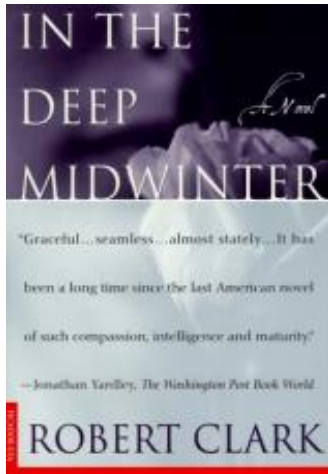


# In the Deep Midwinter

by Robert Clark

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## About the Book

November 1949: In the aftermath of his brother James's death, Richard MacEwan's life suddenly is rocked by secrets involving his wife Sarah and daughter Anna. Among his bachelor brother's papers, Richard discovers a letter from Sarah, hinting at an infidelity. Then Anna becomes involved with a married man, Charles Norden—an affair that will threaten her life and change it forever. Richard, Sarah, Anna, and Charles—along with the troubling legacy of James—drive the plot of this novel: a story of faith and doubt, profound moral and spiritual conflict, and the intricate bonds that hold families together.

## Discussion Guide

1. Robert Clark has said that he "wanted to write about how men and women see themselves as men and women." **IN THE DEEP MIDWINTER** is set during a time in America when gender roles were more clearly defined than they are today. How do society's expectations of men and women in the 50's affect and shape the relationships between Charles and Anna and Richard and Sarah? How do those expectations color the ways in which the characters perceive themselves? Do those perceptions change as the novel progresses?
2. The novel is peppered with references to the battles of World Wars I and II, the Cold War that hangs in America's near future, and the literal and figurative injuries that individuals sustain in battles. What kinds of wounds do Anna and Richard bear in the book? What do those wounds teach them? How do they go about healing their injuries and forgiving the loved ones who inflicted them?
3. Sarah and Anna both have secrets about men, but they handle them quite differently. How do their involvements with James and Charles, respectively, broaden our understanding of their characters?
4. When he wrote this novel, the author wanted to write about abortion "not as a political 'issue' but as something that

arises out of the experience of community, family, even love." Discuss the role that Anna's abortion plays in the novel.

5. If the characters in the novel suddenly found themselves in modern America, they might be shocked at how readily Americans divulge the private details of their lives to one another. How do the characters communicate with one another in the book? How does silence impact Sarah and Richard's marriage? The relationship Anna has with her parents?

6. The novel contains a great deal of religious imagery. What is the significance of religion to the story? How does Richard's crisis of faith in God relate to the trouble he experiences in his marriage?

7. The wintry Minnesota landscape is an important aspect of the novel. How does the physical world reflect the interior lives of the central characters? The mood in America during the time in which the novel is set? Does the emotional atmosphere in the book change as spring draws nearer?

8. Although James never physically appears in the novel, he is nonetheless an important character. What kind of man is he? What do James's family members and we as readers learn from him? What effect does his absence have on the story?

9. After her abortion, Anna believes that she died and was reborn. In what ways does Anna go through a rebirth? How does she change as a result of her experience? Are there other characters who are reborn? How?

10. In her review of the novel, Kate Tuttle of the Boston Book Review wrote, "**IN THE DEEP MIDWINTER** comes along at a time when people have stopped talking about The Great American Novel. That's too bad, because this just might be it." In what ways does Clark's book exemplify the traditional American novel? How does his novel differ from "modern" American literature?

## Author Bio

St. Paul, Minnesota, 1939. The body of a beautiful dime-a-dance girl is found on a hillside, and Police Lieutenant Wesley Horner, struggling and alone after his wife's recent death, heads the investigation into her murder. His chief suspect is Herbert White, an eccentric recluse and hobby photographer who spends his days recording his life in detailed journal entries and scrapbooks. In **Mr. White's Confession**, Robert Clark illuminates the complex relationships between truth and fiction, past and present, faith and memory.

## Critical Praise

"It has been a long time since the last American novel of such compassion, intelligence, and maturity. "

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