

The Burning of Bridget Cleary/ Angela Bourke

Irish Cultural Center

Norton Room

Saturday, January 26, 2019

10:30 AM – 12:30 PM

Bourke's book combines a true crime narrative with insights into the cultural and social history of Ireland in the 19th century. Critic Declan Kiberd has described Bourke's story as being about power: as the authority of seanchaí (Jack Dunne) declined, the power of strong independent women like Bridget Cleary was rising.

The author describes her work as an attempt to illustrate the clash between "two different world views, two ways of dealing with difficult people, two ways of dealing with the irrational at a time of profound social, economic, and cultural change." (page 234) Does she succeed?

Did the background that described the cultural change occurring in the late 19th century help or hinder your understanding of Bridget's death?

Consider the roles of women in this period. As their role began to change, what effect did this have on the outcome?

Based on the actual case, where do your sympathies lie? Are there any heroes?

When some of those convicted appeal for reduced sentences, Judge O'Brien turns them down based on his view that it was murder, not manslaughter. Which do you think it was?

What contemporary mystery/crime writer could have written a novel using the main story? Who do you think the narrator could be?

Consider the different interpretations the unionist and the nationalist newspapers took. What were the political implications for Ireland in this case?