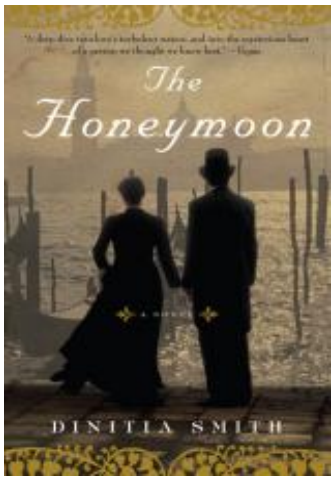
The Honeymoon

by Dinitia Smith



About the Book

Dinitia Smith?s spellbinding novel recounts George Eliot?s honeymoon in Venice in June 1880 following her marriage to a handsome young man 20 years her junior. When she agreed to marry John Walter Cross, Eliot was recovering from the death of George Henry Lewes, her beloved companion of 26 years. Eliot was bereft: left at the age of 60 to contemplate profound questions about her physical decline, her fading appeal and the prospect of loneliness.

In her youth, Mary Ann Evans --- who would later be known as George Eliot --- was a country girl, considered too plain to marry, so she educated herself in order to secure a livelihood. In an era when female novelists were objects of wonder, she became the most famous writer of her day --- with a male nom de plume. THE HONEYMOON explores different kinds of love, and of the possibilities of redemption and happiness even in an imperfect union. Smith integrates historical truth with her own rich rendition of Eliot?s inner voice, crafting a page-turner that is as intelligent as it is gripping.

If you and your book group would like to talk to Dinitia Smith about THE HONEYMOON, please fill out the form on this page to schedule a chat.

Discussion Guide

1. When Marian and Johnnie arrive in Venice for their honeymoon, Marian finds that she is ?unable to give herself over to the surge of excitement she?d experienced sixteen years earlier? (p. 5) when she?d visited Venice with George Lewes. How does her romance with George compare to what she has with Johnnie? Do you think it overshadows her marriage to Johnnie?

2. Describe Marian?s relationship with her brother, Isaac. What causes the rift between them, and how does this rift affect Marian?s life and writing?

3. Describe Marian?s relationship with the men of her time. Is there a sense of friction between her physical appearance and her intelligence?

4. Marian is incredibly aware of how others perceive her. On page 12 she is conscious that others may be ?twittering over their morning coffee about the besotted old woman marrying the handsome man young enough to be her son.? How does Marian perceive herself? How do the people closest to her perceive her?

5. On page 367 Willie describes Johnnie as being ?ashamed? of his illness. What is Marian ashamed of? How does Marian handle her shame?

6. What do you make of Marian?s reaction to Johnnie?s ?illness? (p. 363) considering she herself had faced the prospect of suicide?

7. Describe Marian?s relationship to other women. What do you make of her estimation of ?frivolous women? (p. 221) and her belief that women should take ?care of children and their families? (p. 147)? What does she mean when she realizes that in marrying Johnnie she will finally be ?like other women? (p. 329)?

8. Why do you think Marian marries Johnnie, even though she is still very much in love with George? How would you describe her relationship with Johnnie? How do you think Marian herself would describe her relationship with Johnnie?

9. Marian had ?always wanted to write about a honeymoon? (p. 344), and she calls her time spent with George in Dover their ?honeymoon? (p. 340). What are the differences between the two honeymoons in Marian?s life?

10. Have you read any of George Eliot?s work? How has THE HONEYMOON changed your knowledge or understanding of the famous author and her work?

Author Bio

Dinitia Smith is the author of four novels, including THE ILLUSIONIST, which was a *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year. Her stories have appeared in numerous publications, and she has won a number of awards for her writing, including fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Ingram Merrill Foundation. Until recently, Smith was a cultural correspondent for the *New York Times* specializing in literature and the arts. She has taught at Columbia University, New York University, the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, and elsewhere. She lives in New York.

Critical Praise

"Smith?s vivid exploration of the mind of author George Eliot, given name Marian Evans, and her late-in-life marriage to John Walter Cross raises the bar for historical fiction?. Eliot fans will certainly inhale every page, but any historical-fiction readers will thoroughly relish Smith?s tale of a remarkable woman and an unlikely Victorian love."

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