

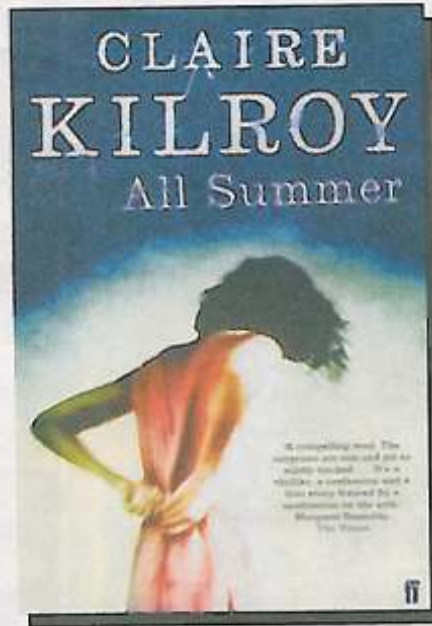
All Summer

by Claire Kilroy
(Faber & Faber)

There you are tapping away on your computer keyboard. Narratives are beautifully couched, flowing effortlessly; the imagery evoked is unbelievably powerful. And then your fingers stop in mid-sentence, poised to strike in that word that will capture the essence of your work... but you can't. You had the word, but it has suddenly disappeared from your memory, and all efforts to retrieve or even reel in something akin to it is in vain.

Now, imagine blanking out on a whole day, or a month, or even your whole life. How does it feel to be without memory? To be unable to remember your past and yet know you're not crazy – it is a scary scenario to say the least.

Upon this premise of memory loss, Claire Kilroy launched her debut novel *All Summer* in 2003. When we meet the narrator Anna Hunt – also known as Isolde, in her former criminal life – she has come to live in an island somewhere in the west of Ireland, in isolation and loneliness. Before this, at her brother Kel's instigation, she had helped to rob three paintings from the national museum for ransom. Two of the paintings have been



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returned in exchange for the ransom money, and Anna is supposed to know where the third painting and the ransom have gone, but she has lost her memory.

It is through the search for the remaining painting, *Girl in the Mirror*, that another theme in the novel is introduced – the nature of desire, or rather the implications of unnatural desire, for Anna is in love with her brother who is ruthless, unpredictable and violent. Her desire for him is palpable. Under his mesmerising spell and aided by drugs, her life is lived only to please him. Is Kilroy alluding that severe mental trauma can be induced by an unnatural fixation, a hunger for the unattainable?

The language of the novel is taut like a stretched bow, the prose sharp and poetic. But when you remember that the book's events take place during the course of a summer, you feel bereft as the imagery is unrelentingly dark, without an atom of sunshine. The fact that Kilroy does not tie up all the loose ends does not help in this respect.

However, she certainly makes a good case for the power of the mind to conjure, distort and create, and points us to the fact that unnatural desires, the effect of drugs and a life of crime do not pay. This book will convince you.

Review by Ifedinma Dimbo



Ifedinma Dimbo, originally from Nigeria, is the author of a soon-to-be-published women's novel *She Was Foolish?* More details about the author, her work and the Irish Writers' Exchange can be found online at www.irishwriters-exchange.com