



Breakfast on Pluto

By Patrick McCabe
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Introduction

Set in the politically tumultuous London of the 1970s, *Breakfast on Pluto* follows the misadventures of Patrick "Pussy" Braden, a transvestite prostitute on a quest to find love and a place to call home. Pussy narrates his own story, occasionally pausing to direct comments at Dr. Terence, the psychiatrist who suggested he write it. Born in the border town of Tyreelin, Ireland in the mid 1950s, Pussy is the product of an encounter between the village priest and his beautiful teenaged housekeeper. Abandoned by his mother and unable to contact his father, Pussy is raised by "Whiskers," a chain-smoking, beer-guzzling foster mother. When Pussy begins demonstrating a penchant for women's clothing and female impersonations, he is booted out of his house. He finds temporary contentment with a British politician who acts as sugar daddy until he is killed by the IRA, leaving Pussy alone once more. Searching for his birth mother, Pussy winds up in London where he finds himself hustling in Piccadilly Circus. Although decidedly apolitical, the terminally exuberant Pussy cannot help being drawn

into the terror around him as his friends and lovers are murdered and bombings become a regular occurrence. As he flirts with a soldier in a club one night, a bomb explodes, blowing the soldier to ribbons. When Pussy is arrested on suspicion of planting the bomb, he begins to lose his already tenuous hold on reality. Despite the obvious losses, Pussy never seems to lose hope in his dream of finding love. A courageous optimist, Pussy Braden navigates a world splintered by violence with "pastiche, wickedness and cheek." He and his story are unforgettable.

Questions for Discussion

1. Aside from the narrator himself, all the characters in this novel are viewed through the shifting lens of Pussy Braden's perspective. Several characters, in fact, exist only in Pussy's imagination. Aside from Pussy, which of these characters, real or imagined, are the most carefully drawn and which leave the most lasting impressions? Why?
2. The author has stated that in early drafts of this novel the character of Pussy Braden was conceived as a female but that as he continued writing, he "realized it wasn't about a girl at all." How is Pussy's sexual identity critical in conveying the novel's themes of identity and disassociation?
3. What is the view of religion expressed in *Breakfast on Pluto*? How does this view shape the internal conflicts of the characters and the external conflicts of their environment? Which scenes in particular support your opinion?
4. Does Pussy Braden's irreverent attitude towards Ireland's troubles ("It's bombing night and I haven't got a thing to wear") diminish or accentuate the horror around him? Is the voice of Pussy Braden more or less effective than those in other Irish novels in its description of Ireland's turmoil?
5. Popular music has a strong presence in *Breakfast on Pluto*, and the title is derived from a 1969 pop hit. Patrick McCabe, who is a practicing part-time musician, has said that "you could make the case that all art aspires to be music." Is there a sense of musicality in this novel? If so, how is it manifested?
6. Given his preoccupations with fantasy and lapses in sanity, can Pussy be a reliable narrator? If not, discuss the ways in which his unreliability affects your understanding of the novel's events. If you find him reliable, discuss why.
7. The author has said that *Breakfast on Pluto* is a much darker novel than he had originally intended to write. Is there any sense of hopefulness by the novel's end? How does Pussy's consistent optimism in the wake of so much personal tragedy affect your impressions?
8. Discuss the concept of borders as it is presented in *Breakfast on Pluto*. Which borders are crossed in this novel, and which remain impenetrable?
9. Patrick McCabe has said that "Ireland is always referred to as a woman. Sometimes it's the Old Woman and sometimes it's the Aisling or the Dark Rosaleen or Cathleen Ni Houlihan. Pussy Braden is my equivalent of that sort of thing." In what way(s) is the character of Pussy Braden a metaphor for modern Ireland?

About the Author

Patrick McCabe was born in Clones, County Monaghan, Ireland, in 1955. He has published four other novels, *Music on Clinton Street* (1986), *Carr* (1989), *The Butcher Boy* (1992), and *The Dead School* (1995). He cowrote with director Neil Jordan the screenplay for *The Butcher Boy* and is finishing a collection of stories.