

Roddy Doyle
Ruaidhrí Ó Dúill
**(Kilbarrack,
Dublin 1958)**



Short bio-biblio introduction

- *“As I grew up, the city corporations bought out the farms, and the private developers bought out the other farms, and it gradually grew more inner-city. People who moved into it would have been more solidly working class.”* (in C. White, *Reading Roddy Doyle*, 2001)
- *“My father’s background would have been more solidly working class, my mother’s more middle class.”* (in U. Paschel, *No Mean City? The Image of Dublin in the Novels of Dermot Bolger, Roddy Doyle and Val Mulkern*, 1998)

- Primary-school teacher, but full-time writer since 1993
- **The Barrytown Trilogy:** *The Commitments*, 1987; *The Snapper*, 1990; *The Van*, 1991 – “northside realism” (all turned into movies, the first directed by Alan Parker, the other two by Stephen Frears)
- *Paddy Clarke, Ha Ha Ha*, 1993
(Winner of the Booker Prize, 1993)

- *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*, 1996
- *The Last Roundup: A Star Called Henry*, 1999; *Oh, Play That Thing!*, 2004
- *Paula Spencer*, 2006 (sequel of *The Woman Who Walked into Doors*)
- *Theatre: War*, 1989; *Brownbread*, 1993; *The Woman who Walked into Doors*, 2003

Central concerns

- Novels relying heavily on pure scene, dialogue rather than inner thoughts dominates (N.B. *dashes* to keep dialogue and narrative together)
- Suburban working-class or lower-middle-class characters whose lives (usually in Dublin's northern quarters) are a mixture of high comedy, depressing poverty and domestic chaos

- Social and cultural changes towards a European cosmopolitan identity; people's difficulty in accepting and assimilating them
- Economic and social deprivation, geographic displacement, alcoholism, unemployment, domestic violence and neglect
- YET **antidotes**: inbred humour, Dublin wit and resourcefulness, shared community values

- Down-to-earth outlook on life: tough lives, rough language, but beauty and tenderness survive amidst the bleakness
- Use of hilarious slang, colloquialisms, vulgarisms and cursing (almost musical)

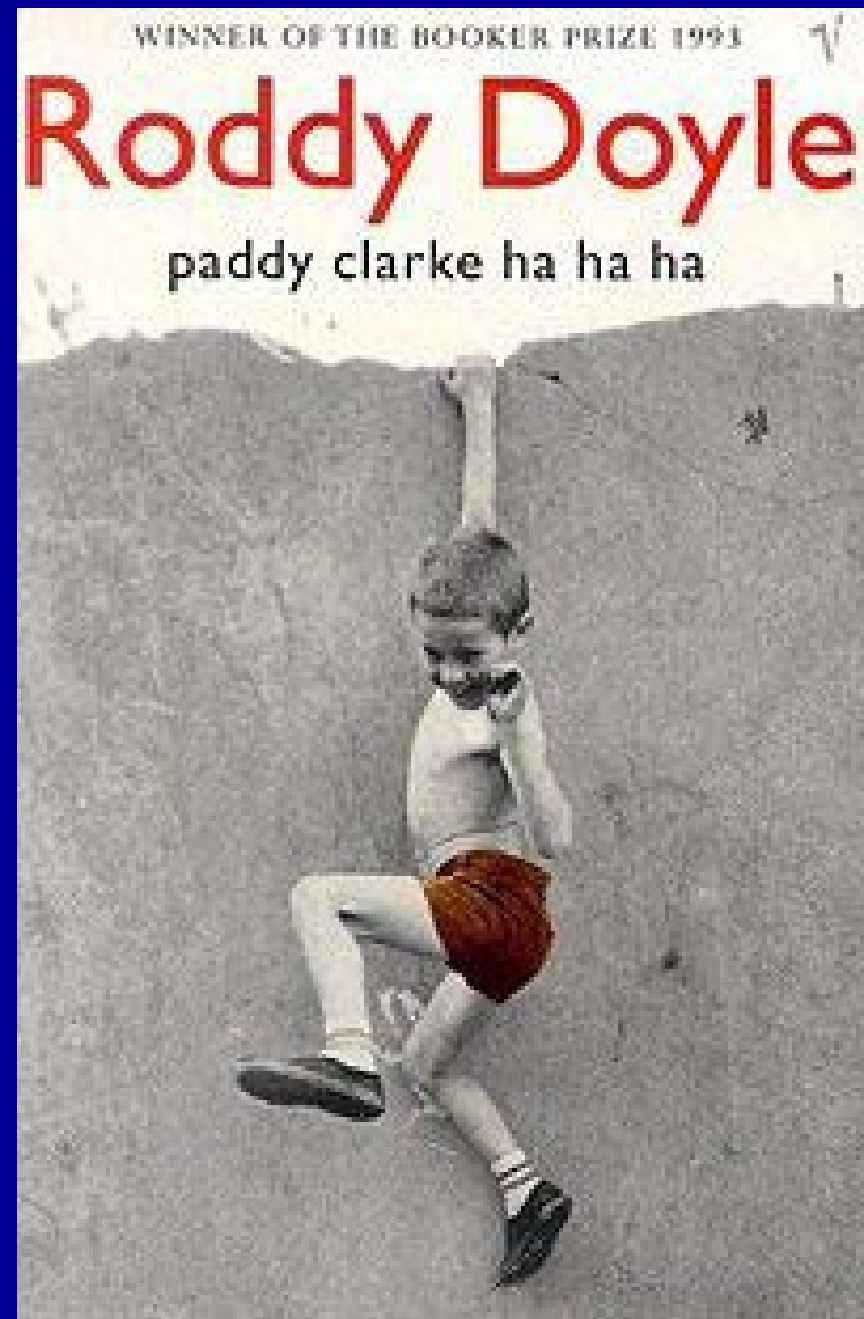
"I've been criticized for the bad language in my books--that I've given a bad image of the country. There's always a subtle pressure to present a good image, and it's always somebody else's definition of what is good"

- **Anti-Joyce:** *“You know people are always putting Ulysses in the top 10 books ever written but I doubt that any of those people were really moved by it.”*

“I only read three pages of Finnegans Wake and it was a tragic waste of time.”

“If you're a writer in Dublin and you write a snatch of dialogue, everyone thinks you lifted it from Joyce. The whole idea that he owns language as it is spoken in Dublin is a nonsense. He didn't invent the Dublin accent. It's as if you're encroaching on his area or it's a given that he's on your shoulder. It gets on my nerves”

***PADDY CLARKE
HA HA HA (1993)***



Setting: “Barrytown”, North-East Dublin 1968



Narrative point of view

- Paddy's vs risk of sentimentalizing from adults' perspective on the world of children
- Journal-like style: present-time narratives and flashbacks
- Primary-school composition: simple syntax, incorrect grammar, H.E. slang (e.g. *eejit* for idiot)
- Polyphonic novel through dialogue and different idiolects overcoming class barriers

“Basically [...] the way a kid’s mind would work [...] I’ve tried to make links, but indirectly. It may be a question of colour or light and something sparks off another memory, and so he goes on to that. I wanted it, particularly the first half, to seem haphazard – winding memories, and by degrees, the winding memories become straighter and straighter as the parents’ marriage becomes worse and worse. And that’s just the way a kid’s mind would work.”

“I wanted to get away from the linear time I used in the previous books [...]. The inspiration for that would be cinematic. As I was writing it I was remembering films like *Amarcord*, Fellini’s film, my favourite film [...] It goes from clip to clip to clip with no seeming unity. But the unity is there when you see it a second time and you wonder, ‘Why did I like it so much the first time?’ and you see the unity there underneath the surface.” (in C. White, *Reading Roddy Doyle*, 2001)

Paddy

- Genuine 10-year old kid never described physically
- Love for his parents and love-hate relationship with his brother Francis/Sinbad
- Daydreaming about priesthood or sainthood vs 'nicking' from shops and fighting with other kids
- Victimized by the local bully, Kevin
- Confused by his parents' faltering relationship (by the world of adults)

A Bildungsroman?

- Underlying hypotext: “[...] *Lord of The Flies*. When the kids don’t have any parental guidance, they are little savages. [...] I think also there is a certain amount of curiosity in their cruelty. Cruelty to animals is more curiosity [...]. When the kids are cruel to the dog in the back garden, they are just curious to see what will happen. (in C. White, *Reading Roddy Doyle*, 2001)

- Unconventional “*bildung*”: only nine months of “forced” growing up from boyhood to “adulthood” (from children’s “rituals” to mature reflections on the unfathomable adult world) and no happy ending, only disenchantment (his da’s cold, dry hand)
- Growing perceptiveness: “Sometimes when nothing happened it was really getting ready to happen.” (p. 33)

“I knew something: tomorrow or the day after my ma was going to call me over to her and, just the two of us, she was going to say, – You’re the man of the house now, Patrick. (p. 281)

- Gradual awareness of human loneliness

“Charles Leavy had kicked me. There was no cheering now. This was serious. [...] I tried to pretend that I was still fighting him. The same place. Charles Leavy kicked me again. No one jumped in. No one said anything. No one moved. They knew. They were going to see fighting they’d never seen before. Blood and teeth, torn clothes. Things broken. No rules. [...] No one had jumped in for me when Charles Leavy had been going to kill me; it took a while to get used to that, to make it make sense. To make it alright. The quiet, the waiting. All of them looking [...]” (pp. 186-187)

Central themes

- A changing cytscape for the *blue collars* – 50s, 60s and 70s demolition of slums and move to Corporation Houses

“We’d go down to the building site and it wouldn’t be there any more, just a square patch of muck and broken bricks and tyre marks. There was a new road where there’d been wet cement the last time we were there and the new site was at the end of the road. [...] There wasn’t only one building site; there were loads of them, all different types of houses.” (p. 5)

“The old bridge was gone. They just knocked it down; took away the rocks and rubble in lorries. I missed it. It had been a great place for hiding under and shouting. [...] The new bridge whistled when it was windy, but that was all.”
(pp. 112-113)

“Our territory was getting smaller. The fields were patches among the different houses and bits left over where the roads didn’t meet properly. They’d become dumps for all the waste stuff, bits of wood and brick and solidified bags of cement and milk bottles. (p. 146)

Cfr. handout (p. 122-123, 147)

- Social and domestic violence (alcoholism and wife abuse)

“The first time I heard it I recognised it but I didn’t know what it was. I knew the sound. It came from the kitchen. [...] My ma and da were talking. Then I heard the smack. The talking stopped. [...] I recognised it now. I knew what the smack had been [...]. He’d hit her. Across the face; smack. I tried to imagine it. It didn’t make sense. I’d heard it; he’d hit her” (p. 190)

“I didn’t understand. She was lovely. He was nice. They had four children. I was one of them, the oldest. The man of the house when my da wasn’t there.” (p. 222)

“I could do nothing. [...] I was the ref. I was the ref they didn’t know about. Deaf and dumb. Invisible as well. (p. 256)

Cfr. handout (p. 257)

- Class conflict: lower middle class vs working-class newcomers in the Corporation Houses (*“slum scum”*)

“There were six new families living in the first row of finished Corporation houses. Their gardens were full of hardened half-bags of cement and smashed bricks. Some of the children were the same age as us but that didn’t mean that they could hang around with us.”
(p. 118)

- Tradition vs modernization
(nationalism vs transnational idea):
adult world (teachers) speaking
Gaelic vs young generations
interested in American culture and
TV shows (“The Virginian”, John
Wayne films), English football
- *Irishness* preserved: use of Gaelic
and Gaelic names (Paddy, Liam,
Aidan, Sean, Fergus, Kevin)

- Understated treatment of colonialism: Paddy's allegiance to Indians and to "gorillas" (The Irish and the "others", other "minorities", the Irish as the Niggers of Europe). Cf. handout (pp. 227-228)
- Satire of Catholicism/nationalism:
"– The Holy family went to Egypt when Herod was after them. –
That's right. There's always work for carpenters." (p. 26)