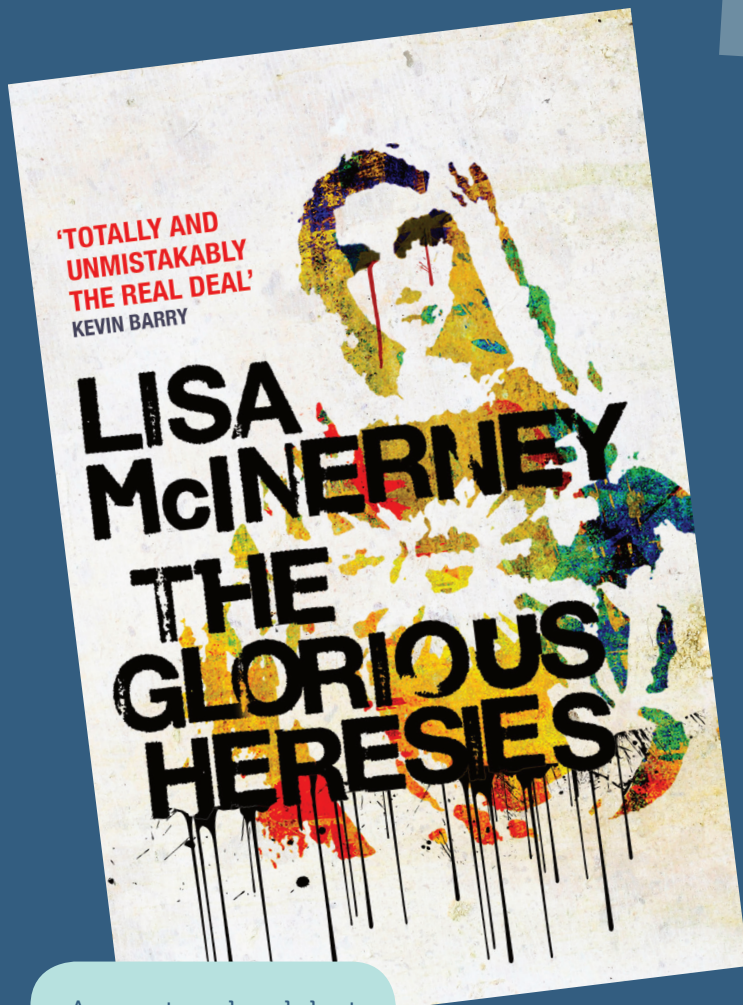


The emagazine

Close Reading Competition

2016-17



Write a 500-word close reading of the opening to Lisa McInerney's award-winning *The Glorious Heresies*.

Deadline

5pm Monday 30th January 2017

Prizes

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... humour and the sheer, seething, broiling energy of the prose, which is peppered with the kind of language your mother would call unforgivable.

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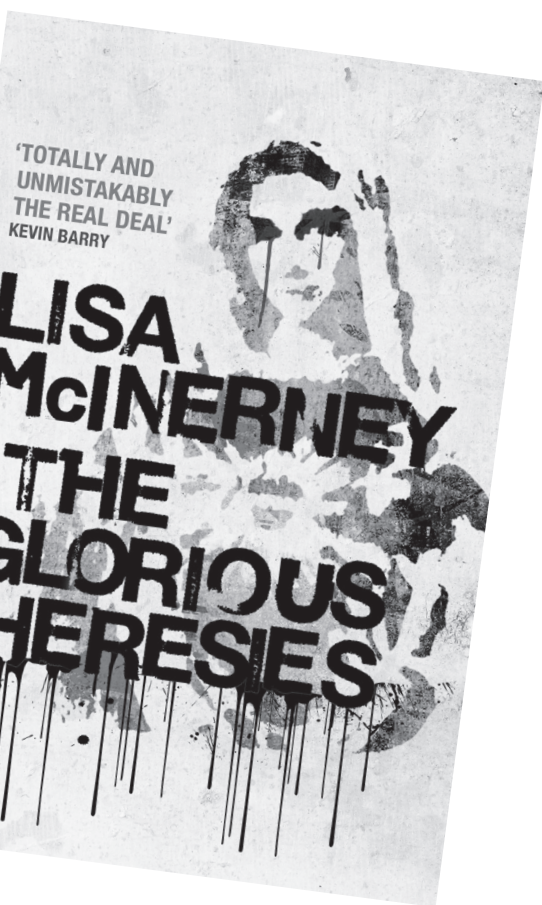
A daring, exuberant and generous novel

The Observer



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Opening of *The Glorious Heresies* by Lisa McInerney



He left the boy outside its own front door. Farewell to it, and good luck to it. He wasn't going to feed it anymore; from here on in it would be squared shoulders and jaws, and strong arms and best feet forward. He left the boy a pile of mangled, skinny limbs and stepped through the door a newborn man, stinging a little in the sights of the sprite guiding his metamorphosis. Karine D'Arcy was her name. She was fifteen and a bit and had been in his class for the past three years. Outside of school she consistently outclassed him, and yet here she was, standing in his hall on a Monday lunchtime. And so the boy had to go, what was left of him, what hadn't been flayed away by her hands and her kisses.

'You're sure your dad won't come home?' she said.

'He won't,' he said, though his father was a law unto himself and couldn't be trusted to follow reason. This morning he'd warned that he'd be out and about, so the kids would have to make their own dinner, though he'd be back later, trailing divilment and, knowing the kindness of the pit, a foul temper.

'What if he does, though?'

He took his hand from hers and slipped it round her waist.

'I don't know,' he said. Oh, the truth was raw, as raw as you could get, unrehearsed words from a brand-new throat.

He was fifteen, only just. If she'd asked him the same question back before they'd crossed this threshold he would have answered according to fifteen years' build-up of boyish bravado, but now that everything had changed he couldn't remember how to show-boat.

'It'll be my fault anyway,' he said. 'Not yours.'

They were supposed to be in school, and even his dad would know it. If he came home now, if, all lopsided with defeat, the worse for wear because of drink, or poker or whatever the fuck, it'd still take him only a moment to figure out that his son was on the lang, and for one reason only.

'Here it'd be yours,' she said. 'But what if he told my mam and dad?'

'He wouldn't.' It was as certain as the floor beneath them. His father was many things, but none of them responsible. Or bold. Or righteous.

'Are you sure?'

'The only people my dad talks to live here,' he said. 'No one else would have him.'

'So what do we do now?'

The name of this brave new man, still stinging from the possibilities whipping his flesh and pushing down on his shoulders, was Ryan. In truth, his adult form wasn't all that different to the gawky corpse he'd left outside; he was still black-haired and pale-skinned and ink-eyed. 'You look like you're possessed,' shivered one of the girls who'd gotten close enough to judge; she then declared her intent to try sucking the demon out through his tongue. He was stretching these past few months. Too slow, too steady, his nonna had sighed, the last time she'd perused his Facebook photos. She was adamant he'd never hit six feet. His mother was four years dead and his father was a wreck who slept as often on the couch as he did in his own bed. Ryan was the oldest of the wreck's children. He tiptoed around his father and made up for it around everyone else.

Something didn't fit about that. Of course, men of any age were entitled to flake around the place giving digs to anyone who looked like they might slight them, and that was certainly how the wreck behaved: hollow but for hot, cheap rage, dancing between glory and drying-out sessions in miserable rehab centres a million miles from anywhere. Even when Ryan dredged up the frenzies required by teachers' scorn or challenges thrown down by bigger kids, he knew there was something very empty in the way the lot of them encouraged him to fight. He'd been on the lookout for something to dare him to get out of bed in the morning, but he'd never thought it could have been her.

She was part of that group of girls who wore their skirts the shortest and who commandeered the radiator perches before every class and who could glide between impertinence and saccharine familiarity with teachers. He'd never thought she would look at him as anything but a scrapper, though he'd been asking her to, silently, behind his closed mouth and downturned eyes, for fucking years.

Three weeks before, on the night of his birthday, she had let him kiss her.

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