

Praise for William O'Rourke's books

(Novels)

For *Notts*

“Here is a powerful novel of deindustrialization set surprisingly, not in a Midwestern factory neighborhood but in a coal-mining district in northern England . . . O'Rourke describes the bitter strike realistically, with a sharp eye. . . . O'Rourke brilliantly senses that we may see it new if we see it in an unfamiliar setting.”

-- James North, *Chicago Tribune Books*

“The novel brilliantly captures the circumstantial estrangement of a young American in Britain . . . [an] impressively austere novel.”

-- David Seed, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*

“O'Rourke's riveting narrative fairly swells with irony, intrigue, and foreboding.”

-- Margaret Flanagan, *Booklist*

“The tone and the pace of *Notts* are masterfully controlled . . . in a voice that can be dryly humorous, ironic, or pensive by turns. I found myself swept along not only because of the grace of the writing, but because, in its own unique way, *Notts* is thriller.”

-- Rob Davidson, *The Sycamore Review*

For *Criminal Tendencies*

“*Criminal Tendencies* is a thriller, as tense as a wound watch. But it is a thriller transformed by an extraordinary elegance of style, by a witty awareness of its own extravagances of language, and by O'Rourke's poised conviction that squalor and beauty can live side by side. It is a kind of felicitous collision of Proust with Elmore Leonard.”

-- Thomas Flanagan

“. . . vivid, multidimensional storytelling . . . wonderful, woolly tale of crime and character . . . in the tradition of Elmore Leonard and Charles Willeford . . . *Criminal Tendencies* has poetic and literary levels that overshadow and finally overpower the mechanics of its simple crime plot. . . . It is a complex, but still commercial novel filled with compassion . . . O'Rourke writes with care and completeness. . . .”

-- *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, a critic's choice

“Not since Tom McGuane has a writer come so close to the shabby, seductive heart of

Key West, nor reported so eloquently on its hard-shelled secrets. Add William O'Rourke's name to the short list of wizards responsible for this singular American literary tradition."

-- Bob Shacochis

"You'll want to read *Criminal Tendencies* with the air conditioner on full blast and a cool drink nearby--even if it's January, the lake frozen over and the nearest palm tree is 2,000 miles away. Chances are, it's still raise a sweat."

-- *Chicago Tribune*

"Low-life sleaze is drawn to perfection in this insightful, if depressing, novel . . . O'Rourke dense, vivid prose draws the reader inextricably into these lives filled with drugs, sex, betrayal, and absolute failure. An intense reading experience."

-- *Booklist*

"*Criminal Tendencies* is filled with fierce surprises and unexpected terrors. It takes the reader on a nightmare ride down a very dark street, a journey at once comic and horrific . . . O'Rourke writes rings around most authors--witness the steamy sex and drug scenes, the descriptions of the overheated Key West ambience. Outstanding."

-- *Library Journal*

"This is a tough book--gritty and nasty throughout, but thoughtful, too . . . While O'Rourke does a fine job in laying out the centerpiece crime, the conclusions adds symmetry to the intricately woven plot and well-imagined action . . ."

-- *Philadelphia Inquirer*

". . . clever . . . with a bleak, loose-ended plot laced through with stylist writing . . . O'Rourke's energetic eye and full-tilt prose churn out a lively . . . adventure . . . a series of snapshots from the land of fake smiles."

-- *Kirkus Reviews*

"The story moves like a speedboat. *Criminal Tendencies* has more villains than [some writers] would have the energy to shake a stick at, and every single one of them is a human being."

-- *Playboy*

"*Criminal Tendencies* offers not escape but the sharp, adult pleasure of recognition of things as they are. Again and again we feel that brief, glancing blow of reluctant but genuine sympathy."

-- *Chicago Magazine*

“*Criminal Tendencies* is at its root a crime story, but with an interwoven texture of character, emotion, politics, love and history that elevates it to the status of literature. *Criminal Tendencies* is a terrific book.”

-- *Detroit News*

“Mr. O’Rourke’s ambitious novel, rich with allegorical and political possibilities, can be as dazzling as the tropic sun.”

-- *The New York Times Book Review*

For *Idle Hands*

“A man’s book written for women, with simple eloquence and startling clarity . . . generally beautiful writing on life’s most enduring mystery. The sexual scenes, by the way, are part of what I’d like to think is a new wave of wholesome erotica being attempted by serious male writers who are finally learning what is truly erotic . . . Underline passages and leave it around for a lover to discover.”

-- Darryl Ponicsan, front page, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*

“The perennial war between the sexes from the female side . . . O’Rourke is a superior writer, often an elegant stylist, and his *Rake’s Progress* is recorded with genuine panache. The novel’s principal attraction, however, lies in O’Rourke’s probing of female sexuality in its various forms.”

-- *John Barkham Reviews*

“A shrewd and witty writer . . . Several of the sexual encounters partake of wisdom and hilarity. O’Rourke can leap from poetry to derision in a single paragraph. And he can be effortlessly funny.”

-- John Leonard, *New York Times*

“The charm and wit of a Roth and almost Stendhalian perceptiveness . . . The high praise O’Rourke won for ‘The Meekness of Isaac’ should be raised a notch for his latest novel, an extraordinarily clever, sensitive, and entertaining portrait of American women between the mid-‘60’s and the mid-‘70’s as presented in the form of the sexual memoirs of a self-styled ‘average man.’”

-- *Publishers Weekly*

“*Idle Hands* outclasses [other books on the same subject] . . . by being wise as well as clever. . . . He deserves a wide audience.”

-- Jane Howard, *Mademoiselle*

For *The Meekness of Isaac*

“The cutting epigram enables William O’Rourke to perform open-heart surgery on his characters in *The Meekness of Isaac*. His first novel confirms the promise noted in his nonfiction. The flashbacks to the war original and terrifying. O’Rourke again demonstrates that he is quite a stylist.”

-- Herbert Mitgang, *The New York Times*

“This is a novel that speaks to the young in a voice they can relate to. O’Rourke is good. And he has written an honest, accurate, at times unflattering portrait of a vast segment of our young male population. O’Rourke is really very good.”

-- C.D.B. Bryan, *The New York Times Book Review*

“What happens in *The Meekness of Isaac* is William O’Rourke’s imagistic acrobatics. I am a sucker for prose that successfully appropriates the virtues of poetry and this O’Rourke has achieved. O’Rourke has what seems to me a near perfect, in Eliot’s phrase, auditory imagination.”

-- R.D. Rosen, *The Boston Phoenix*

(Nonfiction)

For *The Harrisburg 7 and the New Catholic Left*

“In Harrisburg, during the trial, novelist William O’Rourke seemed to be everywhere. . . . It was a teeming, sleazy world, and O’Rourke’s book captures it. . . . It is a poet’s book. . . . This is not only the best volume on any of the recent political trials, but also a clinical X ray of our society’s condition.”

-- Garry Wills, *The New York Times Book Review*

“O’Rourke brings to the Harrisburg 7 . . . the eye and ear of a novelist, the insights of a poet. . . . The result is a most readable history of a crazy case. O’Rourke comes on like some kind of modern Milton to narrate the clash, not between simple good and evil, but between two forces seemingly enslaved by their symbols.”

-- Robert Blair Kaiser, *Commonweal*

“This is a brilliant work: shiny, eye-catching, stimulating. . . . One feels the players in this drama to be fleshed out with the artistry of language and emotion. . . . This book with its eloquence, its sense of history, even its strong bias against institutional Church and State--can provide us with searching thought.”

-- Eugene J. Linehan, S.J., *Best Sellers*

“William O’Rourke’s history of the recent Harrisburg trials is vivid, lively . . . [he] is a good and sensitive reporter, with enormous sympathy for his subject, who knows how to marshal facts and read character. His book is not so much dispassionate history . . . as it is a paean to the seven religious revolutionaries, a rueful but loving acknowledgement of their ‘brave and foolish letters,’ and a solemn threnody for the Catholic left, ‘broken by the mortar and pestle of this trial.’”

-- *New Republic*

**For *Signs of the Literary Times:*
Essays, Reviews, Profiles 1970-1992**

“Though unabashedly literary, O’Rourke’s primary concerns--freedom, war, work, and religion--are intensely American. O’Rourke earns the respect of his readers through his superb phrasing, his rigorous thinking and his consistently sound values. As a general reader I trust what he has to tell me because his writing is so gracefully persuasive. If O’Rourke were a lawyer, I’d want him to represent me in court; if he were a carpenter, I’d want him to build my house.”

-- David Huddle, University of Vermont

“*Signs of the Literary Times* is a fascinating account of working with literature by one of America’s more interesting, responsible, and innovative writers. The range of O’Rourke’s reading and thinking reminds us that, despite all the efforts of popular and academic critics who would too hastily compartmentalize the literary art of our times, there still remains an almost breathtaking universe of styles and subjects that a truly catholic intelligence can not only comprehend but synthesize. O’Rourke reminds us that some of the best thoughts on contemporary writing can come from a working writer himself.”

-- Jerome Klinkowitz, University of Northern Iowa

“Collections are seldom inviting to the reader. This one, however, is written with such grace and insight that it gives true pleasure as well as insight to the reader, even one familiar with the subjects explored. It is written in a highly engaging way by an engaging man of exceptional literary sensibility.”

-- Eugene Kennedy, Loyola University of Chicago

“O’Rourke’s essays and memoirs re Dahlberg would be worth the price of admission alone. This is a splendid collection--and though it ranges widely over modern and contemporary literature and politics (and literary politics), it is unified by O’Rourke singular voice: a voice always intelligent, always unsparing, always nuanced. The judgments are keen and idiosyncratic, and they are articulated most persuasively.”

-- Jay Neugeboren, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Praise for *On Having a Heart Attack*

ForeWord Magazine Book of the Year Bronze Medal Winner 2006 (Health category)

“William O’Rourke’s *On Having a Heart Attack* is a must-read for practicing physicians, cardiologists, nurses, physician assistants, and the general public. The book gives a vivid account of what a person goes through when experiencing a myocardial infarction.”

– Journal of the American Medical Association

“This very personal account of exactly what it was like to have a heart attack, to notice medical personnel somewhat hesitant to treat him until they saw his insurance card, to contemplate the possibility of dying before his son turned two, and to make lifestyle changes to lower the risk of a second attack is frightening, moving, and sometimes funny.”

– Donna Chavez, *Booklist*

“This memoir is much more than just a self-help book. The author examines the many personal thoughts the patient stricken by a heart attack unavoidably encounters. Nobody tells him, for instance, that deep sadness will envelop him after he survives the infarction. O’Rourke’s book is a medical memoir, as the title suggests, but it reaches far beyond that: it is a person’s look at his own mortality and the end of all things. It is a touching and thought-provoking book about the turning points in our lives and a profound reflection on family and friends and on hope and love. It is a book that doctors and nurses should read and learn from, and one that all those should read who are potentially threatened with heart disease through wrong life-style choices. But beyond that I recommend the book to anyone who loves fine writing and a good, meaningful story.”

– Diether Haenicke, *Third Coast*

“Despite its somber subject, the book is as gripping as fiction, full of drama, conflict, and angst.”

– *Provincetown Arts*

“O’Rourke’s book and its long description of having a heart attack may scare the bejesus out of you, but it certainly sheds a lot of light on the subject. He’s writing about what he knows and he knows a lot. His book is full of life -- full of heart -- and necessary reading for anyone who’s ever thought twice about the tough organ that keeps us alive.”

-- Malachy McCourt, author of *A Monk Swimming* and *Bush Lies in State*

“The story of William O’Rourke’s heart attack is as compelling as a thriller because it is a thriller. As always, O’Rourke’s prose is crisp, witty, and wholly original. The chronicle of his recovery demystifies a frightening illness, leaving a reader enlightened and, unexpectedly, cheered.”

--Valerie Sayers, author of *Brian Fever* and *Due East*

“In the first few pages of William O’Rourke’s gripping book I learned what it feels like to have a heart attack and how the press or pleasure of daily events can keep us postponing the visit to the Emergency Room. Now, I tell myself, I’ll be prepared even in the middle of the night or at a sports event. Thanks to my husband’s many years of MS, I did have an idea of how important a

good doctor, a ready wife or husband, an eagle eye for proceedings, and even chance can be in determining one's future -- but the uninitiated in such mysteries will find *On Having A Heart Attack* to be full of first person insights. Besides, if it has already happened to O'Rourke, maybe it won't happen to his readers!"

– Maggie Strong, author of *MAINSTAY: For the Well Spouse of the Chronically III*

"For anyone who has ever had a serious medical crisis, or been close to someone who has, William O'Rourke's book is essential reading. O'Rourke takes us on a fascinating, compelling journey into the literal and figurative heart of a gloriously full and fragile life. He illuminates much about our our vitality and our mortality, and the ways in which fortune and modern medicine can collaborate in our individual and collective fates. This is a rich tale by a splendid storyteller--a most unforgettable, informative, and deeply moving memoir of one man's struggles and triumphs."

--Jay Neugeboren, author of *Open Heart: A Patient's Story of Life-Saving Medicine and Life-Giving Friendship*

Praise for Confessions of a Guilty Freelancer

"This book is a brilliant overview of American history from the 1960s to the post 9/11 era. William O'Rourke is both a novelist and a political commentator—he wrote weekly columns for the *Chicago Sun-Times*—and a forceful writer of nonfiction." —Maura Stanton, author of *Immortal Sofa: Poems by Maura Stanton*

"I can think of no other contemporary writer more suited to the task of chronicling his literary generation. A voracious reader, O'Rourke has always had his finger on the pulse of the contemporary American literary scene." —Corinne Demas, author of *The Writing Circle*

"I don't know any writer who can be as funny and as gloomy at the same time as William O'Rourke. Perhaps that's why he has a fresh take on anything he looks at, and in his grumpy way he is interested in almost everything, from agnostics teaching at Catholic universities to the Zeitgeist of prime-time television. He always hoped to apply for the job of public intellectual, he tells us, but then the position disappeared and a hundred thousand bloggers took its place. O'Rourke makes—he has always made—decency and common sense seem the most startling ingenuity—which, come to think of it, they are. As skeptical as he is watchful, as ardently hopeful as he is, most of the time, horrified; with sparkling wit that never takes a vacation, he is our unpaid public intellectual number one." —Jaimy Gordon, author of *Lord of Misrule*, winner of the 2010 National Book Award for Fiction

"[T]hose who enjoy a good romp through some of our country's most pivotal times in the company of an astute observer who is unafraid to offer a penetrating, and sometimes scathing, critique of the state of the nation, will find themselves well matched." —*ForeWord Reviews*

"O'Rourke is that rarest of increasingly rare birds, a writer's writer. . . . O'Rourke brings an

artist's critical thinking to his political writing, providing him angles of attack on players from both parties that help reframe the issues in ways not available through the most mainstream press outlets." —*NUVO*

"O'Rourke's 'personal' writing doesn't simply mean how the subject relates to him; his writing is literary, without a doubt, but his style is conversational, rhythmic and leavened by a dry sense of humor that engage the reader on an intimate level." —*South Bend Tribune*

"O'Rourke's descriptions of the writing life have the ring of absolute truth." —*Review of Contemporary Fiction*