



Portrait of Jennifer Johnston by Basil Blackshaw.

# Jennifer Johnston at 90

## EXHIBITION

CURATED BY

SARAH SMYTH

LUCY DANIELS

WITH THANKS TO

PATRICK SMYTH AND NELL REGAN

25 JANUARY -  
31 MARCH 2020

JENNIFER JOHNSTON  
BOOK COLLECTION

CATALOGUED AND ORGANISED BY

BERNIE DOHERTY

CAROLINE FLOOD

AND SEÁN DOWNES

DLR LEXICON, LEVEL 5, HAIGH TERRACE, MORAN PARK, DÚN LAOGHAIRE

# JOHNSTON FAMILY THE MALE LINE

The Johnston clan were Covenanters, Scottish dissenters, who settled at Dunarnon in Magherafelt, Co. Derry. James Johnston (1841-1906), the 'Tayman', escaped the family farm to become a successful tea merchant in Belfast. He was that rarity, a Protestant Home Ruler, and for a time the Hon. Secretary of the Protestant Home Rule Association in Belfast.

His son, Jennifer's grandfather, William John Johnston aka 'Boodle' to family, and 'Civil Bill' to colleagues, (1868- 1940) was a barrister and then judge who had stood, unsuccessfully, but only narrowly so, as a Liberal Home Ruler for South Derry in 1910.

On independence he was willing to identify with the construction of a new Ireland, and on Partition transferred his then judgeship South to serve on its new bench. He would end up on the Supreme Court.

His son and Jennifer's father, Denis Johnston (1901-1984), also practised at the Bar in Dublin, but his real love would be the theatre. He became a successful playwright – *The Old Lady Says No*, *The Moon in the Yellow River...* - a war correspondent for the BBC, and an academic.

Jennifer was the eldest child of Denis Johnston's first marriage to the actress Shelah Richards and her younger brother Micheal was five years younger than her. Micheal lives in Sandycove and was an RTÉ radio producer. Denis subsequently married Betty Chancellor, and had two more sons, Jeremy and Rory. He returned from the US in the 1970s to retire and live in Dalkey.

Jennifer had two sons and two daughters. Her sons, Patrick and Malachi Smyth, are respectively an Irish Times journalist and film writer.

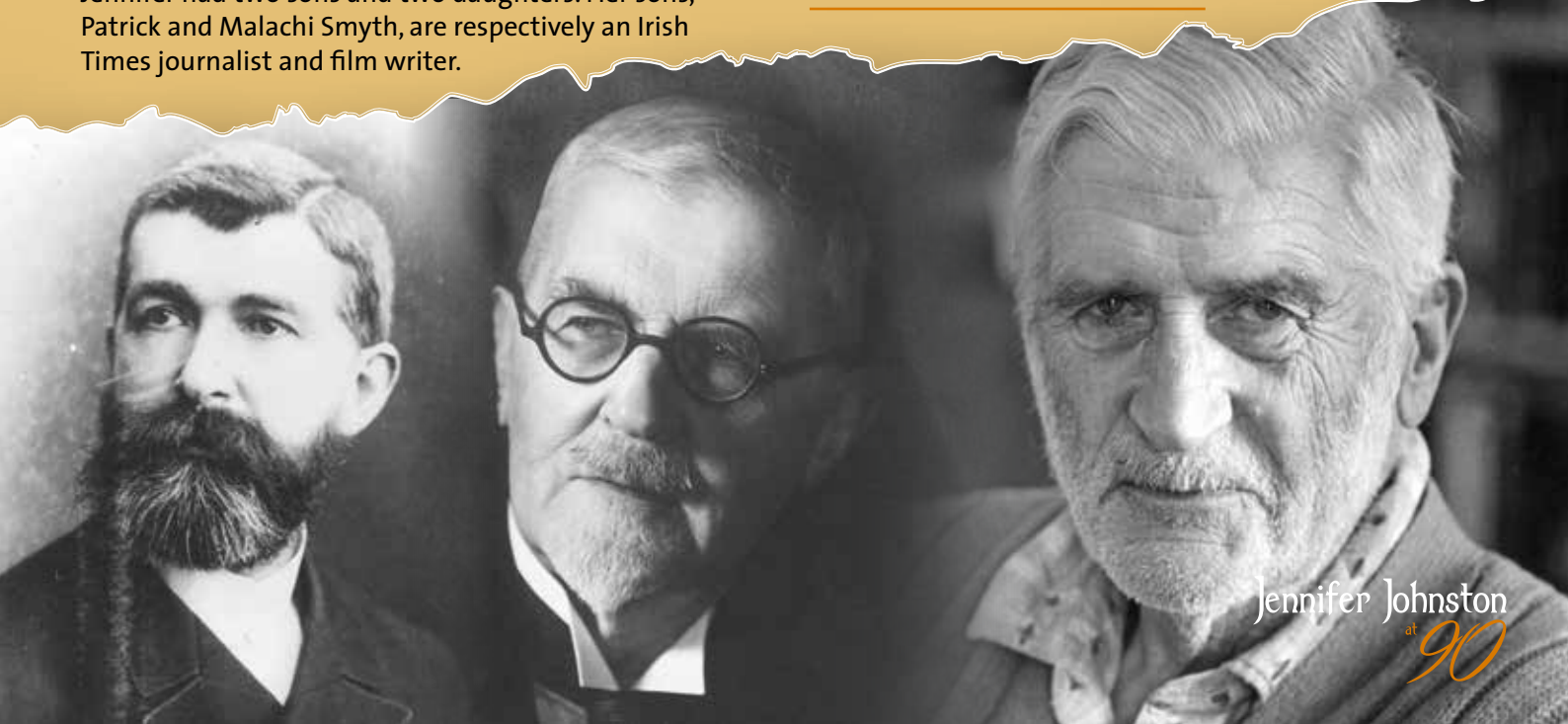


William and Kathleen Johnston, known affectionately as Boodle and Gaga, Jennifer's grandparents on her father's side



Photo of William Johnston third from left, standing; with other members of the Dublin judiciary

Images below (L to R)  
James Johnston (1841-1906), William Johnston (1868-1940),  
Denis Johnston (1901-1984)



# ROPER, RICHARDS, FITZGERALD

## THE FEMALE LINE

Jennifer Johnston comes from a long line of fearless, unconventional and charismatic Irish women who were pioneers in the theatre, film as well as other fields.



Shelah Richards (1903-1985)



Adelaide Roper, Jennifer's grandmother with Juliet (aka Dooley), Edith (aka Brownie) and Billy.

Her grandmother Adelaide Roper was a suffragette in the early years of the 20th century. Family anecdote has it that she agitated for votes for women by chaining herself to the railings of Stephen's Green. She eventually stopped when her husband, a solicitor, said that he could not run a respectable practice if she did these things. She was also a vegetarian, unusual for the times, although not among the progressive suffragettes.

Adelaide's daughter and Jennifer's mother, Shelah Richards, was one of the foremost actors and producers of her day, starting her career very young in the Abbey Theatre. Apparently the first her father knew of this was when friends congratulated him on her success! In 1926 she played the first Nora Clitheroe in O'Casey's *The Plough and the Stars* and went on to tour the US with the company. During the Emergency Richards ran her own theatre company and in 1961 became one of the first producers in RTÉ. Among her many credits were *The Riordans* and *Tolka Row*.

Jennifer grew up watching her mother rehearse. She said of her, 'My mother was of course the epitome of the career woman. She did marvellous things on stage, but then my mother was a very extraordinary person. She wasn't like other people's mothers.... You just had to be so different to cope with the sort of life she was leading.' Another prominent female relative was Jennifer's cousin Geraldine FitzGerald. Inspired by her aunt Shelah, Geraldine began her acting career at the Gate Theatre at 19 (Jennifer was just two years old) and went on to become a leading Hollywood actor. She received an Academy Award nomination for her role in *Wuthering Heights* with Laurence Olivier and starred along Bette Davis in *Dark Victory*.



Four Generations: Edith (aka Brownie) FitzGerald [née Richards], Georgina Roper [née Green], Geraldine FitzGerald, Adelaide Richards [née Roper]

Jennifer's daughters Sarah and Lucy have both continued the redoubtable female line - Sarah as lecturer in the Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies (TCD) and Lucy as lawyer and literary translator.



Shelah Richards (1903-1985) and Geraldine FitzGerald (1913-2005)



# EARLY YEARS

## CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOL



The Irish Times.  
DUBLIN, TUESDAY,  
JANUARY 14, 1930.

BIRTHS  
**JOHNSTON** –  
January 12, 1930 at  
89 Lower Leeson Street,  
to Mr and Mrs Denis Johnston,  
a daughter.

Baby Jennifer on a rug (1930)

### Denis Johnston's Diary – 13/01/1930

'Next morning I rose and went forth of a bright sunny Sunday to call on my wife and to be introduced for the first time to another girlfriend.

That walk of a father! As though I had done it all myself. Up Pembroke Road to Baggott Street lifting my hat right and left – graceful acknowledgment of the applause that I felt sure the somewhat surprised passersby and bystanders would be according me if only they knew what had been accomplished.

Do you see this young man? A small barrister, one might say. An obscure playwright, another would add.

Oh not, not at all. That gentleman with the gracious smile and the jaunty step, jaunty style may have been all these things yesterday. But today, the 12<sup>th</sup> of January in the year 1930, he is more than any of them. He is a father.'

'I went to a very small school called Park House which was in Donnybrook. It was on Morehampton Road. It was a small, experimental school which was started for people the likes of me, really, who had parents who didn't want necessarily their children churned out in a pattern. It was started by a woman who was a great friend of the Synges and the Yeats and people like that, and so it was very literary. It was a seriously liberal arts school. We learned nothing.'

(Jennifer Johnston in 'Be My Guest', an interview with Fr Brian Darcy, BBC Radio Ulster c. 1995)

'As a child I was the game inventor. About twelve or more of us played after school in the summer afternoons in Herbert Park; Robin Hood and his Merry men menaced the innocent dog walkers and pram pushers from behind the bushes, the Knights of the Round Table rescued ladies from dragons and their lances and swords clashed and horses and men died on the green lawns near the ponds.'

(Jennifer Johnston, Introduction to *The Nightingale and not the Lark*, 1988)

'I was at a very nice and proper school, where we read books, we read real books, right from the age of four up to 17. We also read history books. But it always seemed to me that history books were written by people who were trying to explain some enormous mess that we'd all got into but were never going to be able to explain. Whereas novelists can explain things in their own way. That's why it's so important that children read. It's sad that parents don't seem to see books as anything other



Jennifer as a toddler with her mother Shelah Richards and a toy lamb (1931)

than a frivolity these days. Reading should be a joy for a child not a chore.'

(Jennifer Johnston in conversation with Martina Devlin at the Seamus Heaney HomePlace at 3.00pm on Saturday 14 October, 2017)



Jennifer in school uniform with unidentified boy (1940s)

School group photo with Jennifer standing, far right (1940s)

# EARLY ADULthood

## MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Jennifer married Ian Smyth in 1951. They started their married life in Paris where Jennifer nurtured her cooking skills — skills which would stand her in good stead in later life. Many friends and relations enjoyed Jennifer’s generous hospitality and memorable meals.

Ian and Jennifer used to enjoy travelling, alone or with friends and family. Throughout her life Jennifer loved France and Italy, both of which she visited for work or holidays.

Jennifer and Ian settled in London with their four children: Patrick (1955), Sarah (1956), Lucy (1962) and Malachi (1966). Their home was often visited by relations and strangers alike. Some came for a few days, others for rather longer.

Apart from running the household, Jennifer went on Ban the Bomb demonstrations, volunteered in a local youth club, attended evening classes in Irish and Russian. It was in London that her work routines became established: all housework, including food preparation, was done before 9:00 am, Jennifer would then settle down to write until 12:30. The afternoons were spent reading or going for a walk. The family escaped from London for the weekends to Rousham where they rented a cottage with the writer Micheal Campbell and the bookseller Bill Holden. Jennifer never wrote during the children’s summer holidays: this was party time. Summer holidays were spent in Ireland: with ‘granny Dick’ in Strabane, granny Shelah in Dublin or in Rathmullan in the Cottage, where the walls were paper thin — leading Jennifer to say: ‘Don’t f\*\*ck, fart or fight in the middle of the night, coz you’ll give all the children a terrible fright.’



Jennifer and Ian Smyth with Robert Smyth in Italy. Early 1950s.



Jennifer in tweed suit. 1950s.

**“I started writing when Lucy was a baby and I was a writer by the time Malachi was born. I had to get a new passport and I had ‘writer’ on it, rather than housewife, or nothing. It was wonderful.”**

*A quest for perfection’, Ciara Dwyer, December 13 2009, Independent.ie*



Jennifer pregnant with Malachi, with Ian and Lucy in Rathmullan, Co. Donegal (1966).



Jennifer with her son Patrick at Rathmullan in 1956.



Jennifer with Lucy and Sarah in Rathmullan (1963).



Jennifer with Malachi and Lucy in London (1972).



Wedding photo on 21 February 1951 with Robert Smyth, Shelah Richards, Ian Smyth, Jennifer Johnston, Caroline Naylor and Granny Dick (Ian’s mother).

# PUBLICATIONS & THEATRICAL PRODUCTIONS



- 1972** *The Captains and the Kings*, novel, Hamish Hamilton, London
- 
- 1973** *The Gates*, novel, Hamish Hamilton, London
- 
- 1974** *How Many Miles to Babylon?*, novel, Hamish Hamilton, London
- 
- 1977** *Shadows on Our Skin*, novel, Hamish Hamilton, London
- 
- 1979** *The Old Jest*, novel, Hamish Hamilton, London
- 
- 1980** *The Nightingale and Not the Lark*, play [First Production: 16 October 1979 in the Abbey theatre; Director: Paul Brennan]
- 
- 1981** *The Christmas Tree*, novel, Hamish Hamilton, London
- 
- 1983** *Indian Summer*, play [First Production: 11 May 1983 in the Lyric Theatre, Belfast; Director: Robert Cooper]
- 
- 1983** *Andante un Poco Mosso*, in *The Best Short Plays* (1983) [First Production: 17 November 1981 by New Writers Theatre in The Arts Theatre; Director: Brian McAvera]
- 
- 1985** *The Railway Station Man*, novel, Hamish Hamilton, London
- 
- 1986** *The Porch*, play
- 
- 1987** *The Invisible Man*, play [First Production: 28 September 1987 in the Abbey theatre, Dublin; Director: Caroline Fitzgerald]
- 
- 1988** *Fool's Sanctuary*, novel, Hamish Hamilton, London
- 
- 1988** *O Ananias, Azarias and Misael*, play [First Production: 14 October 1988 in the Peacock Theatre, Dublin; Director: Caroline Fitzgerald] First published in *Best Radio Plays of 1989* (1990)
- 
- 1989** *Triptych*, play [First Production: 06 March 1989 in the Abbey theatre, Dublin; Director: Caroline Fitzgerald]
- 
- 1991** *The Invisible Worm*, novel, Sinclair-Stevenson, London
- 
- 1993** *Twinkletoes*, play [First Production: 26 July 1993; Produced by the Project Arts Centre in Bewley's Café Theatre, Dublin; Director: Caroline Fitzgerald]
- 
- 1993** *How Many Miles to Babylon?*, play adaptation [First Production: 02 September 1993 in the Lyric Theatre, Belfast; Director: Caroline Fitzgerald]
- 
- 1995** *The Illusionist*, novel, Sinclair-Stevenson, London
- 
- 1995** *Three Monologues*: "Twinkletoes", "Musn't Forget High Noon", "Christine", Lagan Press, Belfast (premiered in Linen Hall Library in 1996)
- 
- 1996** *The Desert Lullaby*, play [First Production: 31 October 1996 in the Lyric Theatre, Belfast; Director: Caroline Fitzgerald]
- 
- 1997** Short story in *Finbar's Hotel*, devised and edited by Dermot Bolger, Picador/ New Island Books
- 
- 1998** *Two Moons*, novel, HEADLINE REVIEW, an imprint of Headline Book Publishing, London
- 
- 1999** *The Essential Jennifer Johnston* (contains *The Captains and the Kings*, *The Railway Station Man*, and *Fool's Sanctuary*)
- 
- 2000** 'Trio' in *Great Irish Stories of Murder and Mystery*, edited by Peter Haining, Barnes Noble Books
- 
- 2000** *The Gingerbread Woman*, novel HEADLINE REVIEW, an imprint of Headline Book Publishing, London
- 
- 2000** *Moonlight and Music*, play [First Production: 08 February 2000 by Fishamble: The New Play Company in the Civic Theatre; Director: Caroline Fitzgerald]
- 
- 2002** *This is not a Novel*, novel, REVIEW, an imprint of Headline Book Publishing, London

*'The line [...] between the world of the theatre and the real world in which we lived seemed very fine; I was a constant onlooker at some drama or other, on the edge it always seemed to me, of other peoples' dialogues; I sat constantly as a good play watcher should on the edge of my seat, filled with excitement, anxiety, fear and ready for the moment when things got scary to shut my eyes and shove my fingers into my ears.'*

*(Jennifer Johnston, Introduction to the Nightingale and not the Lark, 1988)*

- 2005** *Grace and Truth*, novel, Headline Books, London
- 
- 2006** *Waiting*, play [First Production. 04 June 2006 by Eska Riada Productions and Pavilion Theatre, Dun Laoghaire; Director: Caroline Fitzgerald]
- 
- 2007** *Foolish Mortals*, novel, HEADLINE REVIEW, an imprint of Headline Book Publishing, London
- 
- 2009** *Truth or Fiction*, novel, HEADLINE REVIEW, an imprint of Headline Book Publishing, London
- 
- 2011** *Shadowstory*, novel, HEADLINE REVIEW, an imprint of Headline Book Publishing, London
- 
- 2013** *A Sixpenny Song*, novel, Tinder Press
- 
- 2014** *How Many Miles to Babylon?* adapted for the stage by Alan Stanford at Lyric Theatre, Belfast
- 
- 2015** *The Christmas Tree*, rehearsed reading of a play in two acts [First Production. 14 Feb. 2015. Dolmen Theatre. Director: Caroline Fitzgerald]
- 
- 2016** *Naming the Stars*, novel, Tinder Press (published with *Two Moons*)

## FILMS

- 1970** *The Gates* (TV Movie); Director: Tony Barry; Writer: Jennifer Johnston; Stars: Sorcha Cusack, John Franklyn
- 
- 1980** *Play for Today* (TV Series), based on novel *Shadows on Our Skin*; Director: Jim O'Brien; Writers: Jennifer Johnston, Derek Mahon (screenplay); Stars: Macrea Clarke, May Friel, Joe McPartland
- 
- 1982** BBC2 *Playhouse* (TV Series), based on novel *How Many Miles to Babylon?* Director: Moira Armstrong; Writers: Jennifer Johnston, Derek Mahon; Stars: Daniel Day-Lewis, Christopher Fairbank, Siân Phillips
- 
- 1986** *The Christmas Tree* (TV Movie); Director: Herbert Wise; Writers: Jennifer Johnston, William Corlett (screenplay); Stars: Anna Massey, Simon Callow, T.P. McKenna

- 1988** *The Dawning* (based on the novel *The Old Jest*); Director: Robert Knights; Writers: Jennifer Johnston, Moira Williams (screenplay); Stars: Rebecca Pidgeon, Anthony Hopkins, Jean Simmons, Trevor Howard, Tara MacGowran, Hugh Grant
- 
- 1992** *The Railway Station Man*; Director: Micheal Whyte; Writers: Jennifer Johnston, Shelagh Delaney (screenplay); Stars: Julie Christie, Donald Sutherland, John Lynch

## AWARDS INCLUDE

- 1972** Evening Standard Award for Best First Novel
- 
- 1972** Yorkshire Post Book Award (Best First Work)
- 
- 1973** Authors' Club First Novel Award for *The Captains and the Kings*
- 
- 1977** Booker Prize shortlist for *Shadows on our Skin*
- 
- 1979** Whitbread Book Award for *The Old Jest*
- 
- 1979** Costa Book Award for *The Old Jest*
- 
- 1989** Giles Cooper Awards for *O Ananias, Azarias and Misael*
- 
- 1992** Daily Express Best Book of the Year Award for *The Invisible Worm*
- 
- 2006** Irish PEN Award
- 
- 2010** Irish Book of the Decade (Bord Gáis Energy Irish Book Awards)
- 
- 2012** Irish Book Awards Lifetime Achievement Award

## HONORARY DEGREES

- 1987** Awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of Ulster, Coleraine
- 
- 1992** Awarded a LittD by Trinity College, Dublin
- 
- 1993** Awarded an Honorary Doctorate by The Queen's University, Belfast
- 
- 2001** Elected to Honorary Fellowship in Trinity College, Dublin
- 
- 2004** Conferred an Honorary Degree of the National University of Ireland

# INSCRIPTIONS FROM ADMIRERS

## A SELECTION

These books give some idea of the treasures to be found in the Jennifer Johnston Collection at dlr LEXLCON. There are almost 2,000 books in the Collection consisting of her own novels, gifts from authors and a large collection of her own books.



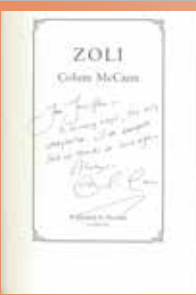
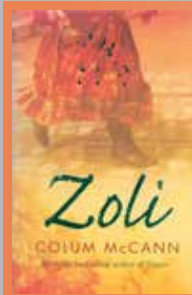
For Jennifer, with the greatest admiration & love, Marie  
January 12, 2017. With note dated Jan 16, 2017

Dear Jennifer,  
Thank you for a wonderful evening. It was a most enjoyable occasion and I met a number of old friends that I hadn't seen in some time. Great food too!  
I meant to give this to you but forgot! So here it is. You really are an inspirational figure for me.  
Love,  
Marie

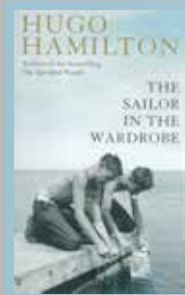


For Jennifer, With thanks, Donal  
14 December 2012  
Note

Dear Jennifer  
It was my pleasure and privilege to be involved with the tribute to you and your career so far at the book awards. It was also a thrill to meet you, although I was, as I knew I would be, overcome with shyness and fell into a characteristic 'thick-tongued rumble'.  
I knew that I didn't properly express the thrill I feel each time I see your name and mine in the same place, and how much I appreciate your words. I would love to meet you, and have a chat, and hopefully not be struck dumb.  
The hardback enclosed is a tiny token of my gratitude. This edition is to be released in the UK in the New Year. What a feeling – that it will make its way with your name on it! Like wings!  
I hope you have a lovely Christmas,  
With thanks again and very best wishes, always  
Yours, Donal.



For Jennifer –  
In so many ways, the only storyteller.  
With deepest love & thanks & love again.  
Always –  
Colum McCann.

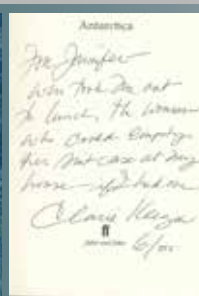


To Jennifer  
From your No 1 admirer.  
Hugo Hamilton  
Dublin Jan 2006.



To Jennifer Johnston  
From brother to dearly loved sister  
Hugh Leonard

(This was a long-standing family joke as Hugh Leonard fantasized that Denis Johnston was his biological father.)



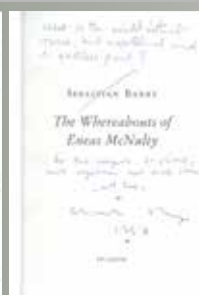
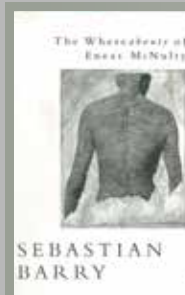
Antarctica by Claire Keegan

For Jennifer –  
Who took me out to lunch, the woman who could empty her suitcase at my house – if I had one.  
Claire Keegan  
6/01



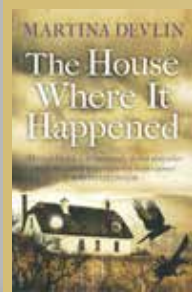
Dublin, June 1992

For Jennifer Johnston, who was part of this journey  
Rosita.



What is the world without rescue, but a wasteland and a worthless peril?

To the deepest, brightest, most mysterious and most dear.  
All love  
Sebastian Barry  
1997



To Jennifer  
With gratitude for so many years of mesmerising storytelling.  
Martina Devlin



To Jennifer  
A great writer and a great friend.  
All the very best from  
Ferdia

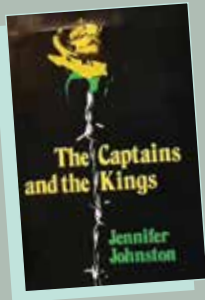
9 September, 1991.



Visiting Paris for Les Belles Etrangères literary festival in 1989, a festival that put Irish writers on the map in France. Nuala Ni Dhomhnaill, Jennifer Johnston, Derek Mahon, Sebastian Barry and Thomas Kilroy.



# OPENING LINES A SELECTION



The two guards left the barracks at ten past four on the afternoon of September 20. The barracks, a small white house, was set in a terrace of similar houses, the only distinguishing features being a small sunburst over the door, signifying Garda Siochana, and a tall white flag pole on the roof for use on ceremonial occasions, which were very few and far between. They cycled slowly along the village street with the sun behind them and their shadows, black on the ground, always that unattainable length in front of them.

*The Captains and the Kings*, 1972  
To Ian



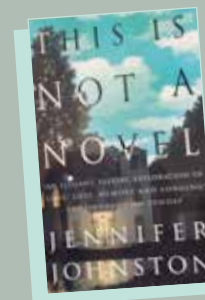
Because I am an officer and a gentleman they have given me my notebooks, pen, ink and paper. So I write and wait. I am committed to no cause, I love no living person. The fact that I have no future except what you can count in hours doesn't seem to disturb me unduly. After all, the future whether here or there is equally unknown.

*How Many Miles to Babylon*, 1974  
For David



There are no new days ahead of me. Is this what they meant by limbo? Waiting time, floating time, time for snatching at the comfortable and uncomfortable moments of the past. Why do I die is not the question. All fools know the answer to that one. But how? How has my life led me to this moment? There is no day, no night, here. The river is wide and slow. They pluck from time to time at the remains of my body with their kind, warm hands. Their voices flow, a counter-stream across me.

As yet, I hear no voice from God.  
*Fool's Sanctuary*, 1987  
For S.R.  
With laughter and rage  
and love remembered



This is not a novel. I want to make that perfectly clear. Normally, when I set out to write a piece of fiction, I invent a setting, a landscape, a climate, a world, in fact, that has no reality outside the pages of the book, and into that world I insert my characters. I become the puppet master and I tweak and push these wretches, who, like us, have never asked to be born, through all sorts of contortions, until that merciful moment when I type those exultant words "The End".

*This is Not A Novel*, 2002  
For Lelia,  
A woman of many arts and parts  
And a great friend,  
With love.

Filming with Daniel Day Lewis on site for *How Many Miles to Babylon*. (1982)



# CLOSING LINES A SELECTION



There is no more to write. The house is full of people. The first thing Mrs Barry did when she arrived was turn off the lights on the tree and pull the curtains. How sad, I thought. How lonely to be dead in the dark. I have packed my case and I am sitting in my room writing this last page. When I have finished it I will put it in the parcel with the other papers and wrap them up with string and sellotape and go to the Hibernian Hotel.

*The Christmas Tree*, 1981

For P and U, S, L and M with a lot of love



'Let's go now. Not to the pictures. Go. Go away,' she said. 'I can walk anywhere in my lovely boots; up mountains, on beaches, through the city, even on the moon I'm sure I can walk. I can run. I can dance. I know I can dance. I used to be a wonderful dancer. I was as light as a feather. I used to fly in the arms of my partners. I can do all those things again. I can show you how well I dance. Let's go now, Bonifacio. Let's go to Rome and Venice and Borgo Sansepolcro and dance in the streets. I can do it. I know that I can do it. I know.'

*Two Moons*, 1998

My mother would have loved Bonifacio.

I dedicate this book to her memory with much love.

Shelah Richards.

Flora laughed. She put out her hand and took Nellie's arm.

'Look up, Nelly. All those stars. Let's name them. Well, just a few of them. The really bright ones. You said you used to do it on your way back from the picture house. Let's do it again tonight. In honour.'

In honour of what, may I ask?

'Truth.'

The two old ladies stood, their necks stretched back, their faces bathed in starlight. The silence whispered around them.

'Deanna Durbin,' said Nellie after a long time of thinking.

'I quite distinctly see the Marx Brothers.'

Flora pointed upwards.

'Bette Davis.'

'Gary Cooper.'

'Bing Crosby.'

'Shirley Temple.'

'Dear Myrna Loy.'

'Eddie,' Nellie whispered.

'Yes. Oh yes.'

Flora put her arm around Nellie's shoulder. 'And Daddy.'

'The Major.'

They stared up at the sky in silence. The wind stirred through the branches of grandfather's trees and a fox barked in the distance.

'I wonder would we...'

'Who?'

'... Perhaps not.'

Flora began to laugh.

'What asses we are. Wilkinson. Dead or alive.'

Of course.'

The two old ladies lifted their heads and shouted 'Wilkinson Wilkinson,' and the moon went behind the cloud and the fox barked again.

*Naming the Stars*, 2015

for my two wonderful grandsons with hope and love, Sam and Atticos (sic)



Jennifer Johnston.  
Portrait by Sarah FitzGerald. (1980s)

Frank McGuinness  
and Jennifer Johnston

# LIFE IN DERRY

## THE WRITER AT HER PEAK

In 1973 Jennifer moved to live with David Gilliland in Derry. They married on 14 May 1976. Jennifer's writing career was occupying more and more of her time. She continued observing the disciplined working routines she had established in London, that is, when she was not a guest at an international literary festival. When at home in Derry, she worked with prisoners in the Maze and was a keen participant in the Writers in Schools schemes funded by the NI and RoI Arts Councils. Jennifer was appointed to a number of national Boards: the Abbey Board (1994), the Lyric Theatre, the Stewart Parker Trust, the Foreign Affairs Cultural Committee, Ireland Romania Cultural Foundation.



David Gilliland on board his boat Green Glory (early 1980s)

It was during this period that many of her books were translated and Jennifer was invited to travel extensively to promote Irish literature abroad. An avid reader of the literatures of the world, she was a deeply committed advocate of cultural exchange.

Jennifer's fondness for parties culminated during these years, the most memorable were the parties she organised to celebrate each of her decades.

Jennifer's friendship with and admiration for the painter Basil Blackshaw dated back to the early 1960s when he spent time with Jennifer's family in and around

Rathmullan where he painted horse races on the beach. His admiration for Jennifer was recorded in the many portraits he painted of her. In Derry, she was also close friends with many visual artists such as Gordon Woods, Philippe Carpentier and Miles Lowry.

*'Twinkletoes was written in about a week, after I spent some time visiting the Maze prison to talk about writing to anyone who wanted to listen. I was received with such courtesy and generosity by the prisoners that I felt, after a while, I would like to write something, not about them, which would have, to my mind, been crass in the extreme, but for them. I wanted to repay in my own way these men for what they had given me during those few hours.'*

*(Jennifer Johnston, Preface to Three Monologues, January 1995)*



60th birthday celebrations with Patrick, Malachi, Jennifer, Lucy and Sarah.



Jennifer Johnston receiving Honorary Doctorate from TCD in 1992.



Rehearsing Three Monologues for Linen Hall Library in 1996. With Oliver Maguire, Róisín Flood, Carol Scanlan, Caroline FitzGerald (Director) and Jennifer Johnston. Photo by Sarah Fitzgerald.

# LATER YEARS EVER THE WRITER



Jennifer and family 2010.  
Back row: Malachi, Marika, Jennifer, Sam. Front row: Oleg, Sarah and Attikos, Lucy

In later years Jennifer moved back to her native city and settled in Dún Laoghaire. She wanted to be close to her beloved brother Micheal and his family, endless cousins living in the neighbourhood and two of her offspring. She also wanted to be able to see Dublin Bay and the sea.



Jennifer with Liam Clancy



Jennifer drawing and writing with grandson Attikos

Her commitment to encouraging young writers led her to supporting Roddy Doyle's Fighting Words; she participated in and supported local literary festivals such as the Mountains to Sea dlr Book Festival, Dalkey Book Festival and events at Dalkey Castle and Heritage Centre. She also encouraged and lent her name to the establishment of The Trinity Centre for Literary and Cultural Translation.

In August 2019, Jennifer Johnston donated her writing desk and nearly 2,000 of her books to dlr Libraries. The collection is now housed in dlr Lexlcon, over half of which is displayed on Level 5 in Meeting Room 4. Jennifer's desk was made to her precise specifications over 30 years ago and it is now used by the Writer in Residence, currently Sadhbh Devlin who is thrilled to be able to use Jennifer's desk. She has no doubt that it will inspire her work during her residency. Jennifer is also pleased that the desk will be used in the Residency Room which looks out of Scotsman's Bay to Sandycove, an area that has played an important role personally and features in much of Jennifer's writing.

*'I live now in a neat house in Sandycove, in a road tipping down to the sea. I have to live near the sea; I don't want to be in it or on it, but I find it hard to live without the sound of it, the smell of it and the constant reflection of the sky, clouds, night, day, grey, blue, and I love the turbulence of storms.'*

*This is not a Novel (2002).*

Jennifer's book collection includes numerous translations of her novels, signed gifts received by many fellow writers, dramatists and artists and a large collection of Johnston's own book collection. Each publication is annotated with her initials J.J. and the year of purchase. Cataloguing is now complete – thanks to library staff Bernie Doherty, Caroline Flood and Seán Downes.

County Librarian Catherine Gallagher notes 'This is a real boost for the Irish Author Collection housed on Level 5, dlr Lexlcon. This Collection began in 2017 with the aim to maintain and build on our support for local and Irish authors. This is achieved through our Mountains to Sea dlr Book Festival where Jennifer Johnston appeared regularly, our dlr Library Voices series, our residencies and about all our commitment to housing and showcasing the work of inspirational writers such as Jennifer Johnston.'



Jennifer in conversation with Roddy Doyle at Mountains to Sea dlr Book Festival 2018 at dlr Lexlcon.

Photo: Ger Holland

Jennifer Johnston  
at 90

# LOCAL PLACES

He ran across the grass and dived from the bank. As the icy water embraced him completely as no woman ever would, a shower of glittering drops rose and fell, a star-laden wake marked his progress out into the middle of the lake.

'Oh God, that's great!'

*How Many Miles to Babylon?*, 1974

For David



The Book Show: Women and Words at Mountains to Sea dlr Book Festival at Pavilion Theatre, 2016 with Olivia O'Leary, Louise O'Neill, Miriam O'Callaghan, Alison Spittle, Sinéad Gleeson, Sabina Higgins, Lisa Lambe, Éilis Ni Dhuibhne, Jennifer, Erin Fornoff, Inni-K and others. Photo Ger Holland.

In the early mornings the shadow of the hill lies dark on the beach and distorts and discolours the opaqueness of the bay with its green and grey shades and the shivering of the trees. That morning there was still blue in the sky and clouds seemed to hang unmoving in the air. Tiny waves flickered on the horizon and white birds' wings were caught by the sun as it moved up from the east.

*Fool's Sanctuary*, 1987

For S.R.

With laughter and rage and love remembered

*The photos on this page celebrate Jennifer's attendance at some of the many local events and festivals.*

Very well, Bonifacio, suppose you are an angel. Suppose that sort of thing is possible. What are you doing here in Dalkey, County Dublin?

*Two Moons*, 1998

My mother would have loved Bonifacio.

I dedicate this book to her memory with much love.

Shelah Richards.



Jennifer with Martina Devlin in Dalkey Castle and Heritage Centre at 'Celebrating Jennifer Johnston' in 2016. Photo John Fahy



Jennifer with Margaret Dunne in Dalkey Castle and Heritage Centre at 'Celebrating Jennifer Johnston' in 2016. Photo John Fahy



Jennifer Johnston with Marian Thérèse Keyes after Bealtaine talk in Dalkey Library on 24 May 2005

The row of handsome grey houses had been standing there for nearly two hundred years, their facades protected from whatever hoi polloi might stroll along the terrace by wrought-iron railings, the gardens behind the houses sloping down towards the rocks and the unsleeping sea.

*Truth or Fiction*, 2009

To the third and fourth generations with love and high hopes



Jennifer's writing desk in dlr Lexicon includes photos of many of Jennifer's close friends. On left is Jennifer with Christopher FitzSimon at the presentation to the Abbey Theatre of a bronze head of Denis Johnston by Marjorie Fitzgibbon (June 1986) and on right with Rosaleen Linehan.



Jennifer Johnston book signing