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Meath County Council Library Service  
Book Club Kit

# CAOILINN HUGHES

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# THE WILD LAUGHTER



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# Notes to Readers




This kit was created for book clubs to use in their discussions of *The Wild Laughter* and contains spoilers

## Content Warnings

Please be aware that *The Wild Laughter* contains content that may be triggering including assisted dying and financial struggle

## Resources

This kit is available to download on our website





# Interview with the Author

## Where do you write?


At a desk in whatever house I'm in—it can be a kitchen table, but I prefer to be able to close myself behind a door. I can write in cafés too, if I'm deep into a story or novel, but I tend to listen to brown noise soundtracks or café noise soundtracks while in cafés! They're beautifully calibrated so that you can't tune into any conversations or hear anyone masticating. Although ... 2020 has made me feel nostalgic about the sound of strangers chewing. So maybe I won't want the soundtrack balm in the future.

## What did you do after school?

I went to art school for a year—the foundation before a degree in fine art. I didn't want to become an artist (I enjoyed being bad at it so much that I had little mind to improve) but I hadn't gotten into university, so that year was a way to move into a creative transitional zone. I worked in a record shop. Then I moved to Northern Ireland to study at Queen's University, where I did my BA and MA degrees. (They let me in despite my B minus in English, for which I am eternally indebted.) The MA was in Twentieth-Century Irish Theatre and Culture. Then I moved to New Zealand for seven years, where I got a corporate job to save money, then did a Ph.D in English Literature and started writing fiction in earnest. Then I moved to the Netherlands for a three-year university gig sevenish years ago and now it's 2020 and the narrative has stopped playing at linearity!

## When did you decide to give writing a go?

I don't ever remember deciding to give it a go. I've just always done it. I never completed or shaped things as a child, so that wasn't really writing as I understand it now. It was gestural. I have no recollection of ever being asked to write poems or stories for school, which—in a way—was helpful, because that would have made it a conscious act. It would have made it feel contrived and fraudulent, for me. I do remember the difference, though, between writing stuff and writing something that I felt to be real. I was undisciplined and impatient as a teenager, except about sucking tea through Penguin bars: that I did with precision and rigour. Only in my mid-20s did I start spending enough time writing to accumulate those 0.01 percentages into sentences.





## Can you give other writers three tips?


Is 'other writers' different to 'budding authors'? If so, I would never give advice to my peers! I'll take their advice possibly, but I would only give out curse-filled encouragements.

### **Did you enjoy writing *The Wild Laughter*? How did it compare to writing your earlier novel *Orchid & the Wasp*?**

They are very different books, structurally, tonally and stylistically, so perhaps it's no surprise that the writing of the two novels differed dramatically. *Orchid & the Wasp* was terrifying to write and it took years. It's a very unconventional book that appears to squinted eyes to be a coming-of-age, rags-to-riches sort of narrative. (When people see a young female protagonist, they often assume coming-of-age; that the story will prompt the young woman to discover her inner strength that will help her overcome various obstacles.) Instead, it's a picaresque novel following a woman's career of sorts, or the progression of her ideas over time, as she tests them out upon society—some of those ideas are cynical, some are sad, some are dubious and contradictory. Picaresque novels with female leads are few and far between—especially if you leave out ones involving the pursuit of marriage, like *Emma* and *Vanity Fair*. Novels with female leads who don't have hearts of gold (who aren't heroines), who aren't sociopaths either, and whose narratives don't revolve around men are very rare. On top of being that rare species, it's a novel in which most characters appear only once or twice; it's a novel told in scenes, with no explanatory summary; and it spans a decade. What's more, I wanted to refrain from using death in the plot of this novel: I didn't want any characters introduced to die. As I was writing the book, I knew that all this would make it a very big ask of a reader. I had to really believe in the reader to write that book.

*The Wild Laughter* is a first-person narrative and its characters have very strong senses of humour, so I wasn't working against the grain as overtly with this novel.

This one cajoles the reader a bit more than *Orchid*. There are innovations with story and in the way the novel plays into and against stereotypes (as well as the stereotypical Irish story) ... but the reader is ideally in deep before those tugs on the carpet are felt. If Hart wins them over, they might mistake them as tugs on the gut. It was less terrifying to write because the narrative voice has this luring, hand-on-the-shoulder, hand-on-the-heart quality, in contrast to Gael's/*Orchid*'s irony ... but there are always unwise challenges! For example, the novel's plot centres around something laughably grim! Its elevator pitch would make you want to jump down the elevator shaft. Let it never be said that I make things easy for myself! But I laughed a lot writing both books—there are characters in both that I'm glad to have known. They tortured me while being bloody good company. And the characters I'm working on now feel the pressure! I have to hope it doesn't break them, or me!





# Reading Group Discussion Questions

Would you recommend this book to someone? Why or why not (or with what caveats)? What kind of reader would most enjoy this book?

Did you find the author's writing style easy to read or hard to read? Why? How long did it take you to get into the book?

Who was your favorite character? What character did you identify with the most? Were there any characters that you disliked? Why?

Did any part of this book strike a particular emotion in you? Which part and what emotion did the book make you feel?

How much did you know about this book before picking it up? What surprised you the most about the book?

Was there any part of the plot or aspects of the characters that frustrated or upset you? If so, why?

How thought-provoking did you find the book? Did the book change your opinion about anything, or did you learn something new from it? If so, what?

Did you highlight or bookmark any passages from the book? Did you have a favorite quote or quotes? If so, share which and why?

From your point of view, what were the central themes of the book? How well do you think the author did at exploring them?

Compare this book to other books you have read by the same author, or other books you have read covering the same or similar themes. How are they the same or different?

How would you adapt this book into a movie? Who would you cast in the leading roles?

## About the Author



Caoilinn Hughes's first novel *Orchid & the Wasp* won the 2019 Collyer Bristow Prize. Her poetry collection *Gathering Evidence* won the Irish Times Shine/Strong Award. Her short fiction has been awarded the Moth Short Story Prize and an O. Henry Award. *The Wild Laughter* is her second novel.

# Who Else Writes Like...?

A readers' guide to fiction authors



## DID YOU KNOW?

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And there are lots of other ways to search Who Else...?, such as genre, character and series. There are also featured links to book award winners, useful websites and editor's choice of top titles.

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### How to Log In

To use this great resource just visit the Who Else Writes Like Website and Log in with your Library Card. Then select Meath County Libraries from the drop down menu of accounts and click on continue. And you're on your way to finding your next read.

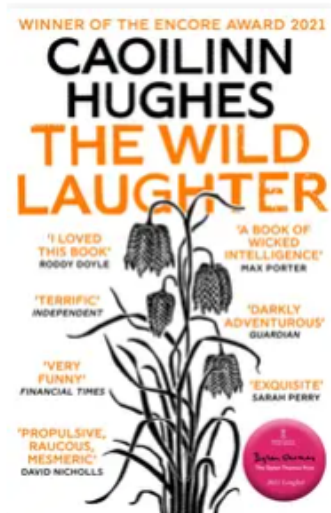
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