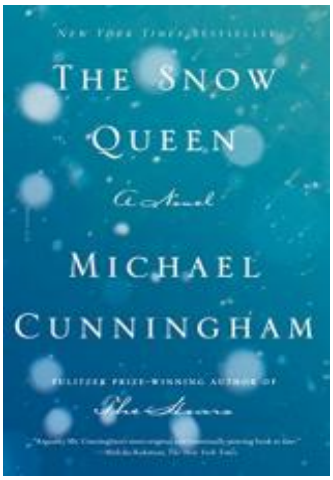
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The Snow Queen

by Michael Cunningham



About the Book

Walking through Central Park on a winter?s night, Barrett Meeks sees a pale, translucent light in the sky. He?s recently been dumped via text message, and a series of financial fizzles has led him to move in with his older brother, Tyler. Transfixed by the light, which catches him at a moment when he is weary of the world, Barrett can?t help but feel that something godlike has cast its eye upon him.

Months go by and, back in their not-yet-gentrified Brooklyn neighborhood, Tyler and Barrett confront a series of profound crossroads. A musician, Tyler struggles to write a wedding song for his beloved Beth, who is seriously ill. Barrett watches Liz, his 50-something boss at a vintage shop, savor a relationship with a seductive man in his 20s. Turning to a variety of comforts, from the spiritual to the pharmaceutical, the characters follow dynamic and divergent paths in their search for transcendence.

Discussion Guide

1. Discuss the novel?s title. Did your understanding of it shift throughout the book? How do the characters experience the Snow Queen?s ?Mirror of Reason,? described in the epigraph by Hans Christian Andersen?

2. When we first meet Barrett, what are his impressions of his destiny? What shapes his understanding of fate and love as the novel unfolds?

3. What are your interpretations of THE SNOW QUEEN?s celestial lights? What is Barrett seeking while he watches the priest and parishioners in the Armenian church? What does he find?

4. How does Beth?s illness inspire those around her? What is her role within her circle of loved ones?

5. How were Tyler and Barrett affected by their mother?s sudden death and their father?s decision to remarry soon after? As brothers, how do they protect and provoke each other? What are the similarities and differences in their approaches to life?

6. What does the novel reveal about the many facets of addiction? How does Tyler respond to the various ways people react to his drug habit (including those who want to exploit it to support their own addiction)?

7. Which aspects of the story resonated with your own experience of love in all its forms, including kinship and the bonds of longtime friends?

8. Throughout her life, from defending her fragile sister to becoming an entrepreneur, Liz has put herself in positions of power. What accounts for her strength?

9. How were you affected by the scene aboard the Staten Island ferry? What transitions occur in the characters? lives after that journey?

10. How has Barrett?s sense of self evolved by the time he meets Sam? Does Tyler experience a similar change in the way he approaches desire and fulfillment?

11. Discuss Andrew and Stella?s final scene. Are they capable survivors, or are they deeply vulnerable?

12. What makes the political climate of 2004?2008 an appropriate backdrop for the fears and longings of the characters? How does it echo the transformations of New York City, particularly Brooklyn, that emerged a decade ago?

13. How does THE SNOW QUEEN enhance the humanity explored in Michael Cunningham?s previous novels?

Author Bio

Michael Cunningham is a novelist, screenwriter and educator. His novel THE HOURS received the PEN/Faulkner Award and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1999. He has taught at Columbia University and Brooklyn College. He is currently a professor in the practice at Yale University.

Critical Praise

?Tender, funny, and sorrowful, Cunningham?s beautiful novel is?radiant and shimmering?gently illuminating the gossamer web of memories, feelings, and hopes that mysteriously connect us to each other.?

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