

That They May Face the Rising Sun

by John McGahern

(Faber and Faber)

The modern age of globalisation, high-speed living and self-absorption is set aside in John McGahern's new novel, which permits us to see clearly the world that is almost forgotten in the pursuit of the new – an enclosed world where life is simple and sedate, and politics, religion and socio-cultural life intertwine.

It's a world where people pause to glory in nature and each step taken from day to day. It's about the gossip and conjecture relished, and malice shrugged off with good rancour like water off a duck's back. It's a world that is fast disappearing, but still sought after by some...

McGahern, the acclaimed Irish author whose book *Amongst Women* won the *Irish Times* Literary Award in 1991 and was adapted for television by the BBC, centres this story on a small Irish lakeside farming village, around the lives of Joe Rutledge and his wife Kate, who have come to Ireland from London in search of a different life – to the bewilderment of the natives.

As the book progresses, we see



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their lives and those of their neighbours unfold through their actions, life rituals, religious observances and play. The Rutledges' closest neighbours, Jamesie and wife Mary, have never left the lake but know everything that swirls there: they embody the spirit of the place.

Meanwhile, John Quinn is thrown into the mix of memorable characters to represent the selfish and the self-absorbed of the world: he will stop at nothing to indulge his weakness.

And through Johnny, Jamesie's brother, it is subtly observed that Irish emigration was out of necessity, and as such any sort of discrimination in their adopted country is seen as unjust. Immigrants into the community, however, are shunned: they are different, and only tolerated with amusement after a long stay, but the idea of their foreignness is never far.

The narrative flows like a stream, rising and ebbing with nuggets of Irish history buried throughout the plot. This book will remind you of your own village; you will surely identify the characters amongst your family and friends, and foes.

That They My Face the Rising Sun is a comprehensive depiction of existence, the ebbs and flows of human relations told in a beautiful language enriched with nature. McGahern has succeeded in making his enclosed world an everywhere.

Review by Ifedinma Dimbo



Ifedinma Dimbo, originally from Nigeria, is the author of a soon-to-be-published women's novel *She Was Foolish?* More details about the author, her work and the Irish Writers' Exchange can be found online at www.irishwriters-exchange.com