

Lit Chat w/Mary and Joyce  
Ep. 5

Dia dhuit! (Hello!)

This is episode 5 of Podcrawl Podchroal, the podcast from the McClelland Irish Library. I'm your host, Lisa, the Assistant Librarian, with Mary and Joyce, our book discussion group leaders. Mary is a retired librarian and a former member of the Scottsdale Library Board. Joyce is a retired professor of Irish Studies. On today's episode we'll talk about Irish Literature, including the stories for this spring's book discussion group.

This year's book discussion group theme is "the emergence of Irish Literature." How do you define "Irish Literature?"

**Mary:** There is no definite answer. Some say it is Irish writers writing about Ireland and the Irish. Others would include any Irish writer writing on any subject. Or maybe anyone writing about Ireland.

**Joyce:** Actually, this is the key question our readers are considering as they read each of the selections this year. It will be the question we will try to answer at the end of the readings in April.

How did you decide which essays, plays and novels to read to fit the theme?

**Mary:** The Irish Cultural Center generally has a theme. This year the Center is examining the roots that formed the Irish Free State. We joined that endeavor by looking at the emergence of Irish literature.

**Joyce:** Well, Mary, has given you step one, consideration of the theme. This gives us a place to begin making our lists of writers and works. In some years, we actually have a list of over 40 titles and have to narrow to just 7. As we make our selections, we consider the theme, we try to mix genres—novels, plays, short stories, and even poetry. We also work to balance the list with male and female writers. Mary checks to ensure that the works are readily available at reasonable prices. She also helps us think about the accessibility of the work for our reading group. As you can tell, it is a process that takes time and careful consideration of the possibilities.

What titles will be read this spring for the book discussion group?

**Mary:** The Crock of Gold by James Stephens in January. It is a comic fantasy novel written in 1912. In February we will be discussing a book known to all graduates of Irish schools: Peig: The Autobiography of Peig Sayers of the Great Blasket Islands.

**Joyce:** The last two selections—for March and April—again challenge the definition, but they also expand the readers' range of literature: In March, we have a novel; in April we have a play. The March selection, Walter Macken's The Silent People, is from a series of novels on the history of Irish people; the April selection—our last one for the year—is by a world-famous playwright, G.B. Shaw. Major Barbara forces readers to think about the playwright and the purpose of the play. It also brings us full circle to the definition of Irish literature. In putting this work last, we've complicated the defining process.

Is there an author or piece of literature that you'd recommend for those who are not familiar with Irish literature?

**Mary:** I have so many favorite Irish writers but if I were to recommend a fiction work, I think I might suggest Colum McCann's Transatlantic or Colm Tóibín's Brooklyn or maybe his Nora Webster. Both novels include the Irish experience in America and American experience in Ireland. Or if you like crime thrillers that deal with the Troubles in Northern Ireland, I would recommend Stuart Neville's The Ghost of Belfast.

**Joyce:** I would certainly endorse Mary's suggestions, but I would add James Joyce's Dubliners to the list. This collection of short stories, as well as his Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, prepares the reader for the most challenging novel, Ulysses. I'm also fond of the women writers in Ireland. Edna O'Brien's Country Girls is a good place to begin if you are new to the subject.

(?)Did you know? Four of the Nobel Prize in Literature winners are Irish. Those authors are William Butler Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett, and Seamus Heaney.

Continue listening for future podcast episodes featuring Mary & Joyce's Lit Chat!  
Thank you so much for listening! We hope to see you soon at McClelland Library.  
Slan! (Bye!)