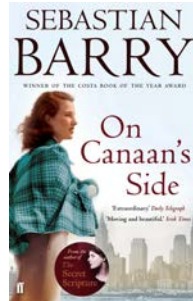


THE WALTER  
SCOTT PRIZE  
FOR HISTORICAL  
FICTION **10YEARS**



## Readers' Guides



### 2012 Winner

## On Canaan's Side Sebastian Barry

Faber

### About the author

Sebastian Barry was born in Dublin in 1955. His novels and plays have won amongst others the Costa Book of the Year award, the Kerry Group Irish Fiction Prize, the Irish Book Awards Novel of the Year, the Independent Booksellers Prize, the Walter Scott Prize and the James Tait Black Memorial Prize. He had two consecutive novels, *A Long Long Way* (2005) and *The Secret Scripture* (2008), shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, and he is the only author to have won the Walter Scott Prize twice – the first time for *On Canaan's Side* in 2012, and the second for *Days Without End* (2017). Sebastian lives in Wicklow with his wife and three children.

### About the book

A first-person narrative of Lilly Bere's life, *On Canaan's Side* opens as the eighty-five-year-old Irish émigré mourns the loss of her grandson, Bill. Lilly, the daughter of a Dublin policeman, revisits her eventful past, going back to the moment she was forced to flee Ireland at the end of the First World War. She continues her tale in America, where—far from her family—she first tastes the sweetness of love and the bitterness of betrayal.

Spanning nearly seven decades, Sebastian Barry's extraordinary fifth novel explores memory, war, family ties, love, and loss, distilling the complexity and beauty of life into his haunting prose.

## Discussion Questions

Most of Mr. Dillinger's family died in Dachau. Why do you think Barry chooses to contrast this information with Lilly's more recent tragedy?

When the Dunnes are moving into Dublin Castle, Lilly contemplates "the Wicklow lighthouse when at last it turns in its great arc towards you. What use was the lighthouse's light to those on land, I never knew". What does the lighthouse symbolize?

Besides his own image, what is it that Tadg sees in Van Gogh's self-portrait?

Did Cassie suspect Joe's secret? If she had, would she have approved of his relationship with Lilly?

As Lilly and Joe drive past the Bellows' house, Joe says, "the past is a crying child, that's for sure . . . but it will all be made up to him in the coming times". How do you read his statement in light of later events?

Why do you think Barry includes the story of Mr. Dillinger's visit to China?

Why is Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination more poignant because it's "on Canaan's side itself"? How does the novel's title affect the way you read the events it relates?

Do you think that Lilly will go through with her plan to kill herself? How would you feel if she did or if she didn't?

*On Canaan's Side* interweaves Lilly's deeply personal story with major historical events. How did this narrative technique affect your reading of the novel as well as your understanding of the twentieth century as a whole?

Have you read *Annie Dunne* or *A Long, Long Way*? How does this novel fit into that trilogy? If you haven't already, are you compelled to learn the rest of the Dunnes' story?

*(Questions supplied by Publisher)*