

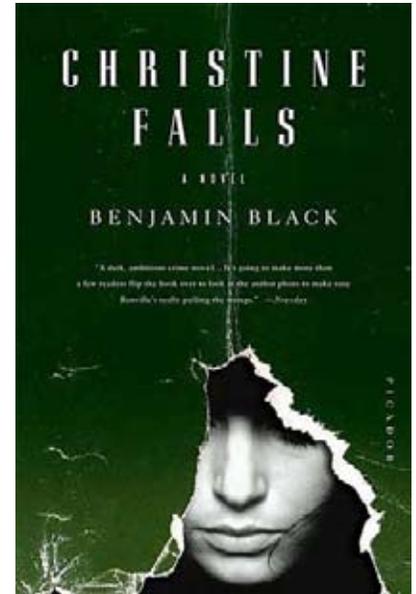


Reading Group Gold

Christine Falls

A Novel

by Benjamin Black



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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *Christine Falls* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *Christine Falls*.

About the Book

Set in Dublin and Boston in the 1950s, the story of a surly, hard-drinking pathologist named Quirke who uncovers a conspiracy that begins with his brother-in-law and reaches deep into Dublin's Catholic society—and into his own past.

Praise for *Christine Falls*

“A page-turner told in prose so beautiful you’ll want to read some passages repeatedly.”—*The Boston Globe*

“Measured, taut, and transfixing . . . Benjamin Black’s plotting is methodical, detailed, and always gripping. You can smell the smoke in Quirke’s favorite pub and touch the cool walls in a Boston convent he later visits.”—*USA Today*

“Swirling, elegant noir . . . Crossover fiction of a very high order . . . Rolls forward with haunting, sultry exoticism . . . toward the best kind of denouement under these circumstances: a half inconclusive one.”—*The New York Times*

“Offers a subtler, deeper satisfaction than just finding out whodunit. . . . What’s most disconcerting of all about *Christine Falls* is the atmosphere of moral claustrophobia enveloping it.”—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*



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“A dark, ambitious crime novel full of cliffhanger chapter endings, barroom brawls, even long- night trucker hauls. . . . The story is an explosive one. . . . Swift, perceptive, and unguiltily satisfying.”—*Newsday*

About the Author

Benjamin Black is the pen name of Man Booker Prize–winning author John Banville who lives in Dublin, Ireland.

Discussion Questions

1. “In secret,” the author writes, “Quirke prized his loneliness as a mark of some distinction.” (pg. 12). What does Quirke’s loneliness do for him? How does it make possible what he ultimately accomplishes in the story? Is Quirke’s isolation part of what allows him to see the truth about the conspiracy around him?
2. What does Crawford mean when he says to Quirke that America is “the New World,” that, “This is the place. God’s country.” How are Ireland and America treated differently in the novel? How do these portrayals relate to the current America and Ireland?
3. Do the revelations about Quirke, Phoebe, and what he knew about their relationship change your perception of how he treated her earlier in the novel? Why do you think Quirke kept the secret so long of who her parents were? Was it the right decision?
4. Early in the novel, Quirke is thinking about his late wife Delia: “Perhaps he had cared for her more than he knew, had cared for what she was, that is, and not just what she had been to him.” How do these two different types of caring come into play for other characters in the novel? Do you think they are always distinct from each other? Are some people capable only of one or the other?
5. What do you think of the overall portrait of the Catholic Church that emerges from the novel? Did you find the conspiracy plausible? Did you feel sympathy for the nuns, the Staffords, and other less powerful figures who were complicit in it?
6. Consider the difference between Quirke’s early childhood, first in a brutal orphanage and then in an adoptive home, and Mal’s, as the natural-born son of a wealthy father who loved him less than his brother. How do you think their respective childhoods can be connected to the decisions they make in their relationships in this story?
7. What role does social class play in the novel?
8. Why do you think Quirke sleeps with Rose? Is she right when she tells him, “You’re more like me than your precious Sarah. A cold heart and a hot soul...”?
9. What do you think drew Quirke and Sarah together initially? Do you think they were better off for having



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stayed apart throughout the years, despite an acknowledged love for each other?

10. Quirke realizes midway through the novel that as “Mr. Punch and fat Judy” were beating him, the prospect of his own death was insignificant, that “he had thought he was going to die and was surprised at how little he feared the prospect.” Is this a sign of bravery in Quirke, or despair, or both? Do you think his own life matters more or less to him by the end of the novel?

11. At the end of chapter 28 a nun says to Quirke, “From the little I’ve seen of you, you’re a good man, if only you knew it.” Do you agree with her assessment? What does she mean by, “if only you knew it.” Would knowing it change his behavior?

12. What do you imagine happening after the end of the book? How will Quirke’s relationship to his family evolve, including to Sarah and Phoebe? Have the events in this story made him a happier man, a better man? Or have they changed him for the worse?