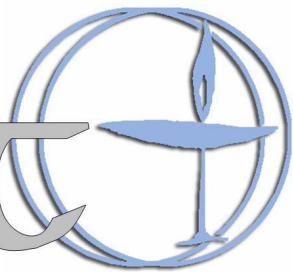


Oscailt



April 2023

IRELANDS UNITARIAN MAGAZINE

Vol.19 Nº 4





The Last Supper, a miniature from a Romanian manuscript of the 17th century.
See article page 2.



Oscailt since January 2005 has become the monthly magazine for Irish Unitarians. Originally it was the calendar for Dublin but due to popular demand by non members this new format was born and continues to grow and flourish.

Oscailt is Published by the
Dublin Unitarian Church
112 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23.

Minister: Rev.Bridget Spain
e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com
Rev.Bill Darlison *Minister Emeritus.*

hello@dublinunitarianchurch.org
www.dublinunitarianchurch.org
www.unitarianchurchcork.com
www.oscailtmagazine.com

Cork Unitarian Church
Princes Street, Cork.
Minister: Rev.Mike O'Sullivan

Editor: Paul Spain

To Subscribe
Annual subscription 12 monthly issues.
€35 Posted for Ireland
£35 Posted for England & Scotland
Cheques and PO should be made payable to: *Dublin Unitarian Church.*

Deadline

The deadline for articles to be included is the 15th day of the month.
Unsolicited articles, news items, letters, poems, etc are always welcome, however there can be no guarantee of publication. Copy should be sent by e-mail or at least typed, photographs should be 300dpi.

e-mail: oscailtmagazine@gmail.com

Advertising

Advertising rates available on request. e-mail: oscailtmagazine@gmail.com

Front Cover: L-R Rev.Bridget Spain
minister Dublin Unitarian Church
The Right Rev.Lina Cockcroft
Moderator of NSPCI
(Photo P.Spain)

CONTENTS

LIKENESSES OF JESUS

Dr. Martin Pulbrook 2

A Moment in Time

Monica Cremins 7

Cult vs. Person

The Right Rev.Lina Cockcroft 10

Book Review 13

Skippping Mother

Maeve Edwards 15

A.G.M. Notice Inside back cover



Our magazine title, *Oscailt*, is inspired by the account of the **Healing of the Deaf and Mute Man** in St. Mark's Gospel, Chapter 7. Jesus commands the mans ears to open up with Aramic word "Ephphatha" - open ! The Irish word *oscailt* (from the verb *oscail*, to open), means an opening, or, metaphorically, it could mean a revelation or a beginning.

LIKENESSES OF JESUS AND THE TWELVE IN AN OLD ROMANIAN MANUSCRIPT

I am somewhat nervous about giving today's address, because of the content and implications of what I say in it; and I hope you will not be put out by the content.

And I should like, by way of introduction and explanation, to say a few words before the address proper. I was brought up in a mixed religious household as an Anglican by way of compromise, my father being a Quaker (Pulbrooks had been Quakers in London since the 1790) and my mother's family being French Roman Catholics. And the result was that for years I attended Anglican and Quaker and Catholic religious services interchangeably.

In 1989, when I was 41, I left the Church of England, because I could no longer assent to its Creeds, or Articles of Religion, or view of Scripture. I have thenceforward been a Dissenter, finding myself in essential agreement with a Congregationalist declaration of 1833, that church membership and eligibility to take Communion are not to be defined in terms of creedal allegiance.

Dissenters are therefore, wonderfully, freed from the inhibitions and constraints which govern and control membership of the mainstream organizations. A Dissenter can range freely - but I hope responsibly in his or her religious quest. And because I have come to have a profound conviction that the religion of Jesus - which must be our unending goal - is not summed up finally and irrevocably in the declarations and articles of faith of the mainstream institutions, I have been free to roam outside those set boundaries, looking for elements of that truth elsewhere too.

And today that exploration takes us to what I think is most important evidence in a Romanian manuscript, which must date back to very primitive times. The joy of the Dissenting position is that we do not have to assent to any particular proposition. For each of us has the right to accept or reject what is presented to us. And in that spirit I know you will give an open-minded hearing to what follows, rejecting it if you wish, or accepting it if you wish, without fear of 'come-back' whichever way your choice falls.

In November 2019 I bought from a curio and second-hand shop in Dublin, a 2-record LP set (undated, but I guess from the 1970s) entitled “Romanian Byzantine Liturgy”, produced under the auspices of the Bible and Mission Institute of the Romanian Orthodox Church. What interests me here is a picture on the front of the record-sleeve, described as “The Last Supper, miniature from a Romanian manuscript of the 17th century”. (*see picture on the inside front cover*)

What is of particular interest is that elements of the picture date to a very long time before the 17th century, in fact to very earliest times. And it is some of these that I wish to examine now. The survival of these primitive details should come as no real surprise; for in the days of hand-written manuscripts successive generations of scribes tended to copy and re-copy things handed down from generation to generation and from century to century. And it is in this context, of survival of something very primitive, that this Romanian picture is of such particular and considerable importance.

The picture includes thirteen people, Jesus and his Twelve Disciples, and I wish to try to identify them here today.

(1) Twelve of the thirteen are depicted with a halo, and only one - going round the table from Jesus's left, to the very end of the bench at the middle in the front - without. This must - for obvious reasons - be Judas Iscariot.

(2) In John's Gospel (13.23 and 25) it is assumed to be John who leans at table on Jesus's breast. But the person doing so in the Romanian picture is clearly a woman. In my Blackpool address “John and Mary” (4th December 2016; also given in Limerick, 26th August 2018; in Dublin, 24th February 2019; in Taunton, 30th June 2019) I suggested that Mary Magdalene was one of The Twelve, and that when the ‘centralising Church’ “wrote her out of the script”, John became used in official circles as ‘substitute’. Interestingly and importantly, Mary, in the Romanian picture, is in her rightful place. And, intriguingly, where the men have golden haloes, Mary has a yellow one. One 19th-century reference book (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 9th ed., Vol.21, 1886, p.146) has remarked that saffron “was a royal colour in early ... times, though afterwards perhaps from its abundant use ... as a scented salve, it was especially appropriated by (prostitutes)” - thus the use of this colour in the Romanian picture may be an unwarranted slur on Mary's character.

(3) John is described as “very young” in the Pistis Sophia (in Bk.1,

on p.66 of G.R.S.Mead's edition and translation), and general church tradition holds that John was, by quite a long way, the youngest of The Twelve. Only two of the Twelve, apart from Mary, do not have beards in the Romanian picture, and the younger of these is clearly the man sitting next to Judas Iscariot. This must in the circumstances be John.

If John was so young, his brother James cannot have been an older man, one of the several disciples with grey hair and beards. On the immediate left of Jesus and Mary is a grey-haired man whom we shall come to shortly. Beyond him, on his left, is a younger man, bearded but with a marked facial resemblance to John. This must be James.

(5) and (6)

According to the Gospel of John (1.40) the first of the disciples to follow Jesus was Andrew (who had up to then been a disciple of John the Baptist); and Andrew immediately went (John 1.42) and fetched his brother Simon (Peter), who thus became, from the beginning, the second disciple. And these two senior disciples are seated the one to the immediate right of Jesus and the other to the immediate left of Mary. But - we may legitimately ask - which is which? A second-century bronze likeness of Peter from the Catacombs of Domitilla in Rome establishes without any doubt that the disciple sitting next to Mary is Peter - which means that the disciple on Jesus's right is Andrew.

Sitting along the table from Judas Iscariot - across the gap in the seating - is the one other male disciple, apart from John, who is without a beard. But this disciple has clearly shaved off his beard? why? The Romans of this period were almost invariably clean-shaven. The first professional barber had come to Rome in 299 B.C., and from then, increasingly, until the time of the Emperor Hadrian (A.D.117-135), who grew a beard for personal reasons (which re-introduced the wearing of beards in Rome), beards were largely regarded as a sign of being a foreigner, not a Roman. Why, in these circumstances, would a member of The Twelve choose to assimilate to Roman practice, rather than wearing a beard like his fellow-members of the group? One member of The Twelve had a particular reason to assimilate: Simon the Zealot, as a member of that quasi-military organisation, otherwise known as the 'sicarii' or

“dagger-bearers”, would have found it beneficial to mix among Romans without immediately standing out, or being noticeable, as a ‘foreigner’. And I hypothesize that it is this Simon who is thus pictured beardless in the Romanian picture.

There was an apocryphal tradition, which survived at Edessa into the fourth century, that the disciple Thomas was the twin-brother of Jesus. The name “Thomas” is from the Aramaic “theuma”, meaning “twin”; and the Greek for “twin” is “didymos”. Thus when we read in John’s Gospel (20.24 and 21.2) of “Thomas Didymus” (or “Thomas, called the Twin” in the R.S.V.), we are being fed the duplicated information of a disciple named “Twin twin”. This disciple’s real name was Judas, the “Judas (not Iscariot)” of John 14.22; and he has sometimes been known as “Jude”, to distinguish him from Judas Iscariot. There is, in the Romanian picture, another disciple who is the mirror-image of Jesus, in the bottom-left corner of the table, two places to the left of Simon the Zealot. This is clearly Judas Thomas.

In principle, in the 17th-century Romanian picture, things should now be getting easier: there are only four individuals left unaccounted for in the group, and only four unidentified faces in the picture. But a reverse process is also true: the easier and more definite cases have now been identified and matched, and the harder cases are inevitably those that remain.

Three of the remaining four are sitting at the ends of the top side of the table, and only one of the four on the lower side (between Judas Thomas and Simon the Zealot). This suggests that the disciple on the lower side (between Judas Thomas and Simon) must in all likelihood be James “the Less” (or, properly, James “the Younger”), since his name appears lower down in the canonical lists.

The three on the top side of the table (two at the end to Jesus’s right, one at the end to his left) are more senior figures, higher up in the canonical lists. Their names are Philip, Matthew and Nathanael bar-Talmai (sometimes elsewhere known as Bartholomew), and the simple question is, in each case, “which name belongs with which face?”

Jesus (in John 1.47) describes Nathanael as someone “in whom is no guile”. That description seems particularly fitted to the dark-haired man (one of the three hitherto unidentified) on An-

drew's immediate right. It seems less fitted to the man beyond him, at the end of the top of the table on that side, whose expression is shrewd and even slightly cynical. That is surely Matthew, whose high, domed forehead is a distinguishing feature of him in some other early portrayals. That in turn means that the one remaining unidentified figure at the other end of the table, between James and John, must be Philip and again some other early portrayals of Philip agree in giving him the rather thin, sensitive, ascetic face of this Romanian depiction.

In conclusion, I venture something important about this Romanian picture. The inclusion in it of Mary Magdalene - information which cannot in origin be later than the second century - and its support for the twinship of Jesus and Judas Thomas - an idea, which cannot be later than the fourth century at latest - betoken a very early and primitive source of information as background to the picture. And for this reason we should particularly value it as providing - just possibly - authentic or near-authentic facial portrayals of Jesus and his twelve disciples.

Dr. Martin Pulbrook (Dublin Unitarian Church, 21st August 2022.)

A Moment in Time

My father said “we didn’t always live in Ballingaddy”. Last September my granddaughter, Ella, and I met my first cousin Mary, whom I hadn’t seen for about twenty years, in Bath in England. During the course of the day Mary told me her daughter Nicola had applied for an Irish passport. Unfortunately Mary was unable to locate her mother’s birth certificate. She was my father’s sister, also called Mary. When I returned home I checked the 1911 census for the family. No sign of them. Then out of the blue my father’s words of over 60 years came to mind. I searched other townlands and eventually found them. There she was Mary, who always said she was born in 1910, was three years old in 1911. I rang my cousin with the good news. Nicola now had a definite year and area in which to search and will soon have her passport. Who would have thought those words in a moment in time would be relevant sixty years in the future?

We are all familiar with such incidents. Do you remember where you were when such a thing happened? It is a memory that unites people. Brings them closer together. A bond is formed particular to those people. No matter how much the event is talked about or explained or discussed later, no one but those at the event can really understand the feelings associated with it. Particularly at funerals, it is such a comfort to sit with family and friends and share memories. It is part of the healing process and makes a difference to everybody.

Some years ago, Denise, Conor and I were travelling on a bus in Australia. On the journey we saw two rainbows, side by side. We chatted with the other people on the bus about them and we all agreed that four pots of gold would be a great find.

A few months ago the three of us were on a train to Killarney. Again we saw two rainbows; a lovely reminder of the sight on the other side of the world, years before. The words a moment in time came to my mind.

I suppose one of the most iconic references to a moment in time is described in the poem “Daffodils” by William Wordsworth. The poet is going for a walk with his sister Dorothy when they come across, as she described it, a long belt of daffodils. The beauty and vivacity of the flowers gave the poet so much pleasure and joy that years later he still feels that same emotion when he recalls the memory.

*For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.*

Such beautiful words to evoke the memory and emotions of that scene. To avail of the benefits of unannounced encounters one has to be open to their possibilities. Most people at any given time are going about their business and having general conversations and interactions. It is impossible to remember every word of every conversation or communication. Nor is it possible to remember every place we have been. We take time and moments for granted. Each moment moves on and attaches itself to the next and before we know it hours have passed turning into days, then weeks and so on.

Susan Pearse and Martina Sheehan in the Currency of Care say: "Attention is precious. Take care of it. People say they need more time. We can't make more time but we can give more attention to what we are doing". Everyday activities. We don't pay much attention to these as they are repetitive. Taste your cup of tea. Little moments. Don't take them for granted. For example, I asked a woman at a checkout in a shop, who wasn't paying much attention, if she was having a bad day. This resulted in a little conversation and we parted laughing. Later passing that shop the woman was in good form with other people, thereby putting good energy into the money - currency being exchanged. The currency of care. Keep the currency of care moving and returning it to yourself".

In Mark's gospel chapter 10 verse 46 - 52. Blind Bartimaeus receives his sight. As Jesus and His disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, a blind man Bartimaeus was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth he began to shout "Jesus Son of David have mercy on me". Many rebuked him and told him to be quiet. But he shouted all the more. "Son of David have mercy on me". Jesus stopped and said "Call him". So they called to the blind man, "Cheer up! On your feet!. He's calling you". Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus. "What do you want me to do for you" Jesus asked him. The blind man said "Rabbi, I want to see". "Go" said Jesus, "Your faith has healed you". Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.

I would have thought that a blind man sitting by the roadside begging would not have noticed Jesus and the disciples passing, particularly when there was a large crowd of people. But Bartimaeus was not insensi-



A place of worship since 1717

UNITARIAN CHURCH

Prince's Street, Cork.

Registered Charity Number 0000246

Service: Sundays at 11a.m.

Minister:- Rev. Mike O'Sullivan Telephone: 023-8842800

e-mail:- osullmike@gmail.com Mobile 087-9539998

Further information from 087-9539998

Treasurer : Brian Cluer e-mail: bmcleur@gmail.com

Secretary : Colm Noonan : e-mail : colm.noonan@gmail.com

www.unitarianchurchcork.com

**Jazz Vespers,
first Friday of the month @ 6pm.**

An ecumenical service with the Methodist church.

FREEDOM - REASON - TOLERANCE

Please Note

If you are aware of any member of our community who is unwell, or who has suffered a bereavement, and who would welcome contact from others in the church, please e-mail Rev.Bridget Spain.

Vestry 01 - 4780638

e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com

Childrens Programme - Sunday Club

Take place on the 2nd Sunday of each month

For any queries about Sunday Club, or to volunteer as a leader, please email
Denise at sundayclub@dublinunitarianchurch.org

DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH

Lunch-time service every Wednesday from 1.10 to 1.40 p.m.

Each week Eileen Delaney sends an e-mail circular as to
what is happening in the church and
the other activities associated with the church.

If you would like to receive this information you should send
your details requesting your name be added to the list to:-
eileendelaney76@gmail.com



Dublin Unitarian Church

112 St. Stephens Green Dublin 2.

Service 11.00a.m.

Sunday Rota for April 2023

2 nd April	<i>Passover</i>
Service	Rev.Bridget Spain.
Reader	Eileen Delaney
Flowers	Lorenzo Casella
Welcomer	Frank Tracy, Janet Mulroy
Coffee	Lorenzo Casella, Paul Murray, Denis Conway
<hr/>	
9 th April	<i>Easter Day</i>
Service	Rev.Bridget Spain
Reader	Janet Mulroy
Flowers	Mary O'Brien
Welcomer	Mary O'Brien, Emer O'Reilly
Coffee	Paula Mills, Daniela Cooney, Catharine Cook
<hr/>	
16 th April	<i>Choosing your Path</i>
Service	Pamela McCarthy
Reader	Will O'Connell
Flowers	Paula Mills
Welcomer	Paula Mills, Paul Murray
Coffee	Janet Mulroy, Kevin O'Hara, Colette Douglas
<hr/>	
23 rd April	<i>Forward to What - Where (A.G.M. after Service)</i>
Service	Rev.Bridget Spain
Reader	Daria Ostrowski
Flowers	Elaine Sisson
Welcomer	Janet Mulroy, Doireann Ni Bhriain
Coffee	Emer O'Reilly,
<hr/>	
30 th April	<i>Why I am a Unitarian</i>
Service	Andy Pollak
Reader	Monica Cremins
Flowers	Janet Mulroy
Welcomer	Jennifer Buller
Coffee	Monica Cremins

Services are broadcast live from the church each Sunday at 11a.m.
On our WebCam, click and connect at www.dublinunitarianchurch.org

Recordings of previous services are also available on the website.

LOVE IS THE DOCTRINE OF THIS CHURCH
THE QUEST OF TRUTH IS ITS SACRAMENT
AND SERVICE IS ITS PRAYER.

TO DWELL TOGETHER IN PEACE

TO SEEK KNOWLEDGE IN FREEDOM

TO SERVE MANKIND IN FELLOWSHIP

TO THE END THAT ALL SOULS SHALL GROW IN HARMONY
WITH THE DIVINE

THIS DO WE COVENANT WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH GOD.

DUBLIN UNITARIAN CHURCH

112 St.Stephen's Green, Dublin D02 YP23, Ireland.
Unitarian Church - Dublin Registered Charity Number 20000622

Service: Sunday at 11a.m. Phone: Vestry 01-4780638

Managing committee:- Madam Chairperson: Denise Dunne;
Vice Chairman: Dennis Aylmer; Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy; Treasurer: Rory Delany;
Tony Shine; Andy Pollak; Peter White; Will O'Connell;
Paul Murray; Madeline Stringer; Gavin Byrne; Tony Brady.

www.dublinunitarianchurch.org
e-mail: hello@dublinunitarianchurch.org

www.oscailtmagazine.com
oscailtmagazine@gmail.com

Minister: Rev.Bridget Spain: Telephone: 01 - 8388 808
Vestry 01 - 4780638 e-mail: revbspain@gmail.com

Rev.Bill Darlison (*Minister Emeritus*)

Madam Chairperson: Denise Dunne:- Tel: 087-2450660

Secretary: Trish Webb-Duffy:- Tel: 087-9346720

Treasurer: Rory Delany: 087-2217414, e-mail: roryjdelany@hotmail.com

Organist: Josh Johnston Pianist 086 892 0602

Caretaker: Kevin Robinson Telephone: 4752781

Recordings of the church services are available on the church website.

tive to what was going on around him. He was aware and awake to the possibilities of how Jesus could help him. He didn't waste any time calling out to him making sure Jesus heard him. He did not allow himself to be pushed aside by the crowd. He grabbed the moment and made the most of it. He was rewarded, receiving his sight and becoming a follower of Jesus. He really believed and "ask and it will be given to you".

For me it begs the question: If I were Bartimaeus would I have had the courage and tenacity to insist on talking to Jesus? Would I have missed Him passing by being distracted by the crowd? Would I have said I won't bother Jesus? I'm only a poor blind man. He wouldn't want to talk to me. Would I have missed a most amazing moment in time? It is so easy to get into a rut and ignore the possibilities of change.

Caroline Myss in *Intimate Conversations with the Divine* says: "Lord help me stay consciously in Grace. Every moment of my life I am participating in an act of creation. Every thought, every feeling, every sensation generates a consequence - a next thought, an emotion, a choice".

So, when we wake up in the morning we usually have some plan for the day. Because we think it through does not mean the day will unfold accordingly. Most people act and react without giving much thought to the deed, responding to a situation as it unfolds. But by being mindful or aware in the moment what is said or done can have a different impact. A word or deed in a harsh or thoughtless way can leave a hurtful lasting impression. Just as a kind and uplifting word or act will give joy and encouragement to the recipient.

While we breathe without thinking, we can learn to attend to the time and value the experience. We only have the present moment. The past is gone. It may become a memory. The future is not yet ours.

Monica Cremins,

February 2023

Cult vs. Person

For the title of my address today, I gave Bridget the words “Cult vs. Person”. I would like to say at the start, I don’t necessarily mean Cult in a pejorative way as it’s often used, but rather to mean the description of actions, observances, customs, dress, eating and drinking, refraining from eating or drinking - the list is endless, by which we define our faith.

My thoughts were mainly inspired by the recent account of the death of Masha Amini in Iran in suspicious circumstances after her arrest by the religious morality police for not wearing the proscribed head covering, the hijab. Never proved, or admitted, eyewitnesses reported that she had been badly beaten and that her injuries could well have contributed to her death in hospital hours later. I remember thinking: how can you belong to a religion where the wearing of a head dress is more important than a human life? A fanatical imposition of cultic regulations as more important than human life seems to me an abomination.

Even if there was no such rigorous enforcement this time - and I repeat it was not proven - it has certainly happened in other cases, including Christianity. Martyrs were made, in my understanding, not always by outsiders and opponents of the faith, but by their brothers and sisters, co-religionists in their faith, over some infringement of cultic practice.

Cults may also spring up out of a lack of understanding of the essence of the worthy recipient of praise and devotion and the elevation of a minor material or personal element which is just a part of the religion. For example, Bamber Gascoigne, first presenter of the programme ‘University Challenge’, some years ago wrote a book “The Christians”. In it he describes a researcher trying to unearth unknown examples of isolated Christian communities in Europe. In one remote region he found an informant who

told him of such a community that called themselves, Jesus or Christian, they lived about 50 miles away. "They worship a cross", he was told . "We don't know why and I don't think they do either".

When Nehemiah and Ezra returned from exile to rebuild Jerusalem, Ezra - more the priest and prophet than Nehemiah, he was more the man of action, - Ezra decreed that any member of the Cult of Yahweh (later Judaism), who had married the member of another Cult, must divorce her and drive her out. This would have meant almost certain death to the women. It would be unlikely their own families would take them back again, except perhaps in a few cases. Yet had not Ezra taken such drastic action, there was every chance the belief in the one God would not have survived. Yahwehism was disappearing amidst a host of other beliefs. It is very probable that religious fundamental fanaticism is still driven by this kind of fear, which spills over into the destruction of non conforming individuals.

So is the answer to place respect, well being, happiness, gratification of the individual at the heart of faith? Talking recently to the minister of another denomination, he admitted that while it had produced some great theologians, it presently concentrated as first priority on the needs and nurturing of the individual . "The problem now is", he said, "we don't know what we believe. All attempts to explain the relevance and meaning of God have been sidelined".

There is also a danger that giving into the needs and wants of an individual, without any reference points to right or wrong, may be dangerous - for them and society as a whole. President Putin desperately wants the whole of Ukraine for himself. I don't believe he should have it. Sometimes we need ways of measuring right and wrong, good and evil.

So, Cult or Individual? I was struggling with this, when I remembered something else our Minister friend had said:-

"I know someone who always asks, why do preachers al-

ways feel they must provide an answer? It should be enough sometimes that they raise the questions". I was comforted. But at the risk of attempting an answer, in closing I will share something Albert Schweitzer said to his congregation in an early sermon from his youth. "Jesus' first command on earth could be reduced to one word , MAN. He does not speak of religion, of faith, of the soul, or of anything else on earth; he speaks only of man, - I will make you fishers of men. It is as though he were speaking to all centuries to come. First see to it, I beg you, that man does not perish. Go after him as I went after him and find him where he is, where others have not found him, in filth, in neglect, in indignity. Live with him and help him to become man again". To the great man's words I would only add - and don't do what many cults do, make women inferior. They too are God's people.

The Right Rev.Lina Cockcroft
Moderator of NSPCI

**Dublin Unitarian Book Club's
choice for February 2023.**

Girl, Woman, Other

by

Bernadine Evaristo

This novel was the joint winner of the 2019 Booker prize for fiction, together with Margaret Atwood's *Testament*. The prize is not usually shared, but in this case the judges declared that their judgement was unavoidable because it was impossible to come to a decision between the two books.

Margaret Atwood generously said afterwards that she thought *Girl, Woman, Other* should have won outright, and the majority of our readers agreed with her. It's a splendid book, challenging, entertaining and informative, as well as being extremely readable, and although a couple of us found both the structure and the style of writing a bit disjointed most of us were absorbed from beginning to end.

Bernadine Evaristo is Anglo-Nigerian - this is the first time a black woman has won the Booker – and she writes about the experiences of several generations of black women in Britain. The stories of the twelve main characters interweave and overlap, and the challenges each of them face, and in most cases surmount, are described in sympathetic detail. Many of the women are lesbian and this imparts a further dimension to the book – as one reviewer puts it: 'for many readers this is not a familiar world' – but this novel is about many issues as well as gender and Evaristo never allows any one of them to dominate. Ultimately the book is about people, and their stories drive the narrative. These women are struggling to find and establish their individual identity in the face of racial prejudice, family expectations and sometimes very adverse circumstances. I thought the characterisation of both the major and minor characters very convincing and the writer's attitude is real-

istic, kindly, humorous and compassionate. Evaristo is particularly good when she is describing the family tensions that arise in the lives of some of the women whose mothers and grandmothers endured very different conditions in their countries of origin from those experienced by their daughters and granddaughters in present-day Britain.

As well as being entertaining and enjoyable in itself, *Girl, Woman, Other* proved to be a stimulating book club choice as it opened up so many topics for discussion, many of them relating to aspects of Irish society today.

Jennifer Flegg

*This is
The Last Will and Testament
I do hereby devise and bequeath my property and possessions*
Are you willing ?

As part of our Fund Raising Campaign, we would like to encourage members to consider a bequest to the Restoration Project in their will.

**A Legacy to charity is free of capital acquisition tax.
The donor can specify that the gift be used for the upkeep and maintenance of this church**

Skiping Mother

A strange thing happens to me as I fall asleep these nights. I'm back on the road outside my childhood home, every pillar and post is in sharp focus, the russet red of the brick wall, the green painted gate.

It's summer time. There's a scent of privet in the air. Outside our front door, the baby is strapped into his pram. He's golden brown with the sun and wears a lemon seersucker romper suit. When my mother takes his shoes off at night, there's a band of white across his instep where the sun doesn't reach. She always kisses this white band, which makes the baby laugh.

He wears a harness of pale blue leather, the edges cut with a pinking shears, the inside soft, like lamb's wool.

He's just awakened from his nap and has hauled himself into a sitting position. He's quietly watching the children play.

The girls are skipping out on the street, the rope turning briskly as the turners call: "Chase, chase, chase the hairy elephant". Each girl lines up and runs into the turning rope, takes two skips and leaps back out again. If a beat is missed, then she must sit along the kerb and wait until a new game begins.

Further along the road, my older sister plays piggy beds. The old polish tin skims and comes to rest neatly between the chalk marks. She hops from bed to bed, pushing the piggy before her with one foot.

On the footpath, my brother and his friends hammer old skate wheels onto a plank of wood. Later, they will hurtle down the road, crashing at the bottom into O'Rourke's wall because their truck has no steering device. They will tumble boyishly together, laugh off their cuts and scrapes, and go back to the drawing board.

Another sister calls from the green. She has climbed to the top of the Mail Boat tree, so called because the Mail Boat can be seen leaving Dublin port from its highest branches: "Look how high up I am," she yells.

Bumble bees flit from clover head to clover head.

My mother comes out to the front step to check on the baby. She hands him a crust of batch loaf and calls to me: "Keep an eye on

him, there's a good girl." The front of her apron is filled with dressmaking pins stuck hastily into the fabric. She has the makings of our summer dresses laid out on the living room floor and will spend the afternoon at the Singer sewing machine, her feet hammering like billio. Later, when we come in for our tea, I'll sweep away the cigarette butts she has lined up like soldiers along its edge. She is young and strong, six babies down, one more to go. On the front step, she takes in the location of each of her children with a glance. She is the queen of all she surveys, my father still beguiled.

Her eyes linger on the skipping girls. Suddenly, she leaves the front step and strides quickly towards them, a grin breaking out on her face. Bending to accommodate the turning rope she leaps into it and takes six skips one after the other, holding down her skirt with one hand. We children scream with delight. A skipping mother! Who would have thought a mother could skip!

Our neighbour, Mrs. Lowndes, who had been sitting quietly in her porch, comes abruptly to her feet at the commotion. Seeing my skipping mother, she leaves her porch, flies down her garden path and erupts onto the street. With a cry, she leaps into the turning rope, and for a few glorious moments, the two mothers skip together, laughing their heads off, each holding one arm under their bosoms to keep them still.

Is there a day in the span of all our lives when the sun shines the brightest? A glory day, a golden day, when all life's possibilities dovetail together. Was this my mother's perfect day – a day, that now, sixty years later, pushes into my mind as I fall asleep at night?

"Ah, don't be bringing me flowers," she used to say to me in her later years. "They only die!" Maybe what she wanted to say was: Just bring me yourself. Sit beside me, talk to me. Remind me what it was like when for one brief moment, the stars and the planets aligned to make a perfect day. A day when the mothers came out to skip.

Maeve Edwards

(First broadcast on Sunday Miscellany on 19th March 2023, for Mother's Day)

Annual General Meeting

Sunday 23rd of April 2023

Notice

The *Congregational Annual General Meeting* will take place in the church after Sunday Service on Sunday 23rd of April 2023.

The meeting agenda and related items will be included in the Annual Report which will be available to all Members one week prior to the AGM.

Denise Dunne
Chair

Plant Sale in May 2023

