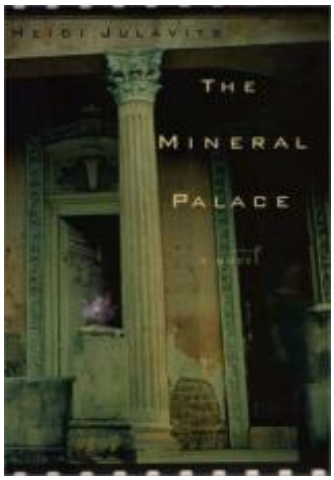
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The Mineral Palace

by Heidi Julavits



About the Book

In her debut novel, The Mineral Palace, Heidi Julavits creates a world of dust, decay, and decadence; a world in which all creatures struggle to survive. The story begins in the drought-ridden spring of 1934, and Bena Jonssen, her husband Ted, and their newborn baby relocate from their home in Minnesota to Pueblo, a Western plains town plagued by suffocating dust storms and equally suffocating social structures. Little can thrive in this bleak environment, including Bena and Ted's marriage, and the baby. To distract herself, Bena accepts a part-time position at the daily newspaper, reporting on the town's plans to restore the town's crumbling monument to the mining industry, The Mineral Palace, to its former grandeur. As Bena is drawn to The Mineral Palace and to more of the seamy side of Pueblo - the lurid hallways of a brothel, where she encounters a prostitute, Maude, and Red, a brooding cowboy, she begins to uncover the sordid secrets of the town, and the ravaging truths about her marriage and her child.

Discussion Guide

1. Things aren't always as they seem in **The Mineral Palace**. How does Heidi Julavits use lies and secrets to tell the story?

2. Inclement weather occurs throughout **The Mineral Palace**. How does the weather mirror actual events in the novel?

3. How do superstition and coincidence impact Bena's decisions throughout the story?

4. Bena's role as a mother is a recurring theme in **The Mineral Palace**. How does the conclusion affect this role? Do Bena's actions break down what might otherwise be a positive construction of motherhood?

5. How would the story change if it took place in a different setting - if, for example, Bena and her husband had originally moved to a more fertile part of the country?

6. How are Maude and Bena alike? How are they different?

7. What characteristics does Julavits give Maude to set her apart from a stereotypical prostitute?

8. Why do you think Julavits chose **The Mineral Palace** as her title? In what way is the Palace at the structural and thematic center of the novel?

Author Bio

Heidi Julavits is the author of four critically acclaimed novels (THE VANISHERS, THE USES OF ENCHANTMENT, THE EFFECT OF LIVING BACKWARDS and THE MINERAL PALACE) and a memoir (DIRECTIONS TO MYSELF). She's also the co-editor, with Sheila Heti and Leanne Shapton, of the *New York Times* bestseller WOMEN IN CLOTHES. Her fiction has appeared in *Harper?s Magazine*, *McSweeney?s* and *The Best American Short Stories*, among other places. She?s a founding editor of *The Believer* magazine and the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship. She lives in Manhattan, where she teaches at Columbia University. She was born and raised in Portland, Maine.

Critical Praise

"Heidi Julavits is a remarkable writer. The Mineral Palace is a mesmerizing first novel and a spectacular display of her talents, her sensibilities on love and danger, and her utterly fascinating and singular voice. "

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