

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES

**“Brooklyn”**

Text guide by: Peter Cram

Copyright © TSSM 2013

TSSM

ACN 099 422 670

ABN 54 099 422 670

**A:** Level 14, 474 Flinders Street Melbourne VIC 3000

**T:** 1300 134 518

**F:** 03 97084354

**W:** [tssm.com.au](http://tssm.com.au)

**E:** [info@tssm.com.au](mailto:info@tssm.com.au)

# Contents

Contents .....	3
BACKGROUND NOTES .....	5
HISTORICAL ISSUES .....	5
The 1950's .....	5
Ireland .....	5
America .....	6
GENRE .....	6
TITLE .....	6
AUDIENCE .....	6
PURPOSE .....	7
STRUCTURE .....	7
PLOT .....	7
CHRONOLOGY .....	7
Continuity .....	7
SETTING [THE WORLD OF THE NOVEL] .....	8
Geographic locations: .....	8
Historical context: .....	8
Economic context: .....	8
Political context: .....	8
Social status of the characters: .....	8
Significance of the setting: .....	9
COMPLICATION .....	9
RISING ACTION .....	9
CLIMAX .....	9
FALLING ACTION .....	10
RESOLUTION [Denouement] .....	10
STYLE .....	11
ORIENTATION [Point Of View, Voice] .....	11
Characteristics .....	11
Third person .....	11
Impartiality .....	11
PLOT SUMMARY .....	12
Part One .....	12
Part Two .....	12
Part Three .....	12
Part Four .....	12
CHARACTER PROFILES .....	14
Aspects of characterization .....	14
Protagonists and Antagonists .....	14

Author's attitude .....	14
Character as symbol or representation .....	14
Major Characters .....	15
Eilis .....	15
Father Flood .....	16
Minor Characters .....	17
Mrs Madge Kehoe .....	17
Tony Fiorello .....	18
Jim Farrell .....	19
THEMES AND ISSUES .....	20
Migration .....	20
The Old World and the New World .....	20
Personal Identity .....	21
Gender Issues .....	21
READINGS .....	23
Dominant Reading .....	23
Resistant Reading .....	23
Alternative Reading .....	23
IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS .....	24
SAMPLE ESSAY TOPICS .....	28
FINAL EXAMINATION TIPS .....	29
FURTHER READING .....	30

## BACKGROUND NOTES

Colm Tóibín's was born in 1955 in Enniscorthy in the southeast of Ireland. His grandfather and great-uncle were members of the IRA. His grandfather was active in the 1916 Rebellion in Enniscorthy and was jailed. His father was a teacher and a member of the Fianna Fáil party. He was a boarder at St Peter's College, Wexford.

He went to University College Dublin and graduated in 1975. He then spent time in Spain. His first novel, *The South*, was the result of his time in Barcelona. He returned to Ireland to study for a Masters degree, but left for a career in journalism.

He became the editor of the magazine *Magill* in 1982. He left in 1985 after a dispute with the managing director.

Tóibín is a member of Aosdána, an Irish association of artists. He has also been a visiting professor at Stanford University, The University of Texas and Princeton University, all in America. He has also taught at Boston College, New York University, Loyola University, and The College of the Holy Cross. He is the professor of creative writing at The University of Manchester. He also teaches at Columbia University.

*Brooklyn* won the Costa Novel Award, 2009.

It was also shortlisted for the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, 2011, and was longlisted for the Booker Prize, 2009.

## HISTORICAL ISSUES

### *The 1950's*

By the end of the 1950's the world had largely recovered from World War II. The Cold War had developed from small beginnings in the late 1940s to be highly competitive between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Clashes between the communist bloc and the democracies characterised the decade. This involved military conflicts such as the Korean War, and scientific endeavours such as the 'Space Race'. International relations were also marked by the beginning of decolonization in Africa and Asia.

### *Ireland*

Ireland emerged from the Second World War better than many other European countries, having not been directly involved. Its per capita income was higher than that of most countries involved. Ireland benefited from loans under the post-war Marshal Plan, being \$36 million at 2% interest. This was spent on housing, slum-clearing and a campaign to eradicate tuberculosis.

On the other hand Ireland did not experience the economic boom of the 1950s, as did many other European countries. Ireland's economy grew by only an average 1% a year during this time. There was an increase in emigration to about 50,000 per year throughout the decade and the national population fell to a historic low of 2.81 million.

Poor economic growth and lack of improving social services led Sean Lemass leader of the Fianna Fáil political party to say that if Ireland's economic performance did not improve then the very future of an independent Irish state was at risk.

## **America**

The USA was relatively unscathed by the burdens of World War 2 compared with almost every other nation involved. The 1950s experienced an economic boom driven by increased manufacturing and home construction. The Cold War encouraged a politically conservative climate characterized by a fear of communism. The 1950s in America are generally considered socially conservative and highly materialistic. It was a time of compliance and conformity, but also of rebellion in race relations and youth culture.

## **GENRE**

This is the kind of story that is being told [for example, science fiction, historical, etc].

- *Brooklyn* is considered a historical novel despite its setting in the 1950's, which is believed by some to be too contemporary to be considered a historical text. It is a fictional account of the Irish-American migrant experience.

## **TITLE**

A novel's title can often be revealing – what it tells about itself. It may give direct and/or indirect indications of genre, and also of aspects of plot, characters and/or themes.

- Brooklyn is a suburb of New York City in America. It is the most populous of the city's five boroughs. Originally an independent city, it was annexed by New York City in 1898. It still maintains a separate culture including recognizable ethnic neighbourhoods, including the Irish.

## **AUDIENCE**

A writer will have a target audience in mind when he writes. These are the people whom he is writing for, who share an interest in the genre or the themes that he is addressing. Genre can often be useful to help determine who the audience may be.

- Toibin writes for a general adult audience.