



STUART NEVILLE

THE GHOSTS OF BELFAST/THE TWELVE

(2009)

One of Northern Ireland's best known and critically reviewed crime writers, Stuart Neville was born in Belfast in 1972. He is the author of seven novels featuring Belfast. His first, **The Ghosts of Belfast** (published in Ireland as **The Twelve**) won several awards. His latest, **Here and Gone** (under the pseudonym Haylen Beck), takes place in Arizona.

In the introduction to the anthology, **Belfast Noir** (Akashic Books 2014), Neville and co-editor Adrian McKinty make the point that during the Troubles Belfast languished culturally. By the time of the 1998 Peace Accord the mystery/crime writers of Northern Ireland had become prominent around the world.

Most novels set during the Troubles focus on the effects of the violence on innocent bystanders. **Ghosts** takes you out of your comfort zone and asks you to deal with characters who are both the cause and perpetrators of the violence. How important is this to understanding the Troubles?

**Ghosts** takes the reader into the psyche of an IRA assassin although the term IRA is never mentioned in the book. Do we feel any sympathy or empathy for Gerry Fegan? Why? Why not? What motivates Fegan to become an IRA hit man? What motivates the double agent Davey Campell?

Are the politicians seen as more culpable? Think of the interchange between Fegan and McGinty toward the end of the novel. To what extent does the repeated phrase, "everyone pays, sooner or later," become a motif in the novel?

In a review in **The Guardian**, Nicola Barr, praises the novel as "a brilliant thriller...Neville has boldly exposed the post-ceasefire Northern Ireland as a confused, contradictory place, a country trying to carve out a future amid a peace recognize by the populace as hypocritical, but accepted as better than the alternative."

While teaching a fiction master class at Armagh, Neville stated that a compulsive plot is not simply a sequence of events but is the inevitable consequences of creating strong characters and allowing them to pursue their conflicting issues. How did he accomplish this in **Ghosts**?

There is a sequel to **Ghosts**. In **Collusion** (published in 2012) you find out the fate of some of the characters in **Ghosts**.

Some other Irish mystery writers you might like are: Ken Bruen, Tana French, Declan Hughes, Lisa McInerney, Peter Tremayne, Colin Bateman, Adrian McKinty. The web site <http://www.cormacmillar.com/Link-IrishCrimeWriters.html> is quite helpful in describing many current and past Irish writers of mystery both current and older.