

Not Your Mother's Library Transcript

Episode 32: Celebrating Ireland

(Brief intro music)

Leah: Hello, and welcome to Not Your Mother's Library, a readers' advisory podcast from the Oak Creek Public Library. I'm Leah.

Rachel: And I'm Rachel.

Leah: When Rachel and I selected the topic of basically Ireland for this episode of the podcast, I had one immediate thought that came to mind: how badly I had wanted to go to Ireland during college. The scene: Twenty-one-year-old Leah diligently studying Multimedia Digital Arts and Communication at Whitewater, working her student worker job at the Anderson Library. She spies a flyer tacked up somewhere on campus—I don't remember where.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: —advertising a student trip to Ireland. So exciting! Old castles, lush green landscape, cliffs...I wanted to see that very much. But alas, I have never been the promptest of individuals, and by the time I saw that flyer that trip was totally filled up.

Rachel: Aw.

Leah: I was heartbroken. Until, of course, I saw the student trip to Paris that I could sign up for. Which I did, and got the amazing consolation prize of visiting countless art museums—including the Louvre—drinking fancy drinks in tiny cafes, and discovering how amazing snails are cooked in a lot of butter.

Rachel: Hm.

Leah: But I digress. We're here to talk about Ireland, the place I didn't get to go to.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: I'd like to plug a program that we're holding here at the Oak Creek Library on March 16th, 2022. I'm so happy to announce that the musical group Ceol Cairde will be performing

here. This group of performers specializes in traditional Irish and Gaelic music. The irresistible blending of their instruments provides the unique sound that is the “Music of Friends.” Join us at 6:30 p.m., March 16th, 2022—that’s a Wednesday—and treat your ears!

Rachel: I am super excited for that event. My father often volunteers at Irish Fest, which is a Milwaukee-famous celebration of all things Celtic. It’s held every summer at the lakefront, so dear ol’ dad has heard Ceol Cairde perform many a time, and he lauds their musical prowess. And yes, obviously, this episode of our podcast is a celebration of Irish culture and heritage, too. It’s March, which means that St. Patrick’s Day will be here before we know it. To kick things off, I have some young adult fiction to recommend. Let’s jump right in with “The Carnival at Bray” written by Jessie Ann Foley. This is realistic fiction; a coming-of-age story set during the early nineties, when grunge was permeating the music scene.

Leah: Mmhm.

Rachel: To prove it, the cover of this book—well, at least the standard paperback edition—features a denim patch ripped into the shape of the country of Ireland, complete with safety pins.

Leah: Is it grunge if there’s no safety pins?

Rachel: I don’t think it is.

Leah: I don’t think so.

Rachel: It’s actually kind of cool looking. The cover is also where you’ll notice that this title is a Helen Sheehan YA Book Prize winner. It was selected as an Honor book for the Printz Award for Excellence in Young Adult Literature, as well, which is prestigious in itself. So...not too shabby! Anyway, the main character of this book, Maggie, is a sixteen-year-old girl who is forced to move to Ireland with her family after her mother—with whom she barely gets along—remarries. Maggie hates it, of course. Uprooting her life in Chicago where she was used to attending rock concerts with her favorite uncle and then suddenly transplanting to a tiny island where she has no friends or connections is difficult, to say the least. You know, it’s interesting that a fair number of young adult stories revolve around the main characters being exiled to a

remote place. “Ooh, you’re an orphan now, time to move to move abroad to stay with your auntie,” or “Your dad is being relocated for work, and you have to go with!” It’s kind of tropey, but I get it. And Ireland can certainly feel remote, depending on where you’re staying. The cities are usually bustling, but the countryside? Not even close. When I visited—

Leah: (gasps)

Rachel: I know.

Leah: You’ve been?!

Rachel: I...I have indeed been to the Republic of Ireland. Twice, actually. Um...

Leah: (sniffs) Was it during college?

Rachel: It was right before college, actually.

Leah: I see.

Rachel: Yeah. Uh, when I visited it the first time, it wasn’t long after the nation’s economic downturn of 2008, and the place felt emptied. The vast majority of their younger generation had left, gone abroad to find work in countries offering more opportunities. Though that recession was difficult for everyone, obviously it isn’t a fair representation of the country as a whole, and their economy has been improving since 2014. But Ireland’s very landscape can make you feel isolated. It’s beautiful, but quiet. Especially compared to Chicago. Now, Maggie plans to wait for her mother’s latest marriage to go sideways so that she can go back home. Soon, though, she starts hanging out with the locals and even begins to fall in love with a boy named Eoin. When someone close to Maggie dies, she starts on a quest to see her favorite band, Nirvana, at a concert in Rome.

Leah: Mmhm.

Rachel: Which...though it is also in Europe, that’s a bit of a far cry from the small town of Bray she has begun to grow used to. I recommend this novel because it’s gritty and evocative, two overused descriptors I usually despise when reading a book blurb. But they are accurate for “The Carnival at Bray” all the same. A great readalike would be “No Filter” by Orlagh Collins.

Like Foley, the author chose to displace her main character, Emerald. She moves from her school in London to “a sleepy sea village in Ireland” under suspicious circumstances. A romance lights up between herself and a local boy, but soon their respective secrets threaten to shake their foundation. If you like to read realistic fiction, then both of these books will have you hooked.

Leah: Perhaps our talk of Ceol Cairde earlier has you interested in checking out some Irish musical artists that you can take home with you. AKA our CD collection here at Oak Creek. Grab a copy of one of Enya’s CDs. She was born in Gweedore, Ireland, and according to Wikipedia she’s regarded as the “best-selling Irish solo artist in history.”

Rachel: Wow.

Leah: Not your musical taste? How about the legendary Van Morrison? He was born in Belfast, and our collection boasts a few of his CDs. And finally—this isn’t obviously a complete list, but rather various highlights—is Sinéad O'Connor. You can find some of her music as well as her new memoir called “Rememberings” here at the Oak Creek Library. Are you a musician? Did you know that the Central library in downtown Milwaukee has scores and music that you can check out? They have a whole music collection! You might locate “The Best of Irish Music: Complete Sheet Music Editions,” which was compiled by Creative Concepts. Now, I’m not musical at all.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: So, I’ll just read directly from the record and tell you that this is for “voice and piano with chord symbols and guitar chord diagrams.”

Rachel: Sure.

Leah: If you’re musical and interested in this sheet music, you’ll probably understand what that means. Maybe I can ask my drum and guitar playing husband about it, but I will probably forget.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: This music collection also boasts a four-volume set meant for an entire orchestra, entitled “Four Irish dances,” by Charles Villiers Stanford and revised by Percy Grainger. I don’t know if you have an orchestra laying around, but maybe!

Rachel: You never know. Yeah, I...I don’t know much about music, either. Other than I really like listening to it! And that it’s a humongous part of Irish culture. Ireland is also known for having rich folklore. It’s full of fairies, merrows, and the impish pooka. In fact, myths are a large part of Ireland’s oral storytelling traditions, and they range from ballads about fabled heroes like Cú Chulainn, to legends surrounding the shamrock, or the supernatural race known as Tuatha Dé Danann. Because Gaelic is a difficult language for many non-native speakers to grasp, sometimes these stories get a bit lost in translation. Never fear, however, because author Malachy Doyle has provided a book that stays true to the source material. “Tales from Old Ireland” is intended for middle-grade readers and retells traditional Irish stories like “The Children of Lir,” “The Soul Cages,” and “Oisín in Tír na nÓg.”

Leah: (gasps) But Rachel!

Rachel: You gasp, utterly blown away by my no-doubt perfect phonetical diction.

Leah: How ever did you learn to pronounce that?

Rachel: Well, I’ll tell you my secrets: One, I’m reading from a script and have it all written down in parentheses. Shocker, I know. Two, Malachy included a pronunciation guide at the start of the book. So, technically, I learned it! Just didn’t memorize it. Anyhow, even though this book is aimed at kids, I think the illustrations are absolutely charming. So, if you’re reading aloud to your family—which would be in keeping with tradition—then you’ll also have something pretty to look at while struggling over the names just as I have. A copy of this book is available through the Oak Creek Public Library, and I definitely encourage you to check it out in time for St. Patrick’s Day. I also recommend getting your hands on a copy of the 2014 animated film “Song of the Sea.” Native animation studio Cartoon Saloon did a superb job with this movie in every regard. Their team clearly knows what they are doing if they’ve received five Academy Award nominations for their endeavors over the past twelve years.

Leah: Mmhm. I'd say so.

Rachel: "Song of the Sea" was entirely hand drawn, and its quality has often been compared to works produced by Japan's Studio Ghibli. "Song of the Sea" follows the journey of "Ben, a young Irish boy, and his little sister Saoirse, a girl who can turn into a seal, [as they] go on an adventure to free the fairies and save the spirit world." Ben kind-of-sort-of blames his little sis for their mother's untimely death, so there's contention from the start. Saoirse herself is mute, and there's an otherworldly quality about the little girl that's clear from the get-go. Turns out she's probably a selkie, which is fabled to be a sea creature which can transform from a woman into a seal. They're super adorable in this movie, just like seals in real life. With their whiskers and huge eyes and teeny flippers...but I digress. "Song of the Sea" is a magical journey with plenty of ties to Irish and Celtic mythology. I think it's worth noting that one of the characters is voiced by Brandon Gleeson, who's actually one of the nation's most famous actors. Some great watchalikes are "The Secret of Kells" which came out in 2009, as well as the 2020 film "Wolfwalkers." All three are from the same studio and comprise writer-director Tomm Moore's "Irish Folklore Trilogy." You can find DVDs for the first two in this set available at the library, though "Wolfwalkers" isn't out on its own quite yet. Keep a weather eye on the horizon.

Leah: Now, perhaps all the Irish music, books, and movies have put you in the mood to experience some Irish cooking. Well, great news! Oak Creek has a few books you could check out to try your hand at creating delicious Irish dishes. First up, "The New Irish Table: Recipes from Ireland's Top Chefs" by ten of Ireland's top chefs.

Rachel: Go figure.

Leah: Published in 2017, it's described as "a delectable look at the modern food culture of Ireland...highlighting fresh, local, and seasonal ingredients from provinces across the Emerald Isle." Fully illustrated and, might I add, very delicious-looking illustrations. The recipe I think I'll be snagging out of this book is one for Guinness chocolate cupcakes. I wouldn't call myself a Guinness fan, but I have a friend who sure is, and her Guinness cake is super good. This cupcake recipe sounds like a knockout, and there's even a tip about adding some orange liqueur to the frosting. Definitely not children friendly at that point, but that chocolate and orange combo?

Right up my alley. The book is organized into different Irish regional areas. How fun would it be to prepare a course from each region and have your own little “tour of Ireland” dinner party?

Rachel: Super fun.

Leah: The other cookbook I’d like to mention is “The Irish Country Kitchen” by Mary Kinsella. This book boasts 250 recipes over 14 different chapters. The back cover reads, “The staple Irish cookbook has been completely revamped and re-presented to provide not only a wide-ranging introduction to the excellence of traditional Irish cooking, but also a superb pictorial memento of Ireland.” This book is a bit older, published in 1999, so the pictures aren’t quite as glossy as my previous mention. However, this book has a recipe for “Gallopings Horseshoe” and if you’re like me, you’re super curious as to what food dish that might be. Any guesses?

Rachel: Uh. Uuuh. Uaaaah!

Leah: If you yelled ‘chicken, various unnamed cooked vegetables, tomatoes, sage, and onion stuffed into a pastry dough which is shaped into a horseshoe shape and baked off’, then you’re right!

Rachel: Well, duh.

Leah: You win being right.

Rachel: (laughs)

Leah: It can be served hot or cold, apparently. I do wish that the item line for “cooked vegetables” was more descriptive, but perhaps I’m just not familiar enough with common Irish veggies they’d have around. I imagine there’d be potatoes in there, though, and I do like that.

Rachel: Yup, that’s a safe bet.

Leah: This recipe is inspired by actual horseshoes, which I’m sure shocks you. Horseshoes are a symbol of good luck in Ireland and, according to this cookbook, old stables always had one hanging by the door.

Rachel: Okay. I have recommended both YA and children's media, so it's about time that I spoke about some adult books! Straight away I feel the need to recommend "DK Eyewitness Travel" guides. Obviously, these are non-fiction guides that are intended to help you plan a trip. I found them invaluable for all of my stays abroad in the U.K. because they are incredibly detailed, have lots of full-color visual aids and maps, and are easy to carry. Even if a vacation isn't in the stars for you right now, I'd still urge you to pick up a copy; they have a lot of great tidbits about the country's history and culture. These guides are published every few years with updated details, but even if you can only find an older edition, that would make for an excellent starting point. If you're at all worried that some of the information about where to eat or stay overnight is outdated, you can quickly bring 'em up online to compare. If you are interested in more, you could also try guides from "Fodor's Essential" series. Basically the same concept, just from a different publisher. All right, I'm going to move onto fiction now. This is a novel I haven't had a chance to pick up quite yet, because it has been checked out by so many patrons since it came out last year. But it gives off intense "And Then There Were None" vibes, so it is for sure on my to-be-read list. It's "The Guest List" by Lucy Foley, and I'm just going to read out part of the blurb: "On an island off the coast of Ireland, guests gather to celebrate two people joining their lives together as one. The groom: handsome and charming, a rising television star. The bride: smart and ambitious, a magazine publisher. The cell phone service may be spotty and the waves may be rough, but every detail has been expertly planned and will be expertly executed. But perfection is for plans, and people are all too human. As the champagne is popped and the festivities begin, resentments and petty jealousies begin to mingle with the reminiscences and well wishes. The groomsmen begin the drinking game from their school days. The bridesmaid not-so-accidentally ruins her dress. The bride's oldest (male) friend gives an uncomfortably caring toast. And then someone turns up dead."

Leah: (gasps)

Rachel: "Who didn't wish the happy couple well? And perhaps more important, why?" Who doesn't love a revenge-murder plot? On an island? At a wedding? Sign me right the heck up. I realize now that I don't know if the characters themselves are Irish or if that's just the setting, but either way it sounds great! My readalike suggestion is "Smile" by Roddy Doyle, another

psychological suspense thriller taking place on the Emerald Isle, where the past is catching up to the characters in sinister, sanity-breaking ways.

Leah: Continuing the sinister vibe that Rachel was just discussing, next I'd like to mention "Say Nothing: A True Story of Murder and Memory in Northern Ireland" written by Patrick Radden Keefe. This is a true crime book that came out in 2019 and involves the IRA. The book description is as follows: "A stunning, intricate narrative about a notorious killing in Northern Ireland and its devastating repercussions. In December 1972, Jean McConville, a thirty-eight-year-old mother of ten, was dragged from her Belfast home by masked intruders, her children clinging to her legs. They never saw her again. Her abduction was one of the most notorious episodes of the vicious conflict known as The Troubles. Everyone in the neighborhood knew the I.R.A. was responsible. But in a climate of fear and paranoia, no one would speak of it. In 2003, five years after an accord brought an uneasy peace to Northern Ireland, a set of human bones was discovered on a beach. McConville's children knew it was their mother when they were told a blue safety pin was attached to the dress." Now, I'll be honest: I hadn't heard of The Troubles before, and I realized I don't know a whole heck of a lot about the IRA and Northern Ireland, either. I think this book is going on my 'yes please I would like to read' list, and perhaps I'll also snag "One Man's Terrorist: A Political History of the IRA" by Daniel Finn, which also came out in 2019. This one is described as: "The conflict in Northern Ireland was one of the most devastating in post-war Europe, claiming the lives of 3,500 people and injuring many more. This book is a riveting new history of the radical politics that drove a unique insurgency that emerged from the crucible of 1968. Based on extensive archival research, One Man's Terrorist explores the relationship between the IRA, a clandestine army described as 'one of the most ruthless and capable insurgent forces in modern history', and the political movement that developed alongside it to challenge British rule." Now, let me go ahead and switch to the total other end of the spectrum of books with a lighthearted romance novel set mostly in Ireland!

Rachel: Awww!

Leah: (laughs) Do you have whiplash yet?

Rachel: I totally do!

Leah: If you're looking for a pretty lighthearted book, try "Love Letters" by Katie Fforde, written in 2011. "When her bookshop closes its doors, Laura agrees to help organize a literary festival. Her initial excitement is followed by panic when she realizes that an innocent mistake has led the festival committee to believe that she is a personal friend of the reclusive writer Dermot Flynn. Even though Laura has been infatuated with Dermot since her college days, traveling to Ireland to persuade him to come out of hiding is not what she had in mind. Nevertheless, she sets off to charm her literary hero into headlining the festival. Unfortunately, Dermot is maddening, temperamental, and up to his ears in a nasty case of writer's block. But he's also infuriatingly attractive... With all the warmth and wit that have made Katie Fforde's novels huge bestsellers in the U.K., Love Letters is an irresistible tale of love and literature and the quest for a happy ending." I mean, guys, I know this isn't the romance episode, but in callback, I'd imagine this novel would fall at, like, a two on the spice scale? The story elements list it as "banter filled," "leisurely paced," and "heartwarming." It sounds so sweet!

Rachel: Super sweet! Grumpy, reclusive authors are my jam. Or my bread and butter. Whatever. You've made it to the end of the episode, which means you are awesome.

Leah: Yes, you!

Rachel: Check the show notes for more information on all the great reads we just recommended. There will be a link to the library's event calendar, too, so that you can easily register for the "Music of Friends" program if you're listening before March 16th, 2022. Future listeners will need to take a trip in a time machine in order to attend.

Leah: Or at least check out Ceol Cairde's upcoming events.

Rachel: That might be more doable, yes. Please subscribe and rate the podcast if you like what you hear. Or, better yet, tell your friends and family about Not Your Mother's Library! There's nothing quite like word of mouth. Listeners can reach us through the Oak Creek Public Library website as well as Facebook by sending messages to @OakCreekLibrary. Until next time, happy reading.

Leah and Rachel: Bye!

(Brief outro music)