



<file:///C:/Daten/AMSP/over-sixties%20Jan%202016/new%20articles/book%20criticims/'Nora%20Webster,%20by%20Colm%20Toibin%20-%20NYTimes.com.htm>

5 **1) 'Nora Webster,' by Colm Toibin By JENNIFER EGAN OCT. 2, 2014**

The story of a middle-aged widow struggling to remake her life after the premature death of her husband, it is written without a single physical description of its characters or adverbial signpost to guide our interpretation of their speech. The emotional distance between protagonist and reader is .....precisely Toibin's radical restraint that elevates..... into a realm of heightened inquiry. The result is a luminous, elliptical novel..... to approach the mystical.

... his uncanny ability to muster outsized storytelling force behind a deceptively simple narrative. ”

.... Each of these crises dissipates, as crises often do in real life (as opposed to the sort of fiction in which they serve as plot points). And each time, I found myself unnerved and then exhilarated by Toibin's resistance to an artificially dramatic arc.

15 The epiphanies in “Nora Webster” accrue slyly, in offhand moments....

2

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/oct/05/nora-webster-review-colum-toibin-powerful-study-widowhood-love-letter-to-ireland>

20 **Nora Webster review - Colm Tóibín's powerful study of widowhood**

...Colm Tóibín's love letter to an Ireland in flux [Robert McCrum](#) 5 October 2014

In Ireland, there is only one Nora – Nora Barnacle, James Joyce's wife and muse. ..(Nora Webster is) an important contemporary Irish writer's relationship with Joyce, whose work still throws such a long shadow across every angle of Irish literary life.

25 *Nora Webster*, .., is about a tough-minded Irish mother and a country morphing, so to speak, from Ulysses to Bloody Sunday. Explicitly, it is a powerful study of widowhood and grief,

..... and because no Irish writer returning to his or her homeland can (n?) ever quite step out of Joyce's shadow, *Nora Webster* carries a burden of detail missing from *Brooklyn*. Put simply, Tóibín's novel contains an awful lot of its author and his resonant sonority. This cuts both ways,

30 good and bad.

...

.....Tóibín’s considerable narrative gifts successfully navigate the bumpy intersection of the private and the public. Through the slow personal reawakening of Webster, he finds a subtle way to reflect on Ireland’s need to put its own grief into a larger context.

35 ...But it skilfully transcends its source material..... When, in the closing pages, Webster burns her late husband’s letters because “they belonged to a time that was over now”, Tóibín’s message is clear. The past is another country. Better to be an exile from regret. The only way for things to “work out”, a recurrent phrase, is to move forward, boats against the current.

3

40 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/oct/11/nora-webster-cormac-toibin-review-rare-achievement>

### Nora Webster by Colm Tóibín review - 'a rare and tremendous achievement'

This personal portrait of grief and politics in 1960s County Wexford does everything a great novel should .!Tessa Hadley 11 October 2014

45 ... there is no exhibition of cleverness, or highly ornamented manner, or any figurative or strenuously descriptive language. ... Someone said to me once – not uncritically – that reading Tóibín was like drinking a glass of water. (The plainness makes his attraction to Henry James's extravagance all the more interesting.)

.....It's written in strict chronological sequence, as time carries her forwards ...

50 It is clear that Tóibín has drawn closely on his own mother's story for Nora Webster: presumably he made his young self into Donal, .....It is poignant that Donal and his mother can't easily talk and seem almost estranged – he confides in his aunt instead, who is simpler and gentler..... it does everything we ought to ask of a great novel: that it respond to the fullness of our lives, be as large as life itself.

55 4. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/colm-toibins-nora-webster-a-masterful-portrait-of-a-grieving-woman-finding-herself/2014/10/07/524108f6-4b0a-11e4-b72e-d60a9229cc10\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/colm-toibins-nora-webster-a-masterful-portrait-of-a-grieving-woman-finding-herself/2014/10/07/524108f6-4b0a-11e4-b72e-d60a9229cc10_story.html)

### Colm Tóibín’s ‘Nora Webster’: A masterful portrait of a grieving woman finding herself By Ron Charles October 7, 2014

60 ...In this incorrigibly subtle novel, ..... “She measured her success with the boys by how much she could control her feelings.”

... “It will be all right,” an old nun tells Nora. “It is a small town, and it will guard you.”

65 ..... Tóibín would probably cringe at the idea, but there’s something implicitly didactic about this novel: Its barely undulating plot and exactly modulated tone serve as a kind of guide to living without excess drama. Nora never breaks down; her children never lash out; none of them spray their grief on Twitter (they don’t even have a phone in the house). It’s a poignant reminder of a time when people responded to hardship with dignity instead of indignation.

5. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/nora-webster-by-cormac-toibin-n-book-review-this-is-a-writer-of-integrity-9759605.html>

### Nora Webster by Colm Tóibín - book review: This is a writer of integrity

- Saturday 27 September 2014 . Matt Cain

70 As you might expect from Colm Tóibín, an author not known for his focus on storytelling, this recovery doesn’t come through a series of big, dramatic events. In fact, it’s so gradual that at times it barely even registers. ...

75 Nora Webster is a quietly perceptive and wonderfully modulated portrayal of life here in the late Sixties and early Seventies. It's so richly detailed and laced with such dialogue that you feel like you are living in Nora's world.

...music ...But this, for me, is where the novel begins to falter. The slow-moving narrative plods through every sad step on Nora's journey, t... although this is effective and often very moving, it can get a little wearing.

..... For me, the novel would have benefitted from more flashbacks ....

80 ...there's no sense that her journey towards happiness should be remotely uplifting for us. ... Nora Webster is a very successful novel. ... this will only strengthen his reputation as a writer of integrity. I only hope his next novel has a little more to offer the reader.

6.

85 [http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Nora-Webster/Colm-Toibin/9781439170939/reading\\_group\\_guide](http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Nora-Webster/Colm-Toibin/9781439170939/reading_group_guide)

This is a reading group guide - I am not giving you any of it, but would be interested if any of you think it could be useful to guide our discussion.

#### **About the Author © Brigitte Lacombe**

90 Colm Tóibín is the author of seven novels, including *The Master*, winner of the Los Angeles Times Book Prize; *Brooklyn*, winner of the Costa Book Award; *The Testament of Mary*, and *Nora Webster*, as well as two story collections. Three times shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, Tóibín lives in Dublin and New York.

95 7.  
<http://www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/colm-t%C3%B3ib%C3%ADn-i-started-nora-webster-in-2000-and-finished-it-in-2013-i-thought-about-it-every-day-in-between-1.2293709>

100 This is an interview with Toibin and his editor. A bit chatty but also interesting.

#### **8. This is also an interview. Quite stimulating to read the whole.**

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jan/22/guardian-book-colt-toibin-how-i-wrote-nora-webster>

#### **Colm Tóibín: how I wrote Nora Webster**

105 The novelist on thinking about the book every day for a decade and how listening to Beethoven helped him capture a widow's loss

\_'The book came as a battle between night and day' ... Colm Tóibín. 22 January 2016

110 I wrote the first chapter of my novel *Nora Webster* in the spring of 2000, in the same season as I wrote the first chapter of *The Master*, my novel about Henry James. Both books dealt with a protagonist over four or five years. Alone in the world, both James and Nora Webster attempted to find a way out of failure or grief or loss. Although *The Master* required a great deal of research and *Nora Webster* almost none, I found *The Master* easier to work on, and easier to finish.

In *Nora Webster*, I was dealing with memory. ...

115 Memory, we are told, plays tricks, is filled with shadows and uncertainties. The problem for me, however, as I remembered those few years in that small house with my newly widowed mother and my younger brother, was that memory for me seemed exact, stable, sharp. That might be useful if I had to give evidence in a courtroom; it was pure hindrance, at least most of the time, when it came to writing a novel. I had to sift and distill what I remembered to find a shape for the novel.

120 The book came as the result of a battle between the night and the day. At night I would think of a scene that might work in the book. By the time I went to sleep I almost had it ready for the morning. In the morning, however, it did not pass the unforgiving test called the hard light of day.

For a decade I thought about the book at some point every day. I worked out a structure. Slowly, the character of Nora Webster herself began to emerge for me more clearly. I wanted her to be both  
125 brave and difficult, to be someone fiercely loyal to her children when there was a crisis, but oddly nonchalant in the ordinary course of events. Her sisters were afraid of her. There is a sense of her as trapped by her circumstances, in a small town.

In 2006, as I read over the first chapter, I found the story that became the novel *Brooklyn* in a few sentences in the first few pages. I stopped writing *Nora Webster* and wrote *Brooklyn*. A few years  
130 later, I wrote *The Testament of Mary*, both as novel and as play. I also wrote a short book and then a play about the Irish playwright *Lady Gregory*, also a widow in her 40s with an only son. I completed two collections of short stories – *Mothers and Sons* and *The Empty Family*. It seemed in all these books that I was circling the story that was Nora Webster's, working out ways of writing about family and loss and trauma.

135 9. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/video/2014/sep/25/colm-toibin-loss-father-nora-webster-video>  
This is a video clip

10. A wide-ranging interview.  
140 <https://longreads.com/2015/02/24/novelist-colm-toibin-on-his-richly-textured-subtle-fiction/>

11.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/11139923/Colm-Toibin-austere-in-writing-wicked-in-person.html>

145 **Colm Tóibín: austere in writing, wicked in person: Colm Tóibín's new novel about a bereaved family in rural Ireland is his most personal yet. He tells Gaby Wood why it took him 14 years to write**

By [Gaby Wood](#) 04 Oct 2014

150 ... all of this is seen through the eyes of the mother, Nora, not the boy. ... a refraction of his own experience?

“You see, I couldn't do it from my own point of view because I didn't exist,” Tóibín replies. “I was almost reduced so much by what happened that nothing made any sense at all. But of course I was watching her. She was rebuilding her life – she wasn't rebuilding mine, anyway – and I became interested in the idea of this sort of anti-mother.”

155 Mothers are something of a specialist subject for Tóibín.....

The truth is, what Tóibín really likes is silence. Or music, accompanied by silence.