

In a galaxy far, far away... floats Clonmel sunblock

'SUN cream for space robots' might sound like an unlikely pitch but an Irish firm has received €1.5million funding from the European Space Agency for such a business.

With the money, Tipperary company ENBIO has opened a new space technology facility: a centre of excellence for developing and producing thermal management treatments or 'sunscreen technology' for satellites, spacecraft and space-related hardware.

Like humans, proximity to the sun can damage the exterior of orbital vehicles. But thanks to a special sun block developed by the Clonmel-based firm, some of the most sophisticated devices floating around our planet have been given crucial protection. At

By **Senan Molony**
Political Editor

its Space Technologies Centre, ENBIO produces a unique Solar-Black surface, which it then coats on critical internal and external surfaces of a satellite.

To apply the sunscreen, the firm uses a patented platform known as CoBlast, invented by company chief executive John O'Donoghue. This enables the firm to cover the oxide layer of a metal with a thin surface which fuses to the metal in a single, environmentally friendly process.

The coating requires no chemicals or thermal input, but allows satellites and space probes to venture out into the punishing solar rays unscathed. Announcing a 12-job expansion at

ENBIO yesterday, Mr O'Donoghue said: 'We've been setting new records for getting a technology from concept to flight-qualified. Not bad for a small company.'

The new facility will produce surface treatments to protect vital parts of the ESA Solar Orbiter satellite due to launch in 2017.

The coatings will protect all of the sun-facing surfaces of the ESA satellite, allowing scientists to get closer to the sun than any previous mission. A complementary ceramic surface, 'Solar-White' is also in the works. It is described as a next-generation, high-temperature reflective white coating.

The 12 new jobs 'making sunscreen for satellites' is being funded through a €1.5million ESA contract.

Dr Mark Dooley



MORAL MATTERS

Prisoners in a world devoid of literary love

MY sons are in the unusual position of having a writer as their father. I say 'unusual' because we live at a time when, sadly, the written word is in decline. The literary culture in which I grew up – one dominated by authors and thinkers – has been replaced by a sphere of endless chatter.

In an age of texts, blogs and tweets, everyone writes and reads. However, this is not writing or reading as previous generations understood them. For us, reading was a mode of communication that opened up new worlds – horizons that had been revealed by great writers.

These were people who had looked deep into the human condition. They had seen what others could not see and the result was often extraordinary.

Their books revealed the true scope of the human imagination and it was invariably beautiful.

Until recently, such writers served as our moral guardians. They revealed life in all its complexity, pouring light on its tragic and comic sense. They brought us close to characters who we learned to love and loathe, but with whom we never failed to sympathise.

As a young boy, I remember being led by Charles Dickens into the world of *Oliver Twist*. I was only six, yet I was moved to the point of tears. Through those tears I saw a whole range of people in an entirely new light.

Dickens softened my heart and opened my eyes to those who often go unnoticed. The beauty and simplicity of his prose made it easy for me to enter a universe of vivid characters. And when I closed that book, I knew that my own world had somehow changed for the better.

Without writers of courage and conviction, people who shine a light on the other side, what could we know of love, tragedy or suffering?

Great writing is not purposely moral, but by putting the reader in the shoes of those he dislikes, it broadens our compassion and understanding. It enables us to walk the path of the villain and to see that he, too, is not beyond redemption.

All societies need great writers if they are not to become blind to their own moral shortcomings. We need them to see beauty, savour love and to beat in harmony with the human heart. Sympathy demands that we see beyond ourselves, but we can only do so when we follow the imagination into new worlds opened up by inspiring authors.

That is why sustaining our literary culture is not a luxury but a necessity. Novelists, poets, journalists and thinkers challenge our cosiness. They force us to see things differently, to

identify with those we would otherwise ignore, and to find consolation in precious things.

My children are growing up in a world of writers and the effect it is having on them is remarkable. Our eldest, in particular, is fascinated by those who have shaped his father, and who have since become good friends. The Easter holidays began with me spending a weekend with philosopher and writer Roger Scruton at his home in Wiltshire. It ended with American writer John D. Caputo spending a night in Dublin with the Dooleys.

The antique charm of Scruton's world is so much in conflict with Cyberia. Yet, he has just produced a novel which, as he writes, 'is a story of our times, of kidnap and rescue, of abuse and healing'. Set primarily in Yorkshire, *The Disappeared* tells of frustrated ambitions, sex-trafficking and interracial tension.

This is not comfortable reading, and yet, as it winds towards its dramatic conclusion, you cannot but feel genuine sympathy for all but one of the characters. Scruton shows us how to see beyond stereotypes to a point where you accept that most people are worthy of salvation. While it may not be so easy to love your enemies, Scruton shows that understanding them is the first step along the path of true love.

TO have such a wonderful writer in the lives of my children is a blessing. It is likewise with Caputo, whose visit to our house was dominated by discussions and a dramatisation of *Phantom Of The Opera*. As he departed, I could see our eldest was fighting back the tears.

Children need books. They need exposure to writers that will make them soar and weep, who will lift their hearts and soothe their souls. Never delving any deeper than a tweet is to be robbed of so much richness and beauty, so much tenderness and compassion.

What human life can flourish in such circumstances?

Without the worlds that writers create we become prisoners.

We fail to see that we cannot see everything.

My life has been touched by so many writers, so many great men and women who not only changed my view of the world, but who changed me as a person. That I became a man of the pen is testament to them and the moral and spiritual horizons they revealed to me. They showed me the power of the written word to redeem, transform and heal.

Caputo left the station and my son began to weep. No explanation was needed, for I was once that young boy.

Like him, I remember wiping away the tears only to find that everything looked completely different.

—mark.dooley@daily@mail.ie—

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