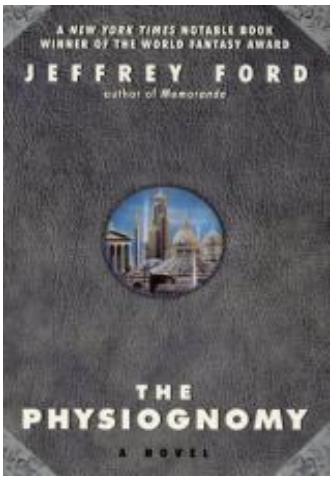
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The Physiognomy

by Jeffrey Ford



About the Book

The nightmare metropolis called the Well-Built City exists because the satanic genius and Master, Drachton Below, wished it so. And few within its confines hold the power of Physiognomist First Class Cley. With scalpels, calipers, and the other instruments of his science, Cley can divine good and evil, determine character and intelligence, uncover dark secrets and foretell a person's destiny, through the careful study of facial and bodily features. But now the Master has ordered the great physiognomist out of the City on a seemingly trivial assignment into the rural hinterlands. but there, removed from Below's omnipresent scrutiny, even the most loyal servant of logic and order can fall prey to seductions of the flesh and spirit. And in this strange and unfamiliar place possessing terrors uniquely its own, there are stark truths awaiting the eminent Cley--and inescapable revelations that could shatter his perceptions of himself, his profession, and his world.

Discussion Guide

1. The idea of physiognomy is that one can read depth from clues found on the surface. In what ways is this practice still in use in today's society?

2. Although the act of judging a book by its cover, so to speak, can lead to problems like stereotyping, when might it be absolutely necessary for one to utilize this technique?

3. When the book begins, who is the figure of greater evil, Cley or Below?

4. Compare the worlds of The Well-Built City and Anamasobia. How are their citizens different? How are they different physically and philosophically?

5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of Cley being able to use "sheer beauty"?

6. How does the concept of Paradise change throughout the book -- in different situations and for the different characters?

7. What does the concept of Paradise bring to mind in relation to our present culture?

8. What is it that makes Cley lose the power of the physiognomy?

9. If you were a subject in the Well-Built City, how would your own physiognomy fare?

10. How important are Cley's friends, the mayor and Calloo, to the success of his goal?

11. What does Cley learn in the mines of Doralice?

12. Is Silencio friend or foe? Why the wide use of monkey imagery through the book?

13. Discuss the major transformations Cley undergoes in the book.

14. At the end of the novel, is the green veil a sign that Arla has forgiven Cley or not? Should she ever forgive him?

15. How does the place that Cley reaches at the end of the novel (Wenau) coincide with his dream of Paradise throughout the work?

Author Bio

Jeffrey Ford is the author of **THE PHYSIOGNOMY** and **THE BEYOND**. He is the protege of the late John Gardner, author of the modern classic **GRENDEL**. Ford is a Professor of Writing and Early American Literature at a college in New Jersey.

Critical Praise

"A modern allegory in the manner of Franz Kafka...."

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