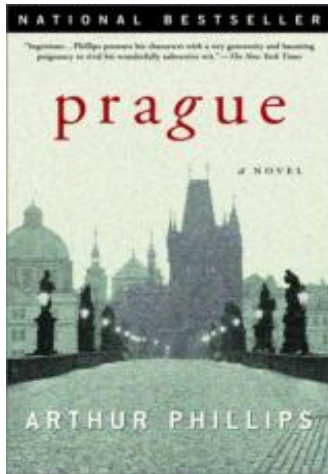


Prague: A Novel

by Arthur Phillips



About the Book

A novel of startling scope and ambition, **Prague** depicts an intentionally lost Lost Generation as it follows five American expats who come to Budapest in the early 1990s to seek their fortune. They harbor the vague suspicion that their counterparts in Prague have it better, but still they hope to find adventure, inspiration, a gold rush, or history in the making.

Discussion Guide

1. Amusingly, critics have cited both Phillips's "compassion" for his characters and his "lack of compassion" for his characters. Which, if either, of these assessments seems accurate to you? Does an author's compassion for his or her characters matter to your experience of reading a story? Should an author implicitly or explicitly pass judgment or reserve judgment on the characters? Should he or she make clear to the reader which characters are admirable and which are not?
2. How do you feel Part II (The Horváth Kiadó), the subplot detailing the history of a Hungarian publishing house, fits into the structure of Prague? What function does it serve the novel as a whole? What is gained or lost by its placement immediately after the stories introduced in Part I (First Impressions)?
3. At the end of the novel, journalist John Price, arguably the central character of the novel, is en route to the city of Prague. What do you think becomes of him there and afterward?
4. The title of the book is a subject of much discussion. While John is the only main character who aspires to the literal Prague, how do other characters reveal their longing for other places, times, and lives, for a metaphorical "Prague"? Which, if any, of the characters seem to be most at peace in their real circumstances?

5. Did Charles Gábor, the American who invests in the Horváth Press, behave badly? How? If so, what should he have done instead? If he behaved badly, did he know it? What do you think the Horváth Press represents? Is its absorption by Multinational Median a loss?

6. What does history mean to the novel's characters? How does it shape their personalities and actions? Do you believe in a "national character"? How much of an individual's personality do you think is dictated by it? How does the impact of characters' family history compare to the impact of their national history?

7. Charles Gábor says intentionally offensive things to other characters, both in rounds of the game Sincerity and in general conversation. John Price's columns often say the opposite of what he feels. Nádja's stories are often loosely inspired by the lives of her listeners. How else does the concept of irony operate in this novel? In what ways can irony be harmful? Why do certain characters use it, and how? Who is the best liar in the novel?

8. Phillips lived in Budapest from 1990 to 1992. Do you think, therefore, that his novel can be taken as an accurate portrait of that time and place? Can it be taken as reliable history or sociology? Can any novel? Do you believe Phillips when he states that his main characters are "entirely fictional"? How do you think truth is transformed into fiction?

9. Can "expatriate novels" be considered a genre? If so, what do they have in common? Does Prague add anything new to this category?

10. The six expats and Mária are in their twenties. Imre Horváth was in his twenties during the World War II episodes of Part II. Nádja was in her twenties in some of her stories. Does something happen to most people's personalities or attitudes in this period of their lives? How do people view an experience or an age differently as time separates them from it?

Author Bio

Arthur Phillips was born in Minneapolis and educated at Harvard. He has been a child actor, a jazz musician, a speechwriter, a dismally failed entrepreneur, and a five-time Jeopardy! champion. He lived in Budapest from 1990 to 1992 and now lives in Paris with his wife and son.

Critical Praise

"Really an old-fashioned novel of ideas...very funny...likely to leave you aching, too."

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