

The Sea
(2005)
by
John Banville
(born Dec. 8, 1945)

Irish Cultural Center
Book Discussions

April 27, 2109
10:30 AM -12:30 PM
Norton Room

Award: Man Booker Prize

Discussion Guide:

- ▶ Banville allows his central characters, often writers or artists, to expose strengths and weaknesses in first-person narratives. In *The Sea*, Max Morden struggles with his grief and reflects on his childhood. How successful is Banville in communicating Max's state of mind? In your analysis, note his values, motivations, and assumptions about himself.
- ▶ In the narrative, Max shifts between present and past (familiar for those reading *Ulysses*). Are the shifts to the past prompted by actions or thoughts about the present?
- ▶ How would you characterize his relationships with his wife and his daughter, Chloe?
- ▶ What did you think of the various members of the Grace family?
- ▶ Think about Banville's prose. Critics point to the self-referential nature of it (associated with modernism and post-modernism). In many of his novels, he employs the "sister arts"—especially painting and music—to develop narrative and explore character. Did you notice some striking examples of the self-referencing and the pictorial tradition in literature?
- ▶ The Man Booker Prize is awarded to the best original novel written in English and published in the UK. If you had been on the prize committee, would you have supported the nomination? Why? If not, why not?
- ▶ If you want to know more about Pierre Bonnard, the subject of Max's research, you can find biography and pictures on the internet.
- ▶ John Banville's well-known pseudonym is Benjamin Black. If you have read any of the novels centering on Quirke, a pathologist, you might think about differences or similarities in narrative, character, and style.
- ▶ As this is our last book discussion for the season, we plan to reserve a few minutes to get your suggestions for next season. Themes, authors, and specific titles are invited.