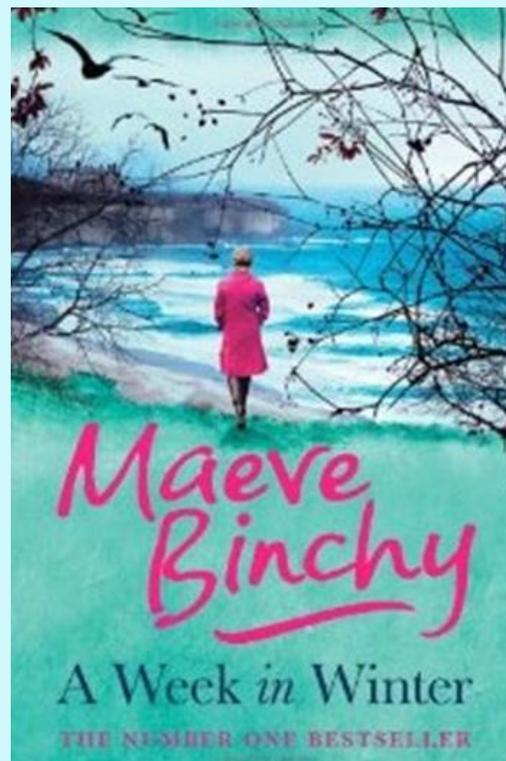


A tribute to Maeve Binchy



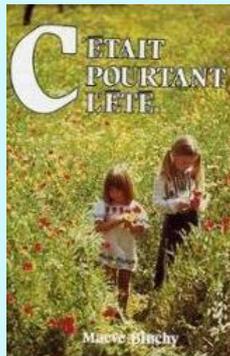
Her very last novel

Queen Maeve and I

When my Anglo-Irish friends, Margaret and Andrew, visited me from Devon last summer, they broke the news I had been dreading to hear for years : Maeve had just died, in Dublin, in the middle of the hustle and bustle of the Olympic Games. She had left quietly, and there was I, a reader in grief, looking forward to reading her last novel. But let me tell you how it all started, somewhere in the west of Ireland, so many years ago...

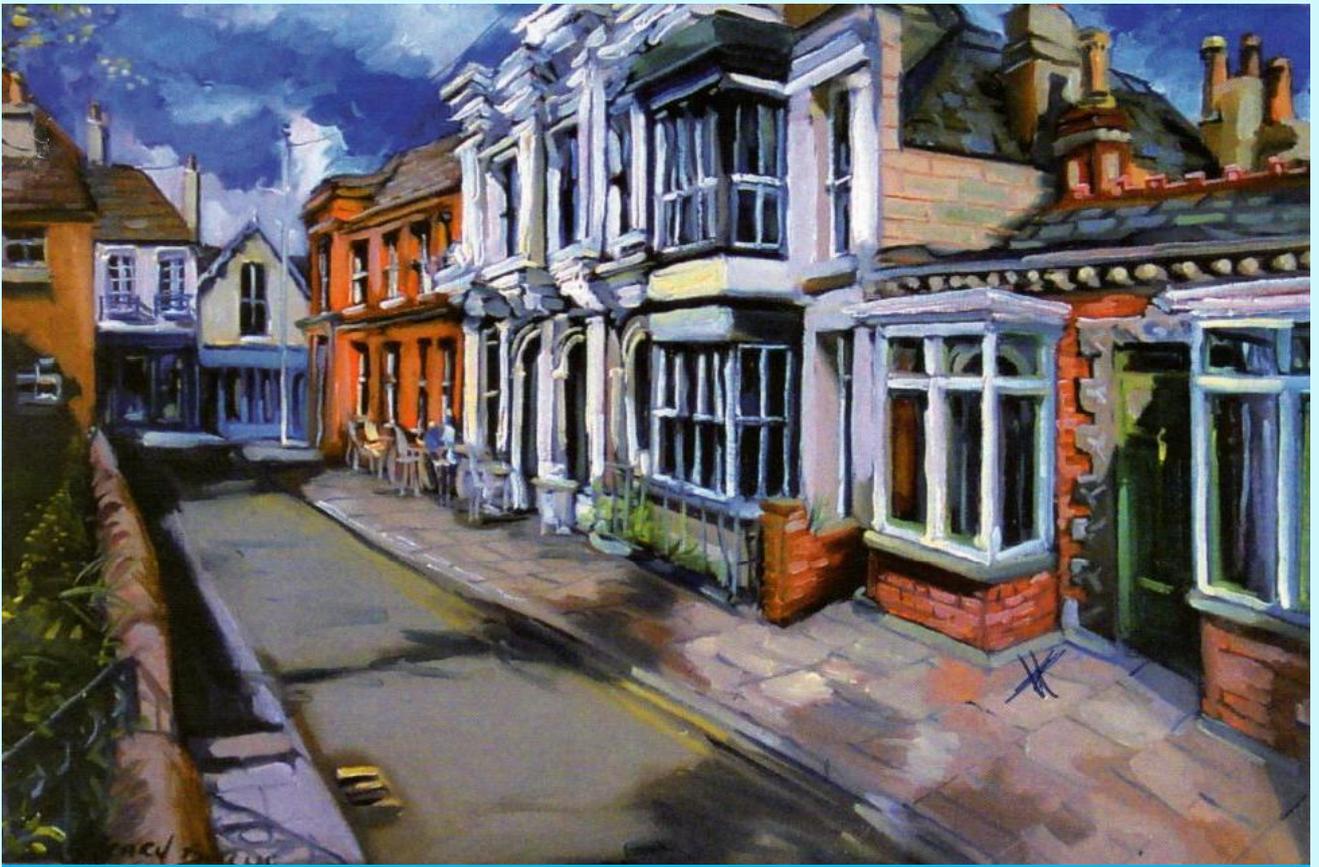
Maeve Binchy first appeared in my life while I was a student on the Emerald Isle, collecting information about recent Irish emigration for the thesis I was writing. One of my colleagues at the Sacred Heart School in Westport, Co. Mayo, had suggested I should read *Deeply Regretted by...*, a play that had just been written by a writer I had never heard of, Maeve Binchy, and for which she was awarded a prize at the Prague Television Festival and two Jacob's awards in Ireland. I remember being quite moved by the sad story of this Irish immigrant living in London with his English wife and their children. When he dies, prematurely, his English wife finds out he has an Irish wife and children in Ireland...

A few years went by, I came back to France and started teaching English. The Internet did not exist then. One day, my sister, who loves Ireland as much as I do, lent me a book entitled *C'était Pourtant l'été* by Maeve Binchy. I did enjoy reading it although it was in French. It was Maeve Binchy's first novel. I bought an English copy the next time I crossed the Channel, its original title being *Light a Penny Candle*.



From then on I bought all her books and became a real addict. My friends from Devon kept sending me the articles she wrote for *The Guardian* and *The Irish Times*. I also read her non-fiction books although I am convinced fiction gave her the opportunity to bring out all her Irishness. As soon as I dive into one of her books, it is like being back in dear old Ireland : I can smell turf burning in the hearth, I can hear the melody of Irish English in my ears, I can picture the winding lanes lined with stone walls, I can feel the mist all around me and the spray on my face above the Cliffs of Moher...

A few years ago I plucked up the courage to write to Maeve Binchy to let her know how much her writings meant to me. She was kind enough to answer, sending me a postcard from Dalkey, her hometown, on which she had drawn a little cross to show me which house was hers... Here it is...



Poilyville Sornawo Rd Dasher
Co Dub

Dear Odette

Tell you for the use was
letter - ya kind words
This is a picture of my little
house - with * outside the
door. How well ya know ya
Ireland - and I am so
proud. Please to
French people like my
wishes - Mother's
Voices today
Love Ben

Sorrento Road, Dalkey
by Gerard Byrne

Soon after Maeve's death last summer, I pre-ordered her last book, *A Week in Winter*. When it came through the post, I opened it almost religiously, realising on receiving it that this wonderful feeling of discovering Maeve Binchy's latest book would never happen again...

I have just read it, savouring each page. All I can say is that it is Maeve at her very best. Each chapter bears the name of one character in the story. Each story seems to be independent, but in fact they all intermingle in a very clever way around a 19th century house, Stone House, turned into a guest house in a town called Stoneybridge in the west of Ireland. Another of her books was built in the same way, *Silver Wedding*, and it enchanted me so many years ago when it was published.

Here is the blurb of *A Week in Winter* :

"The Sheedy sisters had lived in Stone House for as long as anyone could remember. Set high on the cliffs on the west coast of Ireland, overlooking the windswept Atlantic Ocean, it was falling into disrepair – until one woman, with a past she needed to forget, breathed new life into the place. Now a hotel, with a big warm kitchen and log fires, it provides a welcome few can resist."

I advise you not to resist : get a copy of this novel. It is now part of the amazing legacy we are happy to share, together with sixteen other novels : *Light a Penny Candle*, *Echoes*, *The Lilac Bus*, *Firefly Summer*, *Silver Wedding*, *Circle of Friends*, *The Copper Beech*, *The Glass Lake*, *Evening Class*, *Tara Road*, *Scarlet Feather*, *Quentins*, *Night of Rains and Stars*, *Whitethorn Woods*, *Heart and Soul* and *Minding Frankie*. Maeve's writings also include non-fiction : *Aches and Pains* and *The Maeve Binchy's Writers' Club*, wonderful collections of short stories: *Victoria Line Central Line*, *Dublin 4*, *This Year It Will Be Different*, *The Return Journey*, and quick reads: *Star Sullivan*, *Full House*.



"I'd like people to think I was a good friend and a reasonable story-teller and to know that thanks to all the great people, family and friends that I met, I was very, very happy when I was here."

Maeve Binchy

