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## Miami's book fair 'Evening With...' series ends on easy note

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EMILY MICHOT / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

Students from Renaissance Charter School at Plantation look over books from the Percy Jackson series at the street fair of the Miami Book Fair International opened Friday, Nov. 16, 2012. Pictured left to right: Brianna Toney, Sadiyah Rowe, Kayla Crooks and Kayla Nicholson.

A bit of fiction and a bit of philosophy, both seasoned with a touch of the historical, rounded out the final night of Miami Book Fair International's "Evenings With..." programs Friday.

Emma Donoghue read from her *Astray*, new book of short stories inspired by old newspaper accounts, and historian Alan Ryan talked about his weighty new two-volume work *On Politics: A History of Political Thought: From Herodotus to the Present* (told you it was weighty).

"I feel like I should say, 'Hello, Miami!' " joked Donoghue when she took the stage. Earlier, the Canadian author expressed wonder at the fact she was swimming in the Biltmore pool on a November afternoon

before her appearance. "I don't usually stay in places like that," she said, laughing.

But Donoghue, author of the novel *Room*, is no stranger to new experiences: She's a two-time emigrant from Dublin, once from Ireland to England, then on to Ontario.

"The Irish are obsessed with immigration," she told the audience. Even when the economy's good there, she said, the Irish look to other countries. "It's still a small island," she joked. "A lot of us have felt the need to fly that particular coop."

Fitting then, that *Astray* features characters on the verge of moving on or struggling in their new surroundings. Donoghue read the amusing story *The Widow's Cruse* and fielded questions about *Room*, a harrowing novel about a little boy being raised in a tiny shed by his kidnapped mother. Disturbing to be sure. But in case you wonder, Donoghue has no pressing childhood traumas of her own to inspire her to such a dark premise.

"I grew up in Dublin in a bookish household," she said. "I was allowed to read all the time. . . There's something to be said for a happy childhood that leaves you feeling confident."

Ryan, who was in conversation with Robert Weil, editor-in-chief of W.W. Norton's Liveright & Co., talked about his comprehensive study of political philosophy. Or, as his daughter (a biology professor) describes his profession: "He does dead philosophers."

Ryan did mention a few of those worthy gentleman — Plato, St. Augustine and John Stuart Mill, for example — but still managed to elicit a laugh when discussing Americans' adoration of a Constitution they've never read and continually confuse with the Declaration of Independence.

"The Constitution is revered, and it is at least worth knowing," he said.

The fair continues this weekend with a full schedule of authors Saturday and Sunday.

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