

DESPERATION ROAD (A NOVEL)

MICHAEL FARRIS SMITH

1. DESPERATION ROAD features a lot of violence, but it seems to be tempered with a bit of grace as well, a sense of redemption for its beleaguered characters. Is it fair to apply Flannery O'Connor's assessment that extreme violence in fiction can be redemptive? In other words, do you agree with the Misfit in "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" that the grandmother really would have been a good woman had there been someone there to shoot her every minute of her life?
2. Discuss the religious aspects and symbols in DESPERATION ROAD. There is the image of the statue of the Virgin Mary, which plays a prominent role, but there's also the epigraph: "and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday." Do the characters seem to "believe"?
3. Discuss the idea of fate in DESPERATION ROAD. It's probably not a coincidence that Maben's and Russell's lives intersect in the ways they do. Do you believe a larger hand is at play in our lives or in the lives of these characters? Or is it really all just chance?
4. DESPERATION ROAD is filled with memorable characters, from the homeless woman and child, to the morally-bound deputy sheriff, to the father trying to do what is right for his son. What character do you relate to most and why?
5. Russell Gaines, an unlucky ex-con who crosses paths with Maben, a woman whose already broken life has just been made worse by her own disastrous decisions, is coming home. But after eleven years, home is not the same. What has changed since the fateful night of Russell's crime?
6. DESPERATION ROAD is set in and around McComb and Magnolia, two small communities near the Mississippi-Louisiana line. What role does the landscape and setting play in the evolution of the story? Smith believes in writing setting as its own character. What kind of character has he created?

If you are interested in having Michael Farris Smith join your book club discussion, please contact Lauren.Velasquez@hbgsusa.com

Don't forget to check out Michael Farris Smith's new book *THE FIGHTER*, a blistering novel of violence and deliverance, set against the mythic backdrop of the Mississippi Delta. AVAILABLE MARCH 20TH, 2018

