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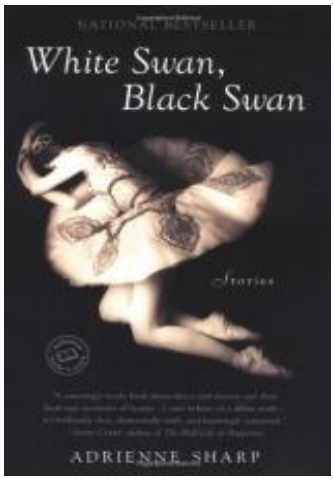
White Swan, Black Swan

by Adrienne Sharp



About the Book

The world's most famous choreographer becomes infatuated with a talented young dancer who proves both siren and muse . . . A rising star plunges into an affair with a principal but finds that the ecstasy on the stage cannot be matched in the bedroom . . . A dying legend reflects on the fading beauty of a life in motion, lost to everything but memory. In this beguiling collection, Adrienne Sharp captures the essence and passion of ballet and its fleeting world and translates them into unforgettable stories. **White Swan, Black Swan** heralds the arrival of a unerringly graceful new voice in American fiction.

Discussion Guide

1. The stories explore many different stages of a dancer's life-- the ballet student in "The Brahmins," the fledgling corps de ballet dancer in "Wili," the ballet stars in "Bugaku" and "The Immortals," the aging choreographers in "Don Quixote" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream." How do the characters at each stage feel about their endeavors?

2. Many of the titles of the stories refer to characters in a ballet or to the titles of a ballet--*Giselle, Swan Lake, Bugaku, Sleeping Beauty, La Bayadere, A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In what ways do the characters and stories of these ballets reflect the action and characters of the book?

3. White Swan, Black Swan mixes together real life ballet figures, such as Alexander Godunov, Margot Fonteyn, and George Balanchine, with entirely fictional creations. In what way is the book enriched by this juxtaposition?

4. American Ballet Theater ballet mistress Elena Tchernichova observed that many dancers come from unhappy homes. In the stories "In the Wake" and "In the Kingdom of the Shades," both young dancer protagonists have problems with their parents. In "Prince of Desire" and "White Swan, Black Swan," the main characters struggle with disintegrating marriages. In what ways do these personal problems affect them professionally?

5. Many of the dancers in the book must deal with the gap between the perfection they seek and their frustration with the level of accomplishment they are actually able to achieve. How do these dancers come to terms with their despair?

6. Many of the stories are interrelated, in that we see a character first in one story and then in another. How has Adam grown and changed from "Departure" to "Ax"? In what way has Joanna's obsession with ballet in "Bugaku" both frightened and inspired her brother in "Prince of Desire"? Why does Kate quit ballet in "Wili" only to return to it at the end of "The Brahmins"? What has Robbie Perez destroyed in the women he loves in "White Swan, Black Swan" and "In the Kingdom of the Shades"?

7. The book opens with the story "Bugaku" and closes with the reminiscences of Frederick Ashton in "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Why does "Bugaku" open the collection and why does "A Midsummer Night's Dream" close it?

8. The title of the book, **White Swan, Black Swan**, refers to both the beauty and the difficulty of a dancer's life. What beauty do you see throughout the book? What darkness?

Author Bio

Adrienne Sharp is the critically acclaimed author of the story collection WHITE SWAN, BLACK SWAN, a Barnes & Noble Discover Book and a national bestseller; and the novels THE SLEEPING BEAUTY, named one of Booklist?s 10 best first novels of 2005; and THE TRUE MEMOIRS OF LITTLE K, which was a finalist for the California Book Award and a Historical Novel Review Editors? Choice, and was translated into six languages.

Critical Praise

"In this breathtaking suite of short stories, Sharp, herself a dancer and ardent observer of the ballet world, adroitly captures the elegance, magic, sexuality, obsession, ambition, sacrifice, vulnerability, and pain that define dancers' lives . . . . Most ballets are about thwarted longing and love, and so are Sharp's masterfully choreographed dramas."

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