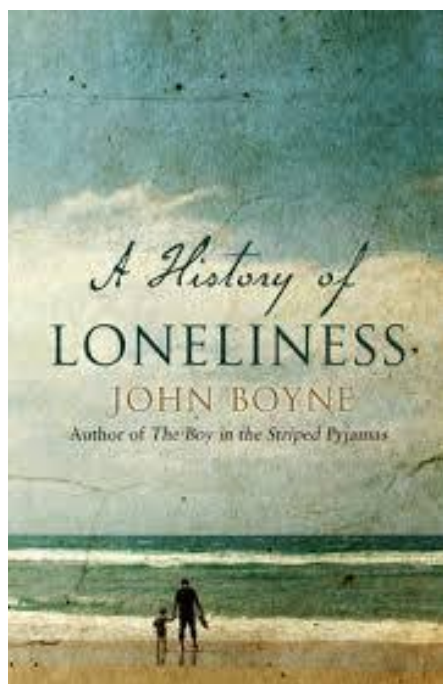




A History of Loneliness

John Boyne

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A History of Loneliness

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A History of Loneliness John Boyne

Propelled into the priesthood by a family tragedy, Odran Yates is full of hope and ambition. When he arrives at Clonliffe Seminary in the 1970s, it is a time in Ireland when priests are highly respected, and Odran believes that he is pledging his life to "the good."

Forty years later, Odran's devotion is caught in revelations that shatter the Irish people's faith in the Catholic Church. He sees his friends stand trial, colleagues jailed, the lives of young parishioners destroyed, and grows nervous of venturing out in public for fear of disapproving stares and insults. At one point, he is even arrested when he takes the hand of a young boy and leads him out of a department store looking for the boy's mother.

But when a family event opens wounds from his past, he is forced to confront the demons that have raged within the church, and to recognize his own complicity in their propagation, within both the institution and his own family.

A novel as intimate as it is universal, *A History of Loneliness* is about the stories we tell ourselves to make peace with our lives. It confirms Boyne as one of the most searching storytellers of his generation.

A History of Loneliness Details

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From Reader Review A History of Loneliness for online ebook

Sarah Monreau says

Ein unfassbares Werk, welches mich an verschiedenen Stellen sehr gerührt, aufgewühlt, mitgerissen, schockiert und gar zum Weinen gebracht hat. Dieses Buch rüttelt jeder aus seiner Starre, rüttelt die Welt wach, öffnet die Augen und zeigt auf, was hinter verschlossenen Türen so alles los sein kann, wie viele Menschen oft davon wissen, aber nichts sagen und wie viele Opfer wir haben, denen Leid angetan wird. Ein Werk von unfassbarem Wert, eines, das mir sehr nahe ging und mir viel geben konnte, so viel, dass ich es immer noch nicht fassen kann. So viel steckt darin, so viel Meisterwerk, so viel Wahrheit, so viel Angst, Feigheit, Wut und Menschlichkeit.

Wenn ich für ein Buch werben müsste, es zu lesen, dann würde ich mich jetzt für dieses hier entscheiden, weil es eine ganz besondere Botschaft verbreitet und auf Dinge aufmerksam macht, vor denen leider immer noch viel zu viele Menschen die Augen verschließen!

Barbara says

I was unsure until the end whether or not I was going to give this book 5 stars. Boyne creates a complex portrait of a priest in Ireland before, during and in the aftermath of the clerical abuse scandals. Odran Yates went to the seminary in the early 1970's, at a time when most Irish families yearned to have a son become a priest. Boyne's story describes how young these boys were, and naive. Many did not have vocation, in the sense that Catholics understand vocations. Some were forced into the priesthood. Odran Yates lives a simple but "charmed" life as a teacher in a boy's school in Dublin. The construction of the story, moving between present and past, kept me engaged. Yates discovers truths about the abuse that has been allowed to fester and grow for decades. And by the end of the novel, he learns truths about himself and his life. Another remarkable novel from Boyne.

Emma Flanagan says

“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

Rarely has a quote summed up a book so well. Odran Yates is a good man (probably) however he is also naive and prefers to ignore things which he finds uncomfortable. The book follows him from his childhood in 1960's Ireland to middle age in the present day, from the last glory days of the Catholic Church in Ireland to its death throes.

A man destined to be uninspiring, Odran's mother pushes him into the priesthood at a time when having a priest in the family was a still subject of pride. For those who may find that concept difficult to appreciate, there was a time in Ireland when having a priest in the family held the same status as having a doctor in the family does in many cultures. It was a big deal, and something to be lauded over the neighbours. Odran is a deeply irritating character, not necessarily unlikable he's too insipid for that, but none the less irritating. I honestly can't decide whether he is as naive as he acts, or just in denial and unable to face the corruption and evil surrounding him. He seems to shy away from what would be blatantly obvious to anyone else in his position.

Honestly it is a book full of unlikeable characters. There are no heroes here. Odran's mother, admittedly due

to the harsh hand life has dealt her, is a bitter woman and religious fanatic. Classic Legion of Mary type. Then there is Tom Cardle, once a sympathetic character who becomes completely corrupt and loses all sense of right and wrong, viewing himself as a victim. To be fair he was once a victim but by the end he is also a perpetrator, forfeiting any sympathy we once had. The Archbishop is almost a caricature, full of his own importance, and the divine rights of the Church. He hawks back to what he views as the glory days of John Charles McQuaid, a very real Archbishop of Dublin renowned for his conservatism and the unimaginable (now anyway or indeed to anyone outside of Ireland) power he exerted over politicians, judges, the Garda, the media and indeed every institution of public life. What he said went, went. The only likeable characters are really Hannah, Odran's strong willed sister, and Pope John Paul I. Hannah refuses to bow to parental pressure and is extremely cynical of the Church when it was still not entirely acceptable to voice such things. At Odran's ordination she remarks of Pope John Paul II, a man held in deep reverence in Ireland for many years, "That man hates women". She isn't entirely wrong. The Church, at least in Ireland had a rather dysfunctional relationship with women to put it mildly. Pope John Paul I is presented as the only person within the Church willing to deal with the corruption which had engrossed it, both in terms of the Vatican Bank and the "problems" in Ireland. Pity he was only Pope for thirty three days. I have no idea how accurate a portrayal it is, but the impression I got was had Pope John Paul I survived history would have been a very different.

This is a bleak book. There's no two ways about it. Both Odran and the reader are forced to consider how events in Ireland, both within the Church and within society, were allowed to occur. Whether it was the abuse of children at the hands of those charged with their care, or the madness of the Celtic Tiger, we are left wondering what has happened to this country of ours. How did we let this happen? Did we know and choose to ignore it? Why did we let evil endure?

Yet for all that I thoroughly enjoyed it. This is a masterpiece critique of Ireland. Boyne really does not pull the punches. His own concerns, fears and dissatisfaction leap off the page. It is a book all who want to understand Ireland should read. It is a welcome and extreme counterbalance to the twee romantic nonsense that so many believe. This is Ireland, though I hold out more hope for my country than Boyne appears to. I cannot believe that:

Ireland is rotten. Rotten to the core.

Am I as naive as Odran, or just not yet as cynical as Boyne?

Allan says

This novel, Boyne's twelfth, is the first he has written that features Ireland, and in it he tackles probably the most difficult issue Ireland has had to face, and one that has left an indelible mark on society-the issue of clerical sexual abuse.

The novel is told from the point of view of Ordran Yates, a priest who entered the seminary in 1972, and time shifts allow him to tell his story, from his childhood, through his complex family relationships and tragedies, to his seminary training and eventual priesthood. What we see is a complex character, convinced of the suitability of his calling, angry at how the church has propagated hurt on so many, yet as time goes on, recognising his own complicity in how this has been allowed to happen.

It's not an easy read, but at the same time, the book is extremely effective in raising issues from the

viewpoint of the clergy, deeply condemnatory of the actions of those that have caused pain, and of the inaction of those that were in a position to stop it, while also questioning the role that wider society played in encouraging individuals into vocations in the first place. The arrogance of many of those in power in the church was frightening. It was fascinating to read the effect that the change in attitude toward the church had on Odran's wider dealings with outside society, and it's a theme that I'll be keen to discuss with friends who are resident in ROI.

This is only the second of Boyne's novels that I've read, but as with 'The Absolutist', I was impressed with the construction, of how the multi faceted threads of Odran's life are brought together very effectively in the end. I can only imagine the heart wrenching he must've gone through to write this powerful novel.

Donna McCaul Thibodeau says

This was one powerful book. The subject matter has been in the news for a while now and the Catholic church is struggling because of it. The story is of Odran, a priest who seems to be so passive that you want to shake him. He realizes the abuse that is going on but refuses to "see" it. Does that make him as bad as the ones who actually commit the crimes? I would not say that he is a likable character but he is one that will stay with me for a long time. Highly recommended.

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

John Boyne takes a difficult subject - sexual abuse in the Catholic church - and reflects on it over several decades through the eyes of Odran, a Catholic priest from Dublin. I found it thoughtful and honest, and the author's note at the end tells that he spoke to quite a few Irish Catholic priests to build his characters.

I loved the dialogue with its Irishisms, "sure if I..." and "himself." Some of the moments are incredible cringeworthy moments, which of course speaks to Boyne's writing.

I like how he explores not just the scandal and not just the victims, but the church and its community that is left afterward. By going backwards and forwards in time he is able to show a lot of contrast. I'm not Irish, I'm not Catholic, but it just hurts anyway.

Karl O' says

A remarkably accurate story of Ireland and the church I grew up with, encapsulating the 1960s through 2104. Catholicism and all its hypocrisies as not observed by a "good priest". A completely engaging three generational family saga. Boyne is an excellent writer.

Meghan says

I'm not sure how I should write about A History of Loneliness by John Boyne. It's a book that made me want to throw my kobo against the wall. I think that's what Boyne wanted, for people to be angry about sexual

abuse within the Catholic church, but my anger at this book wasn't for that; my anger at this book was for how glossy it was. My anger at this book was for how insensitive Father Odran Yates, the protagonist, is. My anger at this book is just all encompassing and I want to stop reviewing and never have to think of it again. Every comment I made in the (electronic) margins on my kobo is caustic and rude and I am going to try and smooth them out and hopefully not give into the nauseated feeling in my stomach.

So we have a priest, Father Odran Yates. He is a good priest, feels the calling of God, enjoys his priesthood. There's some unnecessary intrigue when he's sent to the Vatican and is embroiled in the deaths of Pope John Paul I and whoever was before Pope John Paul I (my Catholic family members are pretty embarrassed for me right now, not knowing who came before Pope John Paul I). The novel suggests that Pope John Paul I was going to do something about some nascent scandal within the Irish Catholic church, which the reader assumes to be the rampant sexual abuse, and hints that Pope John Paul I was murdered for this. The novel then becomes quite scathing against Pope John Paul I's successor, Pope John Paul II. Less hints this time: That man hates women. Direct quote. There's also some unnecessary back story about Yates' brother who drowned and Yates' widowed sister with dementia that could be excised completely without much fuss, although I suppose it's meant to counter the argument that people with lousy upbringings will do lousy things, like rape children. Because Yates had a lousy upbringing and still managed to keep his penis to himself.

Back to Father Odran Yates, who, for the most part, is upset regarding the unrestrained sexual abuse by priests because it makes him look bad. It means people don't respect him on the Luas. It means men are angry with him in coffee shops. It means that he grows tired of having a chaperone when he talks to his altar boys. For something like eighty percent of the novel, Yates does not seem to understand that this is not about him. People are rightly angry because of the years of abuse perpetrated by the church. He has no compassion for the victims of sexual abuse, instead painting himself as the true victim in all this. This infuriates me. I am incensed. It's taken me hours to write this review because I get so angry and I have to walk away. I suppose he comes around when he realizes that his friend, another priest, sexually assaulted Odran's nephew (which he then makes about himself, visiting the nephew even though the nephew has cut off all contact with Yates, because Yates needs the nephew to absolve him. Yep, back to what Yates needs rather than what anyone else does), but for a priest who goes on and on about how this is his true calling, he seems to have no ability for humility and no compassion. No Matthew 9:36 (Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd) for Yates. This is all about him. The book ends with Yates realizing he must have known about other abuses, but chose to look away. The End. No self reflection or anything about this. Just stop.

Ignoring the repugnance of the plot, the writing is all right. Not spectacular, and I'm still biased towards spectacular Irish writing after my time with Frank O'Connor earlier this winter. It's really slick, the writing. It's not uncomfortable the way it should be to reflect the content. I know that seems like an odd criticism, that the writing is too smooth for the context, but I can think of no other way to put it. Facile maybe? I know people are going to connect with this book and it'll likely sell millions of copies (the author also wrote *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*), but there's no depth. It's like a puddle rather than a sea.

You want some amazing writing about Ireland: read Frank O'Connor. You want a meaningful fictitious book on sexual abuse within the Catholic church: read *The Bishop's Man* by Linden MacIntyre instead.

A History of Loneliness by John Boyne went on sale September 11, 2014.
I received a copy free from Netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

Nicole~ says

St. Patrick has been mythologized as having driven all the snakes out of Ireland, a biblical reference that author John Boyne symbolically dispels in *A History of Loneliness*, suggesting that the fork-tongued creatures with a primary concern for self-preservation in an institution that has become a worldwide money-making business, rather than uphold its fundamental pledge to protect and to guide its flock to ultimate morality and spiritual health, still infest the Emerald Isle preying on its unsuspecting innocents: ***all the children who suffer unto Him.***

Boyne weaves actual pedophile crimes of a Dublin priest (Tony Walsh convicted in 2010), which were, even though known by the Archdiocese as far back as the 1970s*, allowed to continue for decades, concealed by the highest authorities in the Vatican who turned its back, closed its eyes, plugged its ears, and covered its mouth, all to protect its 'Firm.'

Odran Yates is the novel's narrator whose tragic family story starts as early as his boyhood, with the drowning of his younger brother by his father, the latter afterwards committing suicide. Honorable and gentle-natured as Odran is, he sincerely believes he has found his true vocation by entering the priesthood, but when he's called upon to replace his best friend, Father Tom Cardle, at one of the many parishes Cardle had been assigned over the years: needling questions of the goodness of his calling begin to surface. The tale of Odran's revelations and eventual self-awareness moves in a painful, heartbreaking path, treading in guilt-leaden steps with what seems to be his worst failings as a priest and spiritual adviser - emotional connection, keen sense of observation, deep insight and basic instinct.

As Boyne meticulously works the true events into the novel, we observe the 'selective' blindness of those who should have seen, the guilt of those who did not intervene, the anguish and torment of the victims and their families whose lips were forced into silence, the scalding anger of the community no longer trusting the 'man of the cloth,' calling for [the snakes] to: "Get out! Get out of Ireland!" But nothing compares to the immoral principles of the duplicitous organization - who concealed the whole affair and remained unapologetic for it - exposed in the polarizing radio interview with Archbishop Cordington, through which Boyne artfully reflects the findings of the Murphy Report.

I've liked the few books of John Boyne that I've read: *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, *This House is Haunted*, *The Absolutist* ; without a doubt, *A History of Loneliness* is for me the saddest, most compelling and his best written to date.

* See: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010...> and <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/12...>

B the BookAddict says

Very easily a 5★ from me. Odran Yates is a sensitive and compelling character dealing with private guilt, public betrayal by his church and his fellow priests, and his own innermost feelings of love and loss.

I'm linking you to Eileen's review because frankly, she says it better than me:
<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

Wilma says

Indringend...heftig...Een roman over seksueel (macht)misbruik van jongens, door priesters binnen de katholieke kerk in Ierland. Indrukwekkend hoe integer John Boyne dit thema vormgeeft.

Het (on)bewust 'weten' van de priester Odran Yates, over een tijdsbestek van ruim 30 jaar. Het daaruit voortvloeiende schuldgevoel. "En het meest ironische was nog wel dat er een veroordeelde pedofiel(beste vriend, priester Tom Cardle) voor nodig was om me te laten inzien dat ik door te zwijgen net zo schuldig was als alle anderen. Ik had alles geweten, van meet af aan, en ik had er nooit iets mee gedaan. Ik was medeplichtig aan al hun misdaden"

De dood van zijn broertje, de zelfmoord van zijn vader...Vilein beschreven!

Deze roman boeit van de eerste tot de laatste zin. Aanrader!!

Eileen says

Hauntingly sad, yet compulsively readable, this book revolved around the widespread child abuse in Ireland under the mantle of the Catholic Church. The author captures the prevailing thought patterns of the time convincingly. There was a common hope, an expectation even, that one child per family would choose to enter the priesthood. Priests, as highly respected authority figures, were pillars of the community, and the betrayal of this trust was a tragedy with ever widening currents. The reader is privy to the inertia which gripped so many. Somehow, if a person didn't want it to be true and ignored it, then maybe it wouldn't be true after all, or it would go away. One sees the cruelty, the flagrant abuse of power, and the resulting damage visited on individuals as well as entire families. Also, the guilt, the self-loathing of those who stood by, or looked the other way, is powerfully rendered. While A History of Loneliness is deeply disturbing, the underlying rage is tempered with empathy on some level. An incredible novel!

Sandra Danby says

I don't normally start a book review by talking about a completely different book, but I will today so bear with me. John Boyne is probably best known for 'The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas', a book about a young German boy during World War Two who moves to a house in the country where he makes friends with Schmuël, a boy who lives at the other side of a wire fence. Written for 'younger readers' it is the story of Bruno's transition from childhood innocence to horrific understanding, the book was made into a film starring David Thewlis. Despite the label 'for younger readers' this, and Boyne's more recent First World War novel 'Stay Where You Are & Then Leave', provide food for thought for adult readers too.

So with that in mind I came to 'A History of Loneliness', Boyne's latest adult novel, excepting a harrowing storyline which tackles emotional and difficult issues with honesty. I was not disappointed. When I look back at the books I've most enjoyed reading, so far this year, Irish writers rank highly – particularly 'A Long Long Way' by Sebastian Barry.

'The History of Loneliness' is a depressing title – it has to be about loneliness, doesn't it? Yes, but it's about so much more – the soul of a boy growing up in 1960s Ireland and becoming a priest, it's about guilt and

responsibility and honesty [with oneself, with others]. And, given its setting and time, it is about the Catholic church in Ireland and child abuse. But it is not a depressing novel. It is the story of Odran Yates's journey from childhood to seminary to adulthood, via Rome where he serves tea to two Popes, back to Ireland where he watches from the sidelines as one then another trusted Irish priest is convicted of child abuse.

It is an unexpected page turner. Boyne drops hints at 'things that happened', enough to make you want to know what. He maintains the suspense by telling Odran's story in disparate chunks – the first four chapters move from 2001 to 2006, 1964 to 1980 – answering some questions and asking new ones, and weaving in the story of Odran's sister Hannah and her family. Some bits made me chuckle, some made me laugh out loud, others brought a lump to my throat. A favourite was the discussion with Katherine Summers, a neighbour of the Yates who cycles by wearing short skirts to the horror of all the Catholic mothers, about the naughty bits in 'The Godfather'. Most of all, this book tells the story of the priesthood from the 1960s when the word of the priest was God, to 2008 when a stranger spits in Odran's face because he is a priest wearing a black suit and a white plastic collar.

I've found a new author to explore, and that is always exciting.

Dem says

2.5 stars

"Father Odran Yates is dedicated to his vocation since entering Clonliffe College seminary at seventeen. He has lived through betrayal, controversy and public condemnation of some of his dearest friends. Through all of this he has remained firm to his beliefs"

A History of Loneliness by John Boyne was a book I had been so looking forward to reading as John Boyne is one of my favourite writers. I was intrigued when I read the blurb of this book and looked forward to how Boyne would tackle this tough time in the Catholic Church and Ireland.

For me the book failed for a number of reasons and firstly the story didn't flow for me I just felt disconnected from the characters and it didn't capture my interest as much as it should have. It took me a considerable length of time to finish the novel and this was because I became bored with the story and felt it was full of cliches. There was many times when reading the book that I grew tired of conversations and situations that seem predictable and over written.

I do appreciate on one level that a book like this highlights the abuse that was hidden within the Catholic Church for many years here in Ireland and the suffering families still live with many years later. I think a novel like this is a good reminder of how religion and power can become obsessive and corrupt.

I felt by the end of the book I hadn't learned anything I didn't know from the media already and the story or the characters didn't have any great impact on me.

An ok read but not one I will be recommending.

John Bartlett says

I never really give a book 5 stars but this is one that richly deserved it. As a former Catholic priest I was totally convinced of the story of Fr Odran Yates, an Irish priest full of idealism but naive and conservative who is caught up in the scandals of the abuse of children by Irish clergy.

This is a harrowing story but totally authentic. Although my experience was not in the Irish Church the story in Australia has been similar with not only the abuse but the cover-up by those in power a scandal that still cries out for some redress.

Boyne has succeeded in presenting this story not as a dry diatribe but through the eyes of human and emotive characters. The dialogue is completely believable and the historical background totally authentic.

The clever device of introducing papal characters add a whole new level to the story, especially highlighting the role and the sudden death of Pope John Paul I.

Here in Australia some of the horrors of child sexual abuse by priests is still slowly being revealed.

It can hardly be less than what happened in Ireland.

Carol says

While **A History of Loneliness** is an aptly named title for this disturbing story of the child abuse cover-up surrounding the Irish Catholic Church, it was just an ok read for me compared to others I've enjoyed from John Boyne.

Overall, I found it somewhat slow going with the abuser obvious to the reader early on, but disappointingly *not* to Father Odran Yates.....I found him to be rather annoyingly naive for an educated man and particularly insensitive and weak for a man of the cloth.

A tough, but noteworthy read (*that made me mad!*)

Update: June 12, 2015 Finally catching up on some movies and **Doubt** did not disappoint. Agree with GR friends Eve and Carol...it was excellent with great acting by Meryl Streep and Phillip Seamore Hoffman. (enjoyed being able to see another PSH flick too)

Mandy says

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing”. This deeply unsettling and powerful novel is a penetrating exploration of Edmund Burke’s words. Odran Yates is a good man who wants to carry out faithfully his duties as a priest. But all around him the Catholic Church is disintegrating as the extent of the child sexual abuse within it is being revealed. At one time the power and control of the Catholic Church in Ireland was unquestioned. Odran now has to navigate his way through a new world and as he does so he questions, as does the reader, his own complicity in what has been going on.

This is the first Irish novel to tackle the subject and it does it brilliantly. Expertly paced, we gradually find out or at least guess what Odran himself refuses to acknowledge. How many others, priests and laymen, are guilty by association, complicit by turning a blind eye? Thought-provoking, disturbing, and very sad, this unflinching look at the Catholic Church, full of insight and compassion – and, of course, anger – is on the one hand a brilliantly sensitive piece of storytelling and on the other an incisive examination of evil. A wonderful book, which will haunt me for a long time, and one of my reading highlights for 2014.

Susan Johnson says

Odran Yates attends the seminary in the 1970's. After a family tragedy, his mother has a "revelation" that priesthood was his calling. A very passive person, Odran goes along with her wishes.

The book follows his path through seminary, his duties in Rome, his postings, his family and his involvement in the pedophile scandals. It is incredibly moving watching him walk a straight and very narrow path. He calls it being naïve but it is really blinders. He chooses not to see and it is a choice.

It reminded me on Germany in WWII when people made the choice to ignore what was happening around them. Or in the U.S. in the 1950's when "separate but equal" guidelines were in practice. Or in more examples that I can count. How many times have we turned our heads rather than deal with the situation?

It is also the pain the people in power knew and covered it up. So many suffered because of that decision. It is reprehensible. I was interested in his distaste for the Polish priest and his hints of the murder of John Paul I. I loved the line about the Fianna Fail crooks whom would be elected again in a couple of years. Here we sit in a country full of crooks and idiots in our Congress and they keep getting reelected.

This is a book that will stay with me for a long time and I couldn't recommend it more highly.

Heather says

Compulsively readable novel with a very likable protagonist, despite his complicity and naïveté. His sheer honesty throughout the book is what did me in. The writing style was right up my alley, too. I really enjoyed this book and rarely wanted to step away. I look forward to reading more Boyne novels.

Alena says

This book made me so incredibly sad, no surprise given its subject matter -- the sex abuse crisis in the Irish Catholic Church. I grew so frustrated in the main character, Father Odran Yates, and his inability/refusal to see what was really happening around him. But the more I read, the more I appreciated Boyne's choice to tell the story from the perspective of someone within the church. In the end, it all felt honest. Incredibly sad, but honest.

I couldn't put this one down.
