

### **Temple Bar Gallery + Studios New Writing Commission 2016**

TBG+S New Writing Commission aims to expand ideas around writing about art. In 2016, TBG+S has commissioned the writer Claire-Louise Bennett to write a piece of short fiction inspired by each of the exhibitions in the gallery programme. This piece was written in response to the film 'The Hopeless End of a Great Dream' by Declan Clarke.

Claire-Louise Bennett grew up in Wiltshire and studied literature and drama at the University of Roehampton, before moving to Ireland. Her short fiction and essays have been published in *The Stinging Fly*, *The Irish Times*, *The White Review*, *Gorse*, and elsewhere. She was awarded the inaugural *White Review Short Story Prize* in 2013 and has received bursaries from the Irish Arts Council and Galway City Council. Her debut book, *Pond*, was published by *The Stinging Fly* (Ireland) and *Fitzcarraldo Editions* (UK) in 2015, and will be published by *Riverhead* (US) in summer 2016.

# TBG+S WRITING COMMISSION 2016

Claire-Louise Bennett

Essay #1 *A Very Moving Speech*

OK, she said. Perhaps you might tell me something about this morning. This morning? he said. Certainly. Certainly Miss Broadenturf, I'd be more than happy to tell you something about this morning. I got home. You got home? she said. Yes, he said. You weren't at home? No, he said. You weren't already at home this morning? she said. No I wasn't, he said. I see, she said. OK, she said. So you got home, and then what happened? I got home, I put my bags against the front door then I went around to the garden and collected my washing off the line straight away, he said. Your washing was still on the line this morning Mr Spiegelhalter? Yes, he said, yes it was. Of course it was still there. And much to my delight it was all dry and since the clothes were all dry I folded them as I moved along the line and put them into the basket. The laundry basket? she said. Straight away? Yes, he said, exactly, into the laundry basket. And then I carried it, the laundry basket, back up to the house.

And everything was OK, Mr Spiegelhalter, everything continued in a way that pleased you? she said. Well, no, not exactly Miss Broadenturf, he said, quite the opposite in fact. What I mean is, things weren't as they ordinarily are. You see, as I got closer to the house I could see the small green bin that stands in my kitchen. Ah, you saw it through the window? she said. No, he said. No, and anyway it would be impossible to see it through the window. Then how was it possible for you to see the small green bin Mr Spiegelhalter? she said. It was possible, he said, because it wasn't standing in the kitchen Miss Broadenturf, it was standing on the gravel outside.

The bin was standing outside? she said. Yes, that's right, he said. I see, she said. How did it get there? The green bin? he said. Yes, she said, how did the green bin get outside? Well, it's quite obvious, he said, I'd left it there Miss Broadenturf. Before I went away I took it outside to empty, then I left it down in order to do something else, to check on my washing perhaps, and then I clean forgot about it. I can see how that might happen, she said. So, when you walked from the washing line to your house holding the laundry basket and saw the green bin standing there, what did you do? I didn't do anything Miss Broadenturf, because, as you mention, my hands were already full.

I arrived back at the house and put down the laundry basket next to my bags and I opened the door. Some lights were on, and the radio. The lights, the radio; everything, just as I'd left it. To tell you the truth Miss Broadenturf I stepped over my bags and marched into the house, straight into the kitchen, because, although I'd seen the green bin standing on the gravel outside, I was damn certain I'd find it in its place.

And then what happened?

I stood in the place where the green bin usually stands night and day. It was very peculiar. Then it began to rain Miss Broadenturf. Lightly, soundlessly, but wet all the same. So I went back to the front door and brought my bags, my laundry, into the house. Out of the rain. And then I boiled water to make coffee. Life must go on.

Now? She said. Now? He said. Yes, she said, now.

What would you do, now, Mr Spiegelhalter if you were to behave with caution, for example?

I would probably stop talking to you Miss Broadenturf.

Touché, Mr Spiegelhalter. And what do you think would happen if you were impulsive?

If I was impulsive? If I was impulsive I'd get up right away, stand near the window, and make a speech.

It would be a very rousing speech Miss Broadenturf, full of pathos, rising and falling, plaintive and charming, melancholy and vibrant. I would look out the window, at the buildings opposite and the ones further on, and be greatly inspired. I would look at the people walking in front of the railings, behind the railings. I would see the local birds, going from a tree right up and along, towards the clock tower, and coming to land on a major traffic sign just short of it. I would see the sunlight falling between the main banks in clean slots, and the pristine children of Europe skating through them in flashes. I would see the mass of leaves, coaxed up upon the breeze towards a moment of exhilarating dispersal, before returning to the same-but-different heap. I would see the buckets of cut-flowers and the virgin cellophane reflecting women walking by, their silent cheekbones wrapped up in weightless scarves. Scarves that drift through the city scattering the scent of perfume throughout the historical streets of the city like so many secret notes. I would see the tree-tops and the spires and the parking meters and the places where workers in uniforms and on-trend scholars and timeless archivists lock their bespoke bicycles for the day. Briefly I would see that there is a place for everything and that everything fits together in attuned and stunning unity. Briefly I would feel the system and the flow and I would go on impulsively with my speech, on and on, rising and falling, as if perhaps I was walking, as if perhaps I was walking right there among it all in fact. It would be a very moving speech, Miss Broadenturf, a very moving speech indeed. Though heaven only knows what would be the point of it.

Where are you Mr Spiegelhalter?

I am here, he said. Here, she said. And what is your next step, she said. What will you do here? Nothing, he said, I'm not going to do anything here. I'm going to stay very still.

Very still, like this.

With my hands turning outwards, just like this. Standing here, very still, Miss Broadenturf, with my hands turning outwards. Like this.

Can I see them Mr Spiegelhalter.

Can you see what?

Your hands.

I wouldn't think so Miss Broadenturf.