



# The Leavetaking

*John McGahern*

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## **The Leavetaking** John McGahern

Widely considered one of the greatest Irish writers by readers and critics alike, John McGahern has been called “arguably the most important Irish novelist since Samuel Beckett” (The Guardian) whose “spare but luminous prose” (Chicago Tribune) is frequently compared to that of James Joyce. In *The Leavetaking*, McGahern presents a crucial, cathartic day in the life of a young Catholic schoolteacher who, along with his new wife, returns to Ireland after a year’s sabbatical in London. Moving from the earliest memories of both characters into the present day, *The Leavetaking* recounts the couple’s struggle to overcome the suffocating influence of the church in order to find happiness in a fulfilling adult love.

## **The Leavetaking Details**

Date : Published December 26th 2006 by Penguin Books (first published January 1st 1974)

ISBN : 9780140280579

Author : John McGahern

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Genre : Fiction, Cultural, Ireland, Literary Fiction, European Literature, Irish Literature, Novels

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# From Reader Review The Leavetaking for online ebook

## Dem says

The Leavetaking by John McGahern was written as a love story, its two parts deliberately different in style and while I enjoyed the first part of the story the second part just didn't work for me and I felt it was out of sync with the usual style of McGahern Novels.

The book tells the story of a day in the life of a young Catholic schoolteacher Patrick Moran who has returned to Ireland after a year sabbatical in London. While the story is slow and little happens in the first half of the novel, the author's descriptions and prose keeps the reader interested and turning the pages for more.

The story is quite reflective of parts of McGahern own life experiences as a child and this was the part that I enjoyed and felt he conveyed best in the novel. The mother and son relationship was extremely well written. The second part of the novel is mostly spent in London and I felt the story became unrealistic and the characters actions unconvincing and I was left disappointed on finishing the novel.

I have enjoyed Amongst Women and That They May Face The Rising Sun by this author.

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## Suzette says

Whew! Its a hard read. He moves from time to time and place to place all in the same chapter, the same page, and even the same paragraph. Very difficult for me to follow. Helps to have my Irish husband next to me while reading to translate some of the Irishisms....."the comagie field"

Just ready to start Part II

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## Gavin says

About half way through part two I struggled to make the connection with part one both in style and content. That he tool the threads and brought them together at the end was not enough to earn five stars. The prose and the jdeas around leaving, ending, disconnecting throughout was, despite that, enough to give it an easy 4 stars - or perhaps on a scale more familiar to the hero of the story, a straight A.

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## Bridget Symonds says

beautiful, evocative prose.

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### **Ruth Loizides says**

Tough slow read

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### **Eilis says**

I know John McGahern is supposed to be an amazing writer and all that jazz but I have to say this book was just... boring

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### **Max says**

I have somewhat mixed feelings about this novel. The first part is quite good. It jumps back and forth between the protagonist's last day as a schoolteacher and his childhood, and the switching is done quite well, without ever being confusing. There are a lot of well done and fascinating scenes in the boy's childhood revolving around the death of his mother, and though I've never experienced a death that close to me, based on my experience grieving, everything was quite realistic. The writing is generally good, and there are some nice images, like the narrator's meditations on a flock of birds that give my edition its cover. However, the second part isn't anywhere near as good. The protagonist now discusses his adulthood and the year long sabbatical he took in London. Here he meets an American woman and the novel almost seems to slip into an entirely different story. Whereas the protagonist is from a poor rural area of Ireland, his American lover is rich and so he gets dragged into a series of complicated situations with her and her father. I found this to be quite jarring. The characters do continue to be fairly well written, and the father is especially disturbing. However, the romance between the two characters proceeds rather too quickly for me, and I never get a sense of why they love each other. Further, the deft jumping back and forth between past and present that occurred in the first part of the novel is largely missing here. Thus I definitely did not enjoy the second part anywhere near as much as I did the first. As a result, I can really only rate the novel overall as average - the first and second parts sort of balance each other out. Had the whole novel had the same quality as the first part, this would easily have been worth four or even five stars, but as it is, I can only give it three.

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### **Saima says**

It was not an easy read, moving back and forth between different times and scenarios within a paragraph wasn't easy for me to grasp. I finished reading it, because I like to finish what I start. Otherwise, it was boring and dry for me..

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### **Sandra says**

A single, final day of reflection by a school teacher about to be dismissed on what has brought him to this

point. As ever I envy the Irish their writing, their ability to be gentle, poetic and compelling and to speak so eloquently of what drives us through life.

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### **Clare O'Beara says**

This is a beautiful, somewhat wistful look at the last day that a young schoolmaster will spend at his school.

We explore the master's thoughts and see his pupils, hear the bell ring in the playground to call the boys in to class. Why is he leaving his job? We learn that it is because of the strict morality and disapproval of the priests who run the school.

McGahern was showing how the secular state was still largely run by the Catholic church in Ireland, asking us to consider the actions of a man who was putting love before obedience and conformity.

While little appears to happen, the book is one to which we can return to savour the writing and reflect on the past, especially now that so many hidden truths have surfaced about church-run institutions. No hint of the irony shows; McGahern was just presenting life as people then experienced it and showing that not everyone was willing to live under the thumb.

I recommend this book for many reasons. It's not cheerful, but neither is it sad. The prose is gentle and lovely.

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### **Bill Keefe says**

Working backwards with McGahern, this book came as a surprise. Seems like I'm working backwards from a writer who increasingly found simplicity in his writing. Thus, this book came as somewhat of a shock. This is the "Joycean" McGahern critics refer to. Not a robust tale, no twists in turns; you know what's coming from the get go. McGahern's gift is that in the simplest, most mundane of life's experiences he brings to the reader the richness of being human. And he does it with tight - and in this book, challenging - prose.

Unfortunately, working backwards with McGahern put me in the position of reading Part I of this book after having read his memoir. They are almost identical; portions of the latter lifted directly from the former. It was so confusing. I'd read this before. Why? Will I have to read the remaining 150 pages of parallel prose. This encounter with a writer's fiction miming his life and his autobiography lifting passages from his fiction was, and still is, very unsettling. I still don't know how to approach this. This struggle, this discomfort of reading the same thing twice, of repetition, of confusion is the only reason I didn't give this book a four star. It was really a wonderful read.

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### **George says**

A story about a school teacher at a Catholic school in Ireland. He marries a divorcee which creates problems with the town priest and the school's head master. The story is told in two halves. The first half is well written stream of consciousness writing where the school teacher at one moment is thinking about his position in the present, then in the next moment he is remembering his upbringing and his relationship with

his parents and grand parents and his first girlfriend. In the second half of the novel the story telling is much more straight forward. It's the story of Isobel, the woman he is to marry. It is a good read.

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### **Danny Daley says**

The novel is broken into two parts - the first part I found to be uncharacteristically dull for McGahern, but the second part is really beautiful and moving, and much more in keeping with what I expect from McGahern's work. As a whole, the themes are familiar for a McGahern novel - family, Ireland, the abuses of the Catholic Church - all represented. The story is rooted in a stern sense of reality, and although inconsistent, it's a good read for a McGahern fan.

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