

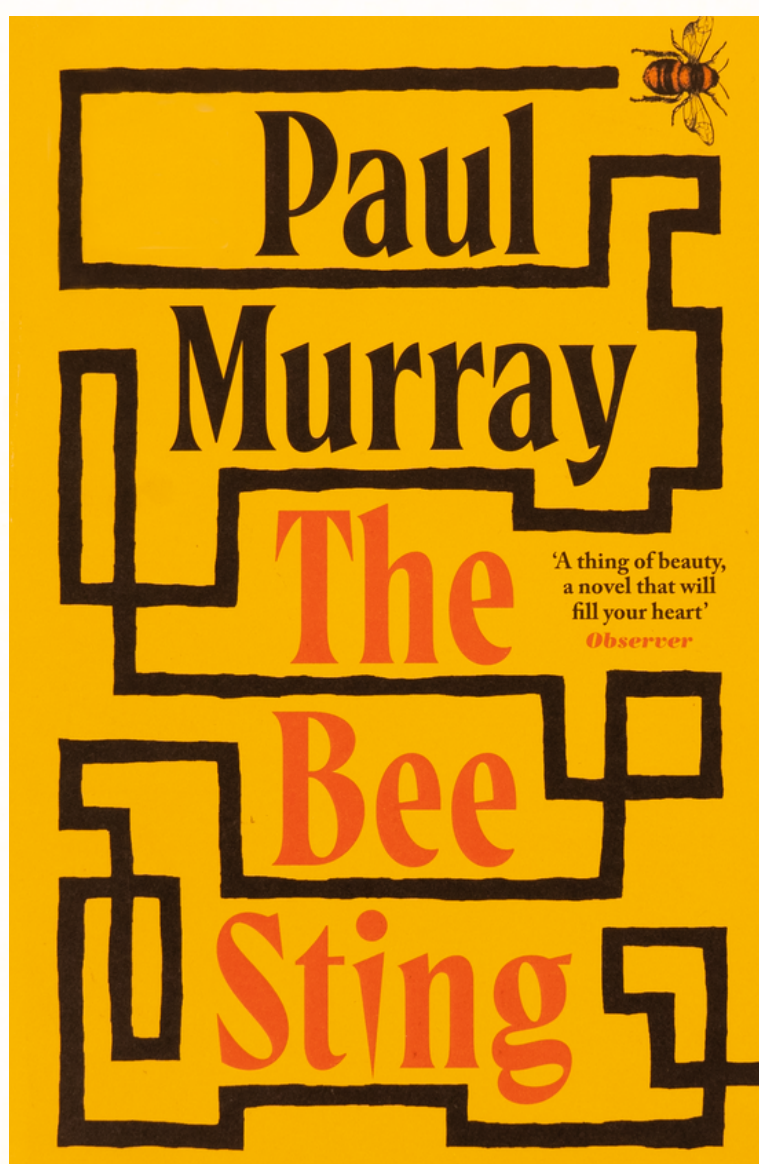
NERO

BOOK AWARDS

Reading Guides

Fiction Shortlist

The Bee Sting by Paul Murray



Paul Murray was born in Dublin in 1975 and is the author of *An Evening of Long Goodbyes*, *Skippy Dies*, *The Mark and the Void* and *The Bee Sting*. *An Evening of Long Goodbyes* was shortlisted for the Whitbread First Novel Award and nominated for the Kerry Group Irish Fiction Award. *Skippy Dies* was shortlisted for the Costa Novel award and the National Book Critics Circle Award and longlisted for the Booker Prize. *The Mark and the Void* won the Everyman Wodehouse Prize 2016. *The Bee Sting* was shortlisted for the Booker Prize 2023 and was the winner of the Irish Book of the Year 2023. Paul Murray lives in Dublin.

'The writing is both accomplished and highly readable, the characters shine, and the family members' individual story arcs are all equally compelling and gripping.' - Fiction judges, 2023 Nero Book Awards

'That man is nothing but a crook, her mother said. She couldn't stand Big Mike, with his smirk, and his investments, and his Gucci cowboy boots. And him only a yahoo, that grew up on handouts from the Lions! But he knew how to use his loaf, which was more than she could say for some people.'

Set in rural Ireland in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crash, when the Celtic Tiger has lost its roar, *The Bee Sting* tells the story of The Barnes family who, in one way or another, all find themselves deep in trouble: Dickie's once-lucrative car business is going under while his exasperated wife Imelda is selling off her jewellery on eBay and half-heartedly dodging the attentions of cattle farmer Big Mike. Their teenage daughter Cass, formerly top of her class, seems determined to binge-drink her way to her final exams and twelve-year-old PJ, in debt to local sociopath 'Ears' Moran, is putting the final touches to his grand plan to run away from home.

Moving back and forth across four decades, to wrong turns that may or may not be the origin of the family's current misery and misfortune, Murray also leads us in and around the same few post-crash months to give us the very different perspectives of Dickie, Imelda, Cass and PJ, on the same events. *The Bee Sting* captures the

comic melodrama of life in a small community in episodes that are both recognisable and relatable, while remaining sympathetic to its characters, even as they make one bad decision after another.

Hilarious and tragic in equal measure, *The Bee Sting* is a gripping saga of one highly dysfunctional family that asks if a single moment of bad luck – a patch of ice on the road, a bee caught beneath a bridal veil – can change the direction of a life?

Discussion Points:

- Imelda and Dickie married after Imelda's first love, Dickie's brother, dies tragically as a young man. Why do you think Imelda chose to marry Dickie?
- Dickie's business has failed. He is consumed with questions of 'what if?' regarding a youthful love affair and takes part in risky behaviour that leave him open to blackmail. Do you think that Dickie is responsible for his own misfortunes?
- Unlike Dickie, the character Big Mike is successful in business and in attracting women. In what other ways is he a counterpoint to Dickie?