

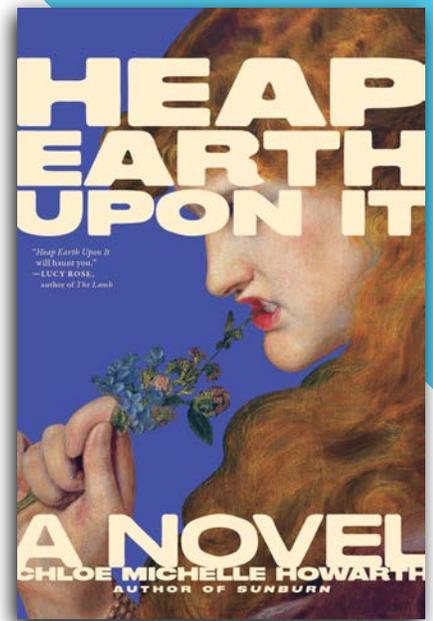
HEAP EARTH UPON IT

A Novel

Chloe Michelle Howarth

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A FEBRUARY 2026 INDIE NEXT LIST PICK

A February 2026 Powell's Monthly Pick

Vulture's "23 books from 2026 that we can't wait to read"

Lithub's "Most Anticipated Book of 2026"

Book Riot's "Most Anticipated Queer Books of 2026"

“Alluring ... an engrossing chronicle of restlessness and desire.”
—*Publishers Weekly*

INTRODUCTION

Chloe Michelle Howarth, author of the bestselling novel *Sunburn*, offers a new take on sapphic obsession. . .

In January, 1965, the growing town of Ballycrea has four new residents.

The O'Leary siblings arrive in their new village under suspicious circumstances. Desperate to make a new start and leave their troubled life behind, the O'Learys offer few, contradicting details about their past.

As they slowly settle in to town, the siblings are taken under the wing of Betty and Bill Nevan, a wealthy couple in their forties who have always wanted children. However, as one O'Leary sister grows close to Betty, lines are crossed and their intense relationship becomes difficult to define. All the while, the O'Leary's buried secrets keep bubbling up, threatening to ruin their new future.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Gender plays a large part in this novel. How do you think that characters adhered to/rebelled against their prescribed gender roles? Do you think that further adhesion/rebellion would have impacted their journeys?
2. While none of the main characters in this book are parents, they each take on the role of parents at one time or another. Which characters do you think do this effectively, why do you think that some characters struggle while others flourish in the role of parents?
3. Did you experience Anna's connection to Betty as queerness, as obsession, or both? How do you think she might have coped with this in the modern day, or in later decades?

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4. Queerness is both a central and peripheral theme in the novel. Besides Anna, did you feel queerness coming from any characters?
5. Anna's story is largely guided by her obsessions, however obsession affects other characters, too. Who else do you think is most impacted by obsession, and how does it affect their lives?
6. Besides Anna, other characters in the novel deal with obsession. How do you think this affects them, their relationships, and their lives?
7. Although we never hear from Peggy as a narrator, she plays a central role in the novel. What do you think she would have to say if she was given the chance to narrate? Are there any other characters you would have liked to hear from?
8. What do you think that the O'Leary siblings' lives would look like without Peggy?
9. What do you think was Anna's fate?
10. What did you think of the depiction of the 1960s in rural Ireland? Did anything surprise you? How did the setting contribute to the story?
11. The theme of the Irish Gothic is seen throughout the book. Are you familiar with this theme, and what are some elements that you believe might fit the theme?
12. How do you think that the portrayal of Ireland in this book measures up to the modern romanticisation of the country?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chloe Michelle Howarth is best known for *Sunburn* (2025, Melville House) and is an Irish writer who grew up in the West Cork countryside. The landscapes, culture, and people of rural Ireland have served as an inspiration for her writing. She first became interested in literature as a teenager, and in 2015, she moved to Dublin to study English, Media, and Cultural Studies in IADT Dun Laoghaire. Chloe currently lives in Brighton.

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