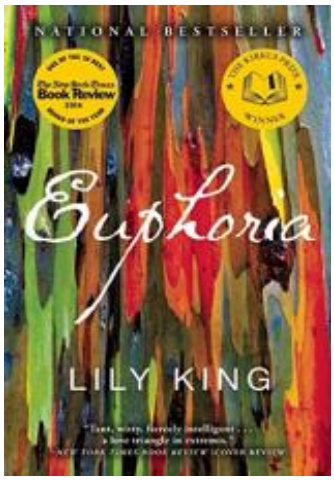
# Euphoria

by Lily King




## About the Book

*Winner of the 2014 Kirkus Prize*
*Winner of the 2014 New England Book Award for Fiction*
*Finalist for the National Book Critic Circle Award for Fiction*

*New York Times Book Review 10 Best Books of 2014; TIME Top 10 Fiction Books of 2014; New York Times Book Review 100 Notable Books of 2014; NPR Best Books of 2014; Entertainment Weekly?s 10 Best Fiction Books of 2014; Washington Post Top 50 Fiction Books of 2014; Kirkus Best of 2014; Amazon 100 Best of 2014 #16; Publishers Weekly Best Fiction Books of 2014; Our Man in Boston?s Best of 2014; Oprah.com 15 Must Reads of 2014; Buzzfeed 32 Most Beautiful Book Covers of 2014; A Vogue Top 10 Book of 2014; A New York magazine Best Book of the Year; Seattle Times Top Books of 2014; San Francisco Chronicle Top 10 Books of 2014*

From New England Book Award winner Lily King comes a breathtaking novel about three young anthropologists of the 1930s caught in a passionate love triangle that threatens their bonds, their ca--reers, and, ultimately, their lives.

English anthropologist Andrew Banson has been alone in the field for several years, studying the Kiona river tribe in the Territory of New Guinea. Haunted by the memory of his brothers? deaths and increasingly frustrated and isolated by his research, Bankson is on the verge of suicide when a chance encounter with colleagues, the controversial Nell Stone and her wry and mercurial Australian husband, Fen, pulls him back from the brink. Nell and Fen have just fled the bloodthirsty Mumbanyo and, in spite of Nell?s poor health, are hungry for a new discovery. When Bankson finds them a new tribe nearby, the artistic, female-dominated Tam, he ignites an intellectual and romantic firestorm between the three of them that burns out of anyone?s control.

Set between two world wars and inspired by events in the life of revolutionary anthropologist Margaret Mead, EUPHORIA is an enthralling story of passion, possession, exploration and sacrifice from accomplished author Lily King.

## Discussion Guide

**1.** Set against the lush tropical landscape of 1930s New Guinea, this novel charts British anthropologist Andrew Bankson?s fascination for colleagues Nell Stone and her husband, Fen, a fascination that turns deadly. How far does the setting play a role in shaping events? Is there a sense that the three have created their own small universe on the banks of the Sepik River, far removed from the Western world? If so, by whose rules are they playing?

**2.** ?She tried not to think about the villages they were passing?the tribes she would never know and words she would never hear, the worry that they might right now be passing the one people she was meant to study, a people whose genius she would unlock, and who would unlock hers, a people who had a way of life that made sense to her? (p. 8). In the light of this quote, discuss Nell Stone?s passion and need for anthropology and find ways in which they differ from Bankson?s and Fen?s. Talk about the significance of her childhood dream of being carried away by gypsies.

**3.** Continue your discussion by considering Nell?s statement: ?If I didn?t believe they shared my humanity entirely, I wouldn?t be here?I?m not interested in zoology? (p. 55). Find instances in the novel in which she demonstrates this. How far do you agree, as Nell states, that it is an anthropologist?s role to encourage self-analysis and self-awareness in the tribes he/she studies?

**4.** Over the course of the novel we learn a great deal about Bankson?s childhood and young adulthood. Talk about the reasons and life events that brought him to anthropology. What has led him to the brink of suicide? How seriously do you think he views his statement: ?The meaning of life is the quest to understand the structure and order of the natural world --- that was the mantra I was raised on. To deviate from it was suicide? (p. 32).

**5.** Given his upbringing and his father?s passion for ?hard? science, Nell?s focus on humanity instead of zoology must hold great appeal for Bankson. What else draws him to Nell, leaving him with ?Fierce desires, a great tide of feeling of which I could make little sense, an ache that seems to have no name but want. I want? (p. 86). What exactly does Bankson want?

**6.** Discuss the ways in which Bankson?s attitude toward his work changes as he gets to know Nell and her research methods. Consider his acknowledgment of the limitations of an anthropologist?s work and discuss how far it is possible to ever get to know another?s culture. Take into account Bankson?s interest in the objectivity of the observer.

**7.** Take your discussion of the previous question a step further by considering whether it is ever possible to truly know another person. Apply your observations to Bankson?s views of Nell and Fen.

**8.** The theme of possession, of ownership, runs throughout the novel, twisting like the river Sepik itself through the relationships and conversations of the protagonists. Talk about Nell?s search for ?a group of people who give each other the room to be in whatever way they need to be? (p. 88). Has she found this kind of freedom in any of the tribes she has studied? In any of her relationships? Talk specifically about Fen and Bankson.

**9.** Further your discussion by focusing on the idea of words and thoughts as things to be owned --- as Nell states, ?once I published that book and my words became a commodity?? (p. 91). How has this impacted her relationship with Fen? Consider her statement ?I only know that when F leaves and B and I talk I feel like I am saying --- and hearing --- the first wholly honest words of my life? (p. 198).

**10.** On several occasions during the novel, Nell refers to an Amy Lowell poem, ?Decade.? Why do you think the poem holds such meaning for her? How does the poem?s central idea --- of feelings for a lover changing from the sweet, almost painful intensity of red wine into the blissful satisfaction of bread --- relate to her and her own relationships?

**11.** While Nell declares later that ?He is wine and bread and deep in my stomach? (p. 247), do you believe that Bankson was able to give Nell the freedom she was looking for? How or how not? Could it have led inevitably to her death?

**12.** How far would you consider Nell to be the epitome of a young, independent accomplished woman? Talk about her character, her personality, work habits and motivations. Then discuss her disturbing relationship with Fen, and her inability to escape his harm. How did she end up in such an untenable situation?

**13.** In one journal entry, Nell writes: ?I am angry that I was made to choose, that both Fen & Helen needed me to choose, to be their one & only when I didn?t want a one & only? (p. 92). Consider Nell?s relationship with Helen as compared to her relationship with Fen and talk about the reasons she may have chosen Fen over Helen. Do you think that she made this decision or it was made for her?

**14.** Set against a distant backdrop of a Western world mired in doubt and economic depression, the novel can be seen to depict a search for understanding, for a sense of order. Look at the ways in which the study of the tribes of New Guinea reflects the protagonists? desperate search for meaning --- a search that can lead to a sense of failure or instead to Nell?s euphoria when ?at that moment the place feels entirely yours? (p. 50). Find instances of despair and disillusionment for Nell, Fen and Bankson in their various work experiences. How do they react?

**15.** What do the three of them really see in the tribes of New Guinea? To what extent, when unlocking the puzzles of the Kiona and the Tam, are they searching for meaning within themselves? How important is it to impending events that the Tam tribe appears to be female-dominated?

**16.** In the context of the previous two questions, talk about the significance of the Grid to the three anthropologists. What does it represent to them? Why does Bankson refer to a ?shift in the stars? caused by the Grid?

**17.** Discuss the glimpses the novel gives into the world of 1930s colonialism --- in the conversations with Westerners in New Guinea and in Australia; and in Bankson?s, Nell?s and Fen?s attitudes to the tribes they study and the Western society to which they must eventually return. How, if at all, do Nell, Fen and Bankson take colonial approaches toward their research practices and anthropological subjects? What is the role of Xambun as he rejoins his tribal village after being recruited by a Western company? Is it possible to live between the two worlds?

**18.** Fen briefly mentions a dark family secret, then continues the conversation to discuss the primitive world versus the ?civilized world?: ?Nothing in the primitive world shocks me, Bankson. Or I should say, what shocks me in the primitive world is any sense of order and ethics. All the rest --- the cannibalism, infanticide, raids, mutilation --- it?s all comprehensible, nearly reasonable, to me. I?ve always been able to see the savageness beneath the veneer of society?

(p.137?38). What does this say about Fen? How far do you agree with his comment, especially in the light of events that follow in the novel?

**19.** For all of Nell and Bankson?s heartfelt conversations, and Bankson?s keen observations of her at work, there are many important things left unsaid. Nell states: ?You don?t realize how language actually interferes with communication?how it gets in the way like an overdominant sense? (p. 79). Should Bankson have understood further Nell?s sadness within her marriage, Fen?s physical abuse? As a reader, do we miss the clues too?

**20.** Discuss Fen?s obsession with the flute, and the reasons why it ultimately leads to the destruction of so much: the anthropologists? relationship with the Tam tribe, Fen?s relationship with Nell and Bankson. If Xambun had not been killed, would it have been acceptable for Fen to take the flute?

**21.** Continue your discussion to consider whether an anthropologist must always betray in some way the tribes he/she works with. How does Nell writing books about the people she studies differ from Fen selling the flute to a museum? Was Nell?s work in the field beneficial to the Tam or to the children of Kirakira? Are her reasons for working with them ultimately as selfish as Fen?s need to profit from the flute? How morally responsible are Bankson and Nell for Xambun?s death?

**22.** Fen justifies taking the flute so that he can restore balance to his relationship with Nell: ?There has to be a balance. A man can?t be without power --- it doesn?t work like that? (p. 238). Contrast this with Nell?s thoughts on balance: ?[P]erhaps a culture that flourishes is a culture that has found a similar balance among its people? (p. 144). Do you think they are talking about the same thing? Does balance always need to rest on power?

**23.** Trace Bankson?s emotional and intellectual development throughout the course of the novel, ending with his visits from his biographer. How do you think his experience with Nell and Fen affected and changed him? Talk about what may have kept him going after Nell?s death. Why did he not revert back to his suicidal path? Consider the quote that holds so much meaning for him from war poet Edward Shillito?s ?Hardness of Heart?: ?Tears are not endless and we have no more.?

**Suggestions for Further Reading:**

HEART OF DARKNESS by Joseph Conrad
ANCESTOR STONES by Aminatta Forna
THE PEOPLE IN THE TREES by Hanya Yanagihara
STATE OF WONDER by Ann Patchett
BEL CANTO by Ann Patchett
OLD FILTH by Jane Gardam
THE POISONWOOD BIBLE by Barbara Kingsolver
THE SIGNATURE OF ALL THINGS by Elisabeth Gilbert
RAIN AND OTHER SOUTH SEA STORIES by W. Somerset Maugham
MATING by Norman Rush
SHIP FEVER by Andrea Barrett

COMING OF AGE IN SAMOA by Margaret Mead
SEX AND TEMPERAMENT by Margaret Mead BLACKBERRY WINTERby Margaret Mead

## Author Bio

Lily King is the *New York Times* bestselling author of six novels, including EUPHORIA, WRITERS & LOVERS and HEART THE LOVER, and the story collection FIVE TUESDAYS IN WINTER. Her work has won numerous prizes and awards, including the Kirkus Prize, the New England Book Award for Fiction, the Maine Book Award for Fiction, and a Whiting Award. She lives in Portland, Maine.

## Critical Praise

?EUPHORIA is a meticulously researched homage to Mead?s restless mind and a considered portrait of Western anthropology in its primitivist heyday. It?s also a taut, witty, fiercely intelligent tale of competing egos and desires in a landscape of exotic menace --- a love triangle in extremis? The steam the book emits is as much intellectual as erotic?and King?s signal achievement may be to have created satisfying drama out of a quest for interpretive insight? King is brilliant on the moral contradictions that propelled anthropological encounters with remote tribes? In King?s exquisite book, desire --- for knowledge, fame, another person --- is only fleetingly rewarded.?

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