

Friday 16 August 2019

The “one good thing about colonisation” is the rhythm of language in Ireland,

says Roddy Doyle.

Acclaimed Irish author Roddy Doyle appeared at the Edinburgh International Book Festival today discussing his new book *Charlie Savage* at an event chaired by Glaswegian author Chris Brookmyre. No topic was off the table for the pair, with discussions about the modernisation of Ireland, the abuses of the Irish Catholic Church in a state formerly wracked with morality, and the rhythm of the English language in Ireland which has survived colonisation.

When asked what was his inspiration for *Charlie Savage*, the novel that began as a weekend column in the *Irish Times Magazine*, Doyle instantly quipped, “I’ll be blunt, getting older is sh**te really, but it’s all I have really to write about. So increasingly I’m writing about men getting older, but the problem with that is that men getting older don’t read about men getting older and the women who are getting older are all in the book clubs, they don’t want to read about men getting older either.”

“There’s no one reading my f**king book,” he added to laughter.

Doyle confirmed that a lot of current events and trends in Ireland work their way into the column and he has a special one planned for the still unknown Brexit deal. “I’ll have to get back to work the first Monday in September to deliver one the following Monday, and I’m going to do one about Charlie getting ready for a no deal Brexit. So he’s got a freezer full of bread and a stash of Nurofen hidden away. That’s my sense of humour you know.”

“I do think that the consequences of a no deal Brexit are a lot more serious than that, and I think particularly along the border, it’s horrific, what’s going to happen and that’s a different article and I’ll probably do that one as well.”

For Doyle, as a Dublin native, the presence of the city features heavily in his books, and he discussed the modernisation of old Ireland into the new open minded metropolitan city that seems to have happened overnight, something he has reflected in his work.

“The last two referenda in Ireland, the one for same sex marriage and for abortion rights. The push for that came from the young. There’s no doubt at all that older people were going that way, they were very impressed by young people coming back from Britain and America and further afield to vote, very moved by it I think. And I think a lot of people whose opinions might have been more, if you like, conservative, were actually thinking ‘nah it’s their turn’ and now we’re very happy now about it.”

He then went on to discuss the abuses of the church in Ireland, and his own personal experience with the subject.

“It wasn’t as if twenty years ago, everybody in Ireland woke up and said, ‘wow that wasn’t a secret we never knew about’, because actually, in some sense, we did. I knew, for example, when I was a teenager, and everybody in my class and everybody in the school, knew that there was at least one Christian Brother who was sexually abusing boys. I never saw it happen, never occurred to me, but we knew it was the case.

“It was one event where we tried to stop it, we refused to go home and stood outside his classroom until the boy in the classroom was let out and even then, I couldn’t have told you now, I couldn’t have told somebody when I was 15 but I sensed that that boy had been selected because there was a vulnerability there. He wasn’t going to bring that story home.

“It was known the Industrial schools were there. It was known that people were treated badly in these places. It was known that a girl would disappear from a village or from a farmhouse. It was known that she was pregnant, if you like, these things were somehow known, but there was some sort of tipping point perhaps. Some sort of a moment where collectively, the courage of individual people but also collectively.”

Charlotte Square Gardens, Edinburgh

10 - 26 August 2019

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When asked about his use of colloquialisms and slang in his works, Doyle replied that it was part of his book's magic as, "One of the few good things about being colonised is that you realise that right underneath the culture that's been imposed on you, is another one bubbling away... and that's gaelic. You know, so there are phrases, lots of phrases and the rhythm to the language as it's used in Ireland that is unique to Ireland."