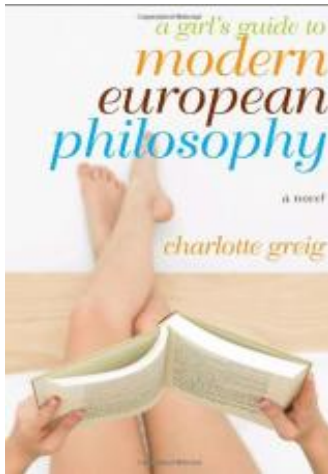

A Girl's Guide to Modern European Philosophy

by Charlotte Greig



About the Book

Susannah's official boyfriend, Jason, is the perfect foil to her student lifestyle. He is ten years older, an antiques dealer, and owns a stylish apartment that prevents her from having to live in the seedy digs on campus. This way, she can take her philosophy major very seriously and dabble in the social and sexual freedom of 1970s university life. But circumstances become more complicated than Susannah would like, when she begins to have an affair with her tutorial partner, Rob. Soon she is dating two men, missing her lectures, exploring independence and feminism with her girlfriends, and finding herself in a particularly impossible dilemma: she becomes pregnant. Forced to look beyond her friends and lovers for support, she finds help and inspiration from the lessons of Kierkegaard and other European philosophers.

A Girl's Guide to Modern European Philosophy is a delightfully insightful, bittersweet coming-of-age romp, in which love is far from platonic and the mind-body predicament a pressing reality. It even succeeds where many introductions to philosophy have failed, by effortlessly bringing to life the central tenets of the most important philosophers of modern times.

Discussion Guide

1. The book begins as Susannah wakes up screaming. At this point, we have no idea why. What do we find out about her inner life as the book progresses?
2. What role do dreams play in the book? Reference the recurring image on pages 64-65 of being "in a white car traveling along a black road."

3. On page 16, Susannah devises a way to walk all the way through a student pub without 'feeling like an idiot.' She seems self-conscious and insecure. Does she become more confident as the story continues? If so, why?
4. How do Jason and Rob fulfill different needs for Susannah?
5. Compare the university environment in which Susannah studies with the company she keeps outside of school. Specifically, compare the party at Rob's house on page 26 with the scene in the London bar on page 47. Does social class play a role? Or is it age? Does Susannah seem comfortable in either setting?
6. On page 42, a tarot card reader on the train deals Susannah an illustrated card of a jester with the words *The Fool* written on the bottom. What does this suggest about Susannah and her peers?
7. Susannah doesn't divulge too much about her family. Discuss what you know about her father, her mother, and her hometown.
8. Do you think the death of Susannah's father subconsciously influences her decisions as regards her love life?
9. How does Susannah view the different settings of her life: the student housing on campus, Jason's flat in London, her mother's home in Swansea?
10. What do you make of Jason's reaction to her pregnancy? Do you think his rejection of her is forgivable? Compare this with Rob's reaction.
11. What roles do Susannah's friends Cassie and Fiona play in the book?
12. 'Susannah turns to the great male philosophers for guidance, in the absence of help from her parents and teachers.' Is this statement true, do you think?
13. The part titles of the book mimic the curriculum for an introductory philosophy course. What do you think of this device?
14. Nietzsche is discussed in the first section, under 'Short Loan,' implying that his philosophy is not very useful; Heidegger under 'Reference' (more useful); and Kierkegaard under 'Long Loan' (very useful). Do you agree?
15. What does Susannah learn from her discussion with Søren Kierkegaard?
16. Do you think Susannah makes the right decision in the end? Is there a right decision?
17. This novel takes place in 1974. Do you think attitudes have changed since this time?
18. The story is set in a seaside town in Britain. Do the characters behave differently than how they would in the U.S.?
19. Is philosophy useful for making life decisions? Would Susannah have done better to visit a student counselor?
20. Did you learn anything about philosophy from reading this novel?

Author Bio

Charlotte Greig worked as a music journalist in print and radio before becoming a folk singer and songwriter. She has recorded five albums and written a book on girl groups, **Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?: Girl Groups from the 50s On**. She is also a playwright, for radio and stage. She lives in Cardiff, Wales, UK, with her family. **A Girl's Guide to Modern European Philosophy** is her first novel.

Critical Praise

"With humor, style, and intelligence, Charlotte Greig transforms modern philosophy into illuminating life lessons --- especially if one aspires to become a skillful artist of love. Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Kierkegaard come down to earth and speak in a language comprehensible to the perplexed and bemused, enchanting us with their direct counsel on the everyday matters of dealing with oneself and with others. Students of philosophy and of life alike are in for an unexpected treat."

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