Book Group & Reader Discussion Questions

The Truth of Sheemore

A Reading Group Discussion Guide

1. Early in the novel, Maud finds a single word in the margin of her father's photocopied deposition: *Liar?* Why do you think her father left that question unanswered rather than pursuing it further? Did this small, ambiguous clue shape your expectations for the rest of the novel?

2. The jury took only fifteen minutes to convict Robert Keon. Did the speed of the verdict surprise you, or did it seem inevitable by that stage of the novel? What does it suggest about justice in eighteenth-century Ireland?

3. Robert strikes George Reynolds in public before the fatal encounter at Sheemore Hill, and both men arrive at the hill carrying anger neither fully controls. How did your sympathies shift, if at all, as the events leading to the killing were revealed?

4. Jane Reynolds's grief gradually becomes a public campaign to see Robert hanged. Did you find her understandable, frightening, compassionate, or all three? Can grief that curdles into certainty ever be forgiven?

5. The novel never resolves whether the fatal shot was an accident, a reflex, or something closer to intent. Did you find that ambiguity honest to the historical record, or did you want the novel to give you a firmer answer?

6. How did Maud's search for the truth about Robert Keon affect her understanding of her own father's death? Did resolving one mystery help her face the other?

7. Bridget Keon, Jane Reynolds, and Frances Keon all shaped or endured the consequences of what happened on Sheemore Hill, yet the surviving legal record mentions them only where men happened to write them down. What does the novel do to restore these women to the story? Did you feel it succeeded?

8. Ballads, pamphlets and public opinion influence Robert's fate almost as much as the courtroom itself. What does the novel suggest about the relationship between reputation, class and justice? Does any of it feel familiar today?

9. Maud is reopening a two-centuries-old accusation against a man who cannot defend himself, using fragments of evidence that were themselves shaped by grief, self-interest, and fear. Do descendants have the right to relitigate the dead? What do we owe the people whose stories we choose to retell?

10. Maud's relationship with her mother is marked by years of silence and questions left unasked. How does that unresolved relationship influence her search for the truth about

the past? Did the ending leave you hopeful that they might eventually find a way back to one another?

11. Several characters shape the truth to protect themselves or those they love. Where do you draw the line between loyalty and dishonesty? Did any of these characters' choices feel more forgivable than others?

12. The novel is titled *The Truth of Sheemore*, yet it repeatedly questions whether history can ever reveal a single, objective truth. By the end, what do you think "truth" means? Can it ever be fully recovered, or can we only assemble the most honest version from imperfect evidence?

Questions may be used freely for book club, classroom, or library discussion purposes.

A Note from the Author: My Thoughts on Question 1

I think Paul left it unanswered because he knew the difference between suspicion and proof. He would have seen that Plunkett was never charged, yet was the sole witness whose account secured Robert's conviction. "Liar?" – the question mark matters. It's a private note, not an accusation he was ready to defend.

Plunkett isn't a villain but a fallible man: his vanity, misplaced confidence, and hunger to be significant set in motion consequences he couldn't stop. That's the tragedy, not evil design, but ordinary people making decisions they spend the rest of their lives unable to undo. The reader must ask: under what pressure have I, too, said more than I knew, or let others believe I was more certain than I was?