

1. A confusing read

—my second reading and still confusing

- lots of/maybe too many characters. Hard to keep track of all the interconnections.
- characters with similar names — the 'D' boys – the Danny's and Donald
- detailed location of the various hamlets and towns along the south shore of Cape Breton – need a map to keep track —Is all this detail necessary to the story? — seems extraneous
- detailed descriptions of the colour of the sea and the sky —of rain and snowfall and sunset. Echo the mood. Tell us the narrator is a careful observer.
- the symbolism of the sea and the causeway
- Timelines —31 chapters in 4 Books— most chapters set the scene with a particular day, week or month. But from there the timeline lurches around— diary inserts for the Honduras story line pop up — making sense of how they fit with the present narrative is difficult.

—also confusing because the narrator Father Duncan MacAskill is unreliable — starts out with lots of facts about his background, summarily and succinctly sets the stage for the narrative but then gradually we see him say one thing while thinking another, which then makes us begin to doubt his truthfulness to the reader. He hints at things and hides things. By Book Three, as his drinking becomes excessive and his memory of events unclear, we are increasingly unsure of what he is thinking and feeling and planning. It's not that we distrust his recounting of what he knows about others, though. Just that his knowledge is patchy, and so our's is too.

Unreliable Narrator - Definition:

In fiction, as in life, the unreliable narrator is a narrator who can't be trusted. Either from ignorance or self-interest, this narrator speaks with a bias, makes mistakes, or even lies. **Part of the pleasure and challenge of these first-person stories is working out the truth, and understanding why the narrator is not straightforward. It's also one tool an author uses to create an aura of authenticity in his or her work.**

The term originates from Wayne C. Booth's 1961 *Rhetoric of Fiction*, and though it was a key component of modernism, we find unreliable narratives in classics like *Wuthering Heights* (in both Lockwood and Nelly Dean) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver*. For an example of how this can work, see an explication of the narrative voice in Chang-rae Lee's contemporary novel *A Gesture Life*.

2. Assuming the confusion of the narrative is deliberate — I always had the feeling that the author was in control of all the details, just that I couldn't keep them straight — **Where does this leave the reader?**

Struggling to understand and keep the characters and their relationship and interactions with one another clear. This perhaps mirrors the experience of parish priests attempting to 'keep watch over their flocks.'

Struggling to stay with and empathize with MacAskill — to understand the nature of his faith—if indeed he has any, to understand the nature of his relationship to his vocation and his fellow priests, to his parishioners, his relatives—Effie, John, Sextus, Carrie—to his old family friends: the Mackays, the Gillis's, the O'Briens

Do we stay with him? Are we sympathetic to his predicament – Is there a band of happy smart priests from which he has been excluded because he is the "Bishop's Man" or do we begin to

LEM Notes for Best Book Club reading: **The Bishop's Man, Linden MacIntyre**

Random House, Toronto: 2009

Meeting: Nov 13, 2012 — 7:30 pm @ Dianne Brown's

think that his is just one detailed look at the universal plight of the modern day priest? Can we go this far?

—Linden Mac says that most priests have responded quite favourably to the book. It rings true for them. Is it an apologia?

3. I'm not sure I stayed with this particular priest, which, apart from the confusion adds up to an unsettling and disturbing reading experience.

- insincere
- secretive
- manipulative
- disconnected
- a brave whistleblower OR a one man wrecking crew:
 - fight with his Dad (while being protective?),
 - Alfonso's murder (a case of mistaken identity?)
 - fight with Danny Mackay and Mackay's suicide (hollow offers to hear, to share, to absolve)
 - fight with Willie causing Willie's death

In the end he has succeeded in carrying out the Bishop's orders: Brendan Bell, whatever his transgressions, is out of the priesthood, Father Roddie MacVicar is dead, the journalist MacLeod who tried to uncover the story has pulled back. And he has uncovered the mystery surrounding Danny MacKay's suicide. But these results are far from being neat resolutions.

We aren't sure what will become of him —“Once a priest, always a priest” but “Just don't call me Father anymore.”

...so we have a partial confession, a rejection of the possibility of redemption, and no act of contrition. A portrait of the priest as modern anti-hero.

...on to the Dominican Republic.