

Walk the Blue Fields by Claire Keegan

Discussion Guide

February 28, 2107

“Claire Keegan was born in 1968 and grew up on a farm in Wicklow. Her second short story collection, *Walk the Blue Fields*, was published to enormous critical acclaim in 2007 and won her the 2008 Edge Hill Prize for Short Stories. Claire Keegan lives in County Wexford, Ireland.” Faber and Faber Publishers.

<http://www.npr.org/books/authors/138025388/claire-keegan>

List of her works:

Antarctica (1999)

Walk the Blue Fields (2007)

Foster (2010)

Which of the stories in this collection most impressed you? Any you did not like?

Often a collection is held together by a place, a theme, a character, or an image. Is that true of Keegan’s collection? Some of the stories seem to emphasize community, others family. Did the stories that featured one theme more than the other resonate with you? What theme resonated most?

Compare the fathers and father figures (the priests) in the stories. Does the author show sympathy for some but not for others?

Some of you commented on the simple, plain style of McGahern. How does his style compare with that of Keegan? Do you, for example, find her style more “lyrical” or poetic? Some critics note that she bends English to Irish rhythms. If you agree, note examples that you would like to share with the group.

Notice that one of the stories—“Surrender”—draws on McGahern’s Memoir. Do you hear echoes of Moran and the community in Amongst Women? Do the family dynamics in “The Forester’s Daughter” remind you of John McGahern’s “Amongst Women”? Are Deegan and Moran similar? What about Martha and Rose?

How would you characterize family and community in this collection of stories?

The last story, “The Night of the Quicken Trees,” is unlike the other six in that it is grounded in fairy tales and Irish lore. Did you see any themes in this story that you found in the others?

Looking ahead: Colm Tóibín, Nora Webster, for March 25, 2017.