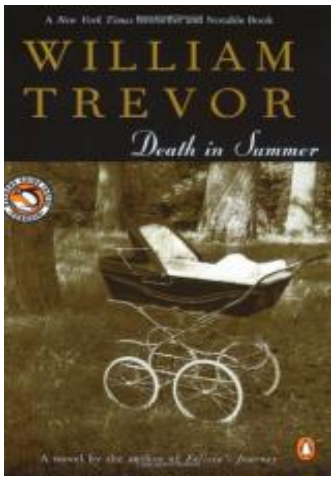
Death in Summer

by William Trevor



About the Book

William Trevor's fiction is inhabited by characters who suffer from an inner longing and desperation that is heartbreaking. In **Death in Summer**, his most emotionally resonant novel, Trevor's keen attention to the smallest detail and his subtle hand reveal the tragedy that comes with the inability to love.

Thaddeus Davenant is the last descendant of a distinguished English family and owner of Quincunx House. He has just lost his wife, Letitia, a person of "almost wayward generosity." Yet, despite her compassion and her "Piero della Francesca face," Thaddeus acknowledges that he was never able to really love Letitia. It is Georgina, their baby daughter, who receives all of Thaddeus's attention. He admits he married Letitia primarily out of financial necessity, his own family fortune long since gone. It is this deception, even more than Letitia's sudden death, which haunts Thaddeus throughout the novel.

When Thaddeus and Mrs. Iveson, his mother-in-law, begin interviewing for nannies to care for his infant daughter, their carefully manicured world is invaded by a series of coarse, unattractive young women. Pettie, the young girl who smells of cigarettes, proves unsuitable for the job, but develops an obsession with Thaddeus that will expose the frailties of both characters. Pettie, the product of the Morning Star, a grim institution for homeless children, latches onto Thaddeus, thinking of him as her salvation. The only affection Pettie has ever known came from her sexually abusive "Sunday Uncles" who visited the Morning Star on weekends.

We learn that Thaddeus was equally unloved as a child, ignored by his parents, and is therefore unable to feel love as an adult. Although their worlds could not be more different, Thaddeus and Pettie are both haunted by the same longing. Ironically, when Pettie's obsession drives her to steal Georgina from Quincunx House, their sole chance at understanding and redemption occurs. Thaddeus must allow himself to feel real emotion for the first time and submit to the incredible love he has for his own daughter; Pettie must return to the Morning Star, the origin of her troubles. It is the death she encounters there that will bring her freedom. And it is Albert, her only friend, a seemingly simple young man of

unrivaled compassion and understanding, who will ultimately show all the characters in **Death in Summer** the most hidden human failings.

Discussion Guide

1. What is your impression of Letitia? What does her kindness toward Mrs. Ferry say about her character? Is she a saintly figure?

2. How does the marriage of Zenobia and Maidment compare with that of Letitia and Thaddeus? Is it a more fully realized relationship?

3. How does Thaddeus relate to women? Is his interest in them simply self-serving? Does he seem to have affection for either Mrs. Ferry or Letitia?

4. What is Mrs. Iveson's opinion of her daughter's compassion? What does she mean when she says, "Letitia's innocence seems just a little remarkable now, and I wonder if the good are always innocent"? Is she being disdainful toward her daughter's memory?

5. What is Pettie's attitude toward other women? We learn that she has been sexually abused by older men as a child. Why do you think she gravitates toward them?

6. How does Trevor use lush, natural imagery to contrast the sparse existence of the characters that inhabit Quincunx House?

7. What is your impression of Albert? What qualities does he share with Letitia? Why is his profession significant?

8. After Georgina is taken, Thaddeus says that "A miracle it has seemed. . . Loving Georgina." What miracles have Georgina's birth and subsequent kidnapping brought about?

9. How are Pettie and Thaddeus similar characters?

10. Is Pettie's tragic death somehow redemptive? Could she have been saved?

Author Bio

William Trevor was born in Mitchelstown, County Cork, in 1928, and spent his childhood in provincial Ireland. Among his books are **Two Lives**, **My House in Umbria**, **The Collected Stories**, **Felicia's Journey**, **After Rain**,**Death in Summer**, and **The Hill Bachelors**. He is a member of the Irish Academy of Letters and lives in Devon, England.

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