

BOOKS



Lingering, exquisite and subtle

Long Island by Colm Tóibín



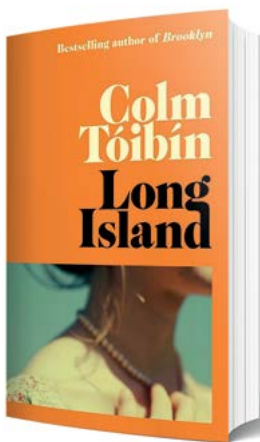
by Lottie Fyfe, Author

LONG *Island* by Colm Tóibín (2024) follows the critically acclaimed *Brooklyn* (2009), which saw Eilis Lacey return to America and her husband Tony after an unexpected romance in her rural Irish hometown of Enniscorthy. Now, it's the mid-seventies, Eilis is in her forties, and after twenty years of building a life together, crisis hits, as we learn that Tony has fathered a baby with another woman. Eilis now faces a decision.

Perhaps tellingly, she decides in the first instance to escape her overbearing Italian-American in-laws, and go home. An outsider in Enniscorthy now, she nevertheless finds herself immersed in her past once again: her stubbornly old-fashioned mother, one-time best friend Nancy – and old lover Jim Farrell, who, it turns out, has pined for her for most of the intervening years. There, she will consider her next move, an extraordinarily pivotal moment in a life grown seemingly mundane.

Though it stands comfortably alone as a novel, there are echoes here of its predecessor: similarly light on plot, *Long Island* nevertheless highlights Tóibín's uncanny ability to express multitudes without, seemingly, saying very much at all. His prose is neat, clean and deceptively simple – spartan, almost – and yet longing, nostalgia and the turbulent, uncharted depths of human emotion sing brilliantly off the page. There are moments of wry

humour in its portrait of rural Ireland, along with a cloying sense of claustrophobia, and an ever-present tension between public action and private feeling. Deftly told from the distinct perspectives of Nancy, Jim and Eilis, the novel gathers pace towards its conclusion, as the puzzle pieces of Eilis' indecision, Jim's prevarication and Nancy's sleuthing come together in a final crescendo. In the end, though, we are left with more questions than answers. But in a novel that is a masterclass in mining the confusion, ambiguity and messiness of a wholly ordinary life, perhaps this uncertainty is, in the end, entirely the point. ■



Lottie Fyfe is a freelance writer, editor, translator and voracious reader. After a decade working in the London publishing industry with authors including David Mitchell, Cal Flynn and Melvyn Bragg, she is currently based in East Sutherland. You can read more at <https://lottiefyfe.com/>

FILMS



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I'm still here

Release date (UK): 2024
Country: Brazil
Running time: 137 min
Genre: Drama - History

Director: Walter Salles
Starring: Fernanda Torres,
Fernanda Montenegro, Selton
Mello. BBFC 15

I'M *Still Here* is a poignant biographical drama following the true story of the disappearance of Rubens Paiva under the Brazilian military dictatorship in 1971, and his devastated family's subsequent courageous perseverance against all odds.

Walter Salles directs this true story with such tact, avoiding unnecessary stylistic interpretation and instead deriving dramatic tension from the bleak realities of the authoritarian dictatorship that brutalised Brazilian citizens for over two decades.

Adopting a form of McCarthyism, the Brazilian dictatorship carried out mass arrests of those seen to oppose the regime, labelling them as "communists" and committing horrific crimes of torture and violence to repress ideas that could undermine the dictatorship. Glimpses of this brutality throughout *I'm Still Here* demonstrate the oppression of victimised citizens of Brazil during this turbulent Cold War period in an oblique and tasteful manner that is respectful to victims of the dictatorship.

Fernanda Torres steals the show as Eunice Paiva who is thrust into a matriarchal role after the sudden disappearance of her beloved husband Rubens. Torres has rightly been nominated for the Oscar for Best Actress, as she performs the role of Eunice Paiva with skilful subtlety. Torres manifests Paiva's resilience through adversity and her veiled sorrow, outwardly cheerful for the sake of her children, proving intensely moving and true to Paiva's life story.

The strength of Paiva in exposing her husband's disappearance despite the personal risks involved is rousing but bittersweet, as this period of history is sadly reflected in contemporary dictatorships, and serves as a stark reminder of the existential dangers of authoritarianism.

■ by **Jack Weir**. Jack Weir is a graduate of Edinburgh Napier University's Film BA (Hons) course.