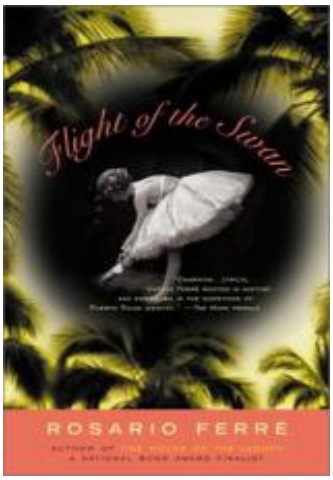
ReadingGroupGuides
The online community for reading groups

Flight of the Swan

by Rosario Ferré



About the Book

Flight of the Swan is the captivating tale of Madame, a world-famous Russian ballerina. In 1917, her dance troupe embarks on a South American tour while Russia is entrenched in World War I. Just as the tour begins, the Bolshevik Revolution takes place in Russia, stranding the dance troupe, without passports, for three months. During this time, Madame meets Diamantino, a local revolutionary in support of Puerto Rico's independence. Despite the mandate that all of her dancers remain chaste and avoid attachments, Madame falls desperately in love with the much younger man. Her connection to him heightens her sympathies for the populist movement and threatens the stability of intimate corps de ballet.

Narrated by Madame's devotee, Masha, the emotional affects of Madame's abandonment are evident. Distressed by her mentor's rash behavior, Masha attempts to warn her, but discovers rational explanations cannot counter true passion.

Grounded in Puerto Rico's rich history and culture, **Flight of the Swan** examines the complexities of love and betrayal, of civil duty and personal sacrifice. At its core, the book explores the power of art, the depth of Madame's commitment to dance, and her willingness to forsake everything for it.

Discussion Guide

1. Madame sustains the corps de ballet with her reputation as the czar's ballerina. What kind of responsibility does Madame have for her dancers? What have they forsaken in order to be a member of her company? How do they react to the news of her affair?

2. Masha's devotion to Madame is unwavering. Why is she so loyal? Is the dance world the rose-petaled realm she had anticipated when she first beseeched Madame to adopt her as a pupil?

3. Compare Madame's arrangement with Dandre to her affair with Diamantino. How do both of these relationships illustrate the sacrifices one must make for art? Would Madame have given up everything for Diamantino, including her dance? Was she justified in having her marriage license destroyed?

4. As the dance troupe arrives in Arecibo, they witness the recruitment of Puerto Ricans for the United States war effort. How does the crowd react to this and other demands made of the Puerto Rican people?

5. Diamantino and Bienvenido are both godsons of Don Pedro, but their backgrounds are worlds apart. Discuss the two individuals and their positions in the social hierarchy of the sugar plantation. How did each develop his political stance, and to what extent would each go in order to help the *Independista* effort succeed?

6. Throughout the novel, Madame maintains her belief that art is an essential form of expression for those involved in individual and collective struggles. Is this true? Does her kidnapping by Los Tiznados change her convictions?

7. As the daughter of a peasant, Masha considers herself the only true Bolshevik among the book's characters. How does this influence her character?

8. After being released by Los Tiznados, Madame falls back into the cadence of her everyday routine. To what extent were her revolutionary sympathies fueled by her passion for Diamantino? Is she ultimately a relic of the czar's regime?

Author Bio

Rosario Ferré is Puerto Rico's leading woman of letters, with several books of poetry, short fiction, biography, and feminist criticism to her credit. A 1995 National Book Award Finalist, for **The House on the Lagoon**, she has published five other works in English: **Eccentric Neighborhoods**, **Flight of the Swan**, **The Battle of the Virgins**, and **The Youngest Doll**. She is a frequent lecturer in the United States and lives in Puerto Rico.

Critical Praise

"The magic in Ferré's fiction arises from the intertwined experiences of human beings, carrying the story of twentieth century Puerto Rico in the arc of their lives."

Flight of the Swan
by Rosario Ferré

Publication Date: July 30, 2002
Paperback: 272 pages
Publisher: Plume
ISBN-10: 0452283310
ISBN-13: 9780452283312