

Tara Road Takes Readers on an Emotional Journey

By Paula Marinak
Capital Times Staff Writer

"I write about what I know best," said Irish author Maeve Binchy in a March 1991 interview with *People Weekly* magazine.

In her tenth novel, *Tara Road*, Binchy once again proves her intimate understanding of the complexities of relationships and the deepest recesses of the heart.

From the opening pages of this dramatic work of fiction, readers will feel as if they have plunged headlong into an Irish version of "Days of Our Lives".

This novel tells the story of a group of neighbors, each with their own secret, whose separate lives are always intertwined. Binchy weaves an intricate narrative tapestry that demonstrates how quickly life can unravel if just one thread is pulled.

The author blends romance and the hope for a secure, happy future with liberal doses of anger, jealousy, betrayal and sadness that, at times, pierces even the most cynical reader's heart.

She even adds a dash of comedy to create the perfect book to enjoy on a lazy day at the beach.

At the heart of the story are Danny Lynch and his wife Ria, a young couple from humble beginnings who move to the newest section of Dublin to begin their dream life together.

Life in the Lynch household resembles scenes from any family sitcom of the 1960s. Danny works as a partner in one of the city's largest real estate firms; his moneymaking ability would spark King Midas' envy.

Ria pours all her energy into playing the perfect wife, mother and hostess. She provides an idyllic home life for her husband and two children and she constantly entertains in their stately Victorian home, which Ria's mother affectionately dubs Ireland's answer to Grand Central Station.

But Binchy adds many modern twists to this seemingly rosy portrait of familial bliss. Fourteen years after their vows, Danny delivers a shocking announcement which derails Ria's fairy tale vision of living happily ever after with her Prince Charming.

Binchy skillfully draws her audience into the saga that unfolds as Ria tries to rebuild her shattered life. She has created a protagonist in which her audience can see traces of their moth-

er, sister, best friend or even themselves.

Readers will want to enfold Ria in a comforting hug one moment and scream in frustration the next when she doesn't kick Danny to the curb like the dog he is.

The author shows her creative talent with her equally engaging cast of supporting characters. Ria's husband conceals a darker side beneath his Ken-doll good looks and sophisticated movie-star manners. He treats women as though he were starving and they were a free Happy Meal.

Rosemary Ryan is an astute business woman whose skill at closing deals makes her a winner in and out of the boardroom. The complete antithesis of her warm-hearted yet naive best friend, she uses her position as Ria's closest confidante to commit the ultimate betrayal of their relationship.

People will recognize traces of their mysterious next door neighbor in Colm Barry, a handsome, reserved man who wages a daily war with his own private demons.

He struggles to overcome his battles with alcoholism and money to gain some respect as a

successful restaurant owner. At the same time, he vows to protect his sister from a destructive, loveless marriage to a husband who continually feeds her dangerous addiction.

The Lynch children star in some of this novel's most memorable and poignant moments. Nine-year old Brian is honest, often to the point of embarrassment, about the people he meets and the conflicting emotions he feels as he struggles to understand his parents' problems.

With Brian's sister Annie, who has just turned 14, Binchy displays her awareness of adolescent turmoil and its effect on the parent-child relationship. Beneath the mask of a typical teen who fights with her mother about clothes, hair, and boys is a young girl crying out for her parents to give her the love and support their marriage lacks.

Ria's salvation comes from a most unlikely source. On the same day that her life is circling the drain, she receives a telephone call from Marilyn Vine. Ria can tell from the caller's voice that she, too, seeks refuge from the ghost which haunts her.

These two women, separated

by an ocean but united by common grief, agree to exchange homes for the summer.

What begins as a shared desire to escape the difficulties that have plagued their lives turns into a journey of self-discovery.

As Ria settles into Marilyn's home in Stoneyfield, a mere pinprick on the map of Connecticut, she gradually blossoms into a more self-assured woman who learns that, in order to win the love, admiration, and respect of others, she must first develop these qualities within herself.

During her stay at the sprawling Dublin mansion where she is surrounded by a supportive network of Ria's friends and family, Marilyn dismantles the wall surrounding her heart and shares the grief that has nearly destroyed her and her marriage.

Though they only meet by chance during the waning days of their visits, each woman has discovered secrets about the other that allow them to forge a lasting bond.

Binchy's latest work displays the same sensitive, yet realistic, treatment of emotions as in her most well-known novel, *Circle of Friends*. It also expresses the

same spirit of courage and resilience as Wally Lamb's *She's Come Undone*.

However, she misses some opportunities with character development. The most obvious examples are Nora Johnson, a stereotypically meddling but well-intentioned mother-in-law, and Mrs. Connor, the leader of a misfit band of fortune tellers whose predictions never miss their mark.

The novel's title represents a street of dreams for each of the people who inhabit the homes that line it.

Readers who travel here will see how closely this fictional world reflects reality. Just like real people, this book's characters cling to their own dreams.

Some, like Humpty Dumpty, have broken and may take a lifetime to repair. Others simply await the right time for their birth.

The journey down *Tara Road* is often rocky and filled with unexpected twists, but first-time readers and faithful Binchy followers will find themselves hoping for a return trip.



PSH Society News

Office of Continuing Education Staff Assistant **Suzanne F. Stoner** was recognized by the International Association of Administrative Professionals for earning her professional secretarial certification.

She completed an eight month course of study and demonstrated knowledge and competency in financial and business law, office systems and administration and management.

Dr. Richard Ammon, professor of education, was appointed by the National Council of Teachers of English to its Standing committee against censorship.

The standing committee keeps teachers and the media informed about censorship as it affects teachers and about strategies for dealing with censorship of school materials.

Wilco Rocks the Troc

By Daniel McClure
Capital Times Staff Writer

When I was told that Wilco was coming to the Trocadero in Philadelphia on Nov. 19, I had to rethink my disdain for the "City of Brotherly Love."

Wilco defies categorization because of their ever-changing musical style. Their lead singer, Jeff Tweedy, who along with Son Volt founder, Jay Farrar, used to play together as Uncle Tupelo.

Since the dissolution of Uncle Tupelo, Tweedy started Wilco and has played country, folk, rock, and now currently studio-tweaked pop music.

The opening band, the Old 97's, hail from Texas and play what could ironically be called alternative country. But, more or less they play good rock music that keeps the songs catchy and around three-minutes long.

They instantly earned points when they said they were going to start early so they could play longer.

The majority of the songs played were from their latest

album, *Fight Songs*. A highlight was one of the tracks from that album called "Murder (or a Heart Attack)."

Besides playing infectious songs, the Old 97's also showed enthusiasm for playing good rock music and putting on a good show.

Wilco opened with the brooding "Via Chicago" from their latest LP, *summerteeth*, but showed their musical variety by playing many songs from all three of their albums.

They also picked a few songs from the album *Mermaid Avenue*, a collection of unreleased Woody Guthrie songs that features both Wilco and British troubadour Billy Bragg.

Another highlight was a very forceful "misunderstood" from *Being There*. During the powerful end of the song, Tweedy seemed to knock the microphone stand over just by sheer force of presence.

As a part of their first encore (they did two), Wilco played "Casino Queen," from their debut

album *A.M.* This showed off the rest of the very talented band by taking a rousing rock song that was about three minutes long and turning it into a 10-minute s**t-kicking party.

As a part of a highly satisfied audience, I left the Trocadero that night extremely happy to be a part of a phenomenal show by two great bands that have a sincere love for rock music, and especially for its roots in country and blues.

As one of the few bands that could get me to drive to Philadelphia, Wilco left me thinking that I had just seen the greatest rock performance of my life.



Photo courtesy of Wilcoweb
Wilco