You know, she's a very able, very glamorous, very sophisticated and very physically healthy woman who is being really forced to stay at home. I just felt, yeah, you know, this leveling of people is definitely not equal, you know, people are being put into boxes of, well, you can go out but you can't. Yeah and I do, I do really worry about the continent of Africa which has so little health services and healthcare and ventilators and access to medicines. And I think when it hits there, it's hard to think about what the consequences are going to be.

PW: Gary, you're at home. You're, you're cut off from the normal stimulus, from work from neighbors from the world outside and do you think that this is going to change the way you see the world? And maybe change the way you write about it in future?

GD: I think again, you know, just picking up on a lovely point that Alan made there, he said you know, be open to what is subconsciously or unconsciously more revealing and present for you. I think probably it will. And you know, in terms of what I think about Coronavirus, I echo everything that Liz said. You know, when death comes knocking, death is equal for everyone but doesn't equally come knocking for everyone. And the statistics play that out and as Jane said, we all hope for social



change to mirror the social inequalities and the social injustices with, in the way that this virus has been experienced. But to take it back to the writing experience, you know what I writing Blood will be Born, which was about four or five years ago now, you know, I kind of, I sort of use a metaphor, I kind of just put my antennae up. And I allowed any signal to kind of come in. That was there. And there was an awful lot of badness going on in the world at that time, the terrible events of Syria, the terrible events of ISIS, and the atrocities of ISIS were happening. And you know, retrospectively, as I edited that book more recently, which I have had to do for the most recent publication, I was like, Oh, my God. First of all, I couldn't believe I'd written something so dark and so intense in parts. And I could see it, I could see how those things seeped, leached into the writing. Do you know there's a lovely phrase, which says there's a common pool from which we all drink. I think it was Alan's idea about our own conscious impulses and pulls. So yes, I think it probably will. And I'm not necessarily sure of the way it will. And I do think though, that whenever we're talking about, you know, social change and social responsibility, I happen to go back to this idea of whether we can write and whether we ought to write, I think we can write about whatever we want. And I think we ought to write about whatever motivates and inspires us to do so. But you know, a little bit like protest songs, you know, good literature and good crime fiction, which has a social message, it tends to have a social message built around it rather than rather than the story built around the social message when it's most effective. And, you know, I still think that, you know, if you think about some of the greatest writers that we've got, if we think of Dickens, who was the voice of the marginalized, and the underrepresented and you think of Stephen King, who you take five years ago it wasn't very cool to say you liked Stephen King when I was at university but I always did. And you know, King has been lauded as a modern Dickens in many ways. Then you think of the other narratives that are so popular the things that are on Netflix, such as Breaking Bad, and Better Call Saul, written by Vince Gilligan. All of those things are the stories of characters, really underdogs, who are who are usually not the millionaire playboys with nothing to lose, although that would suggest Jane's story isn't fantastic and incredible and it is .

PW: Thank you very much. And thank you, everyone, we've come to the end of our NOIRELAND Crime of the Times session. Thank you, Liz Nugent, Our Little Cruelties. Alan Judd, Accidental Agent. Gary Donnelly, Blood will be Born. And Jane Casey, The Cutting Place. Thank you all for joining us. And my name is Paul Waters, author of Blackwatertown and this has been sponsored by the NOIRELAND international crime fiction festival, which you can go to, we hope, in person at the Clayton Hotel in Belfast on Saturday, the 10th of October. Fingers crossed, there are



going to be some fabulous people there, we'll be there we hope so you can get all this again. So thank you very much indeed. And Goodbye, everyone.

LN, JC, GD, AJ: Thank you. Thank you.