

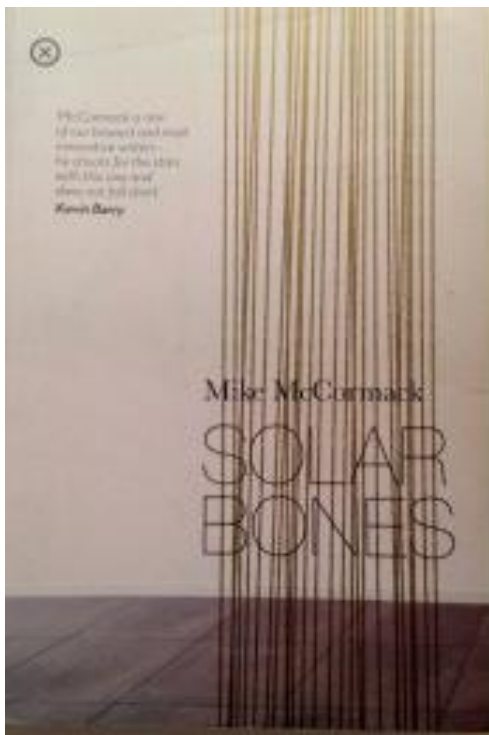
Solar Bones by Mike McCormack

Tramp Press, 2016

Prelude to Oblivion

On All Souls' Day when the dead are honoured, Marcus Conway is feeling pensive. A dependable family man and successful engineer, he is reflecting on what he has achieved so far. He also happens to be dead. Whilst pottering around the house he recalls past triumphs and set-backs, unaware that he is the lead character in his own ghost story. The reader is invited to step inside the mind of a recently deceased man as his life slowly flashes before his eyes.

'The living and the dead stood shoulder to shoulder sharing a joke and a fag.'



Written entirely as a stream of consciousness by this one central character, a unique insight is offered into his thoughts. A deep thinker who trained as a priest before choosing marriage and fatherhood, Marcus is oblivious to his own death as he sits at the kitchen table. His familiar surroundings feel slightly off kilter for reasons he cannot quite put his finger on.

Set in Mayo in the West of Ireland during the economic crash of 2008, the precarious nature of financial security prompts Marcus to re-examine those certainties on which he has built his life. With recent colossal shifts in world politics following the US election and Brexit, this context deeply resonates.

Here is a man suddenly keenly aware of a vast, wider history unfolding as concepts seemingly far removed from individual lives threaten to pull the rug from under them. Marcus realises the huge responsibility citizens have in voting for change and ultimately the shared blame when things go wrong.

'What did you expect electing such clowns to public office?'

Solar Bones is a love letter to family life and an outstanding achievement by ground-breaking writer Mike McCormack. Experimental in style and almost entirely devoid of traditional punctuation, the book has no chapters and not a single full stop. Far from being off-putting, this enables the internal monologue to flow naturally. It is full of those supposedly mundane details which make up a life and are infused with meaning, like the cheese sandwich lovingly made just the way he likes it by his wife. Memories and observations topple over one another, from his artist daughter writing in her own blood on the walls of her exhibition to early childhood conversations with his father.

The reader is encouraged to invest emotionally by joining Marcus at pivotal moments of his life and so when it finally comes, the intense, brutal impact of his death feels like the loss of a friend. Haunting but not frightening, this is a stunning eulogy from the dead man himself and a truly innovative take on the traditional ghost story. Comparisons to Ulysses are inevitable and deserved, as intimate minutiae fill a story that ultimately spans just one November day whilst covering a lifetime. Subtle and poetic, Solar Bones is an emotive reading experience that moved me to tears and a novel as beautiful as it is original.

About the Publisher

Tramp Press is a new, independent Irish publishing house committed to promoting unique literary voices and books of the highest quality. They aim to 'encourage, support and maintain Ireland's literary talent, and to enrich the lives of readers.'

About the Reviewer

Becky Danks is an avid reader, creative writer, dog lover, poet, and reviewer of books. Amongst other things! She was recently shortlisted for the Verve Poetry Festival Prize 2017. Follow her on Twitter: @BeckyD123