

Discussion Questions for *Long Island*

by *Colm Tóibín*

1. Tóibín says himself that sequels “tend to be pale.” Did you find *Long Island* pale in relationship to *Brooklyn*? Were you happy to be back with Eilis? Has anything changed about the “half-said, unsaid” relationship with her mother? (*Karen Schneiderman*)
2. Laura Spence-Ash names Tóibín as one of her favorite writers and after speaking with her last week, I am struck by how both tell their stories with small moments rather than scenes. We see Eilis buying a new bed, starting to phone Jim and hanging up, driving her kids home from the airport after spending the night with Jim, but we don’t see her telling him she’ll spend the night, we don’t see her confront Tony about the baby (though there is that MOMENT when she drops his dinner). I felt this technique in Spence-Ash’s book to be brilliant, but in Tóibín’s I felt I was missing the heart of the story. Can we discuss this technique of focusing on small moments rather than describing BIG moments. Are some of these small moments especially effective. Are there scenes you are missing? (*Maribeth Fischer*)
3. On the surface, this is a fairly predictable story: guy cheats on his wife, she (perhaps in retaliation, at least to start) rekindles an old love...What makes this book worthy of the accolades it’s getting? (*Maribeth Fischer*)
4. Another plot-based question: Is this book realistic? Believable? *Judy Catterton* cites the following examples that don’t ring true:
 - Why does Eilis immediately and obsessively focus on the question of the birth of the baby and who will parent it to the exclusion of other questions?
 - Why haven’t we learned anything about Eilis’ relationship to Tony in the years after her return to America (other than they seem to both enjoy their kids).
 - Is it really believable that the woman who is about to have Tony’s baby will allow her husband to deposit him/her on Tony’s doorstep? What’s the story with that?
 - Why hasn’t Eilis visited her mother in 20 years? It seems like she could afford to and yet...
 - The set-up, i.e., mother will be forced to give up her and Tony’s baby by an angry husband who will bring it to Eilis’ doorstep where it will be completely rejected out of hand seems extreme in many regards to me. Would each of the characters involved really make such an extreme and precipitous decision?
5. It’s not just Eilis and her mom who do not talk. It seems *no one* talks. Eilis and Tony never speak of his infidelity (the baby, yes, but not the other woman), no one can

acknowledge that Frank is gay, Jim and Nancy don't speak of their engagement, Jim and Eilis never seem to talk in depth about what she did all those years ago—even when Eilis goes to call Jim, she hangs up. Is Tóibín making a larger point about words—their uselessness or maybe the opposite—their great power? (*Maribeth Fischer*)

6. Related to the above... How does Tóibín's use of deep POV work with the silences and hesitations of his characters? What does he accomplish with this that dialogue could not? (*Deborah Baker*)
7. The silences in Eilis' life are thunderous, as the book jacket says, but they are also maddening. I suspect my American sensibilities are at issue here, but were others equally frustrated? (*Kim Burnett*)
8. I was bothered by Eilis' lack of integrity—hiding her marriage, leading Jim on—in *Brooklyn*, and again in *Long Island*, integrity is an issue when Tony's entire family harbors secrets and plans about that baby. Does this lack of integrity make it difficult to care about Eilis, and if so, why might Tóibín choose to write such difficult characters? (*Kim Burnett*)
9. Finally, in both *Brooklyn* and *Long Island*, an event occurs at the very end that changes the trajectory of the ending. Is this an effective technique? (*Karen Schneiderman*)