

READING GROUP GUIDE

The Master Bedroom A Novel

by Tessa Hadley

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Master Bedroom* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Master Bedroom*.

About the Book

After more than twenty years in London, Kate Flynn has abandoned her career as an academic, rented her apartment in the city, and moved back to live with her mother in the grand old house beside a lake where she grew up. Bored and lonely, Kate meets a childhood friend, David Roberts, at the opera. David is married, but Kate finds herself falling for him against her better judgment.

At the same time, David's seventeen-year-old son is visiting Kate's house in secret, attracted by her eccentricity, her wit, and her shelves full of old books and music. Though she knows the risks, Kate cannot quite resist either man. As both father and son set about their parallel

courtships, Tessa Hadley's intricate, graceful novel discovers the anxieties of adulthood, and the hazards of refusing to grow up.

Praise for *The Master Bedroom*

“A chess game of slow-burn erotic maneuvers...Hadley is a lovely, subtly teasing writer.”— *The New York Times Book Review*

“Truly beautiful prose. Hadley’s writing is outright gorgeous, without a misstep or false note...Both artful and realistic and most of all enjoyable”—*Newsday*

“Elegantly observed...Hadley’s smart, often prickly characters remind us that love is never simple and happiness rarely wins without sorrow”—*People* (four stars)

About the Author

Tessa Hadley teaches literature and creative writing at the Bath Spa University. She is the author of *Sunstroke and Other Stories*, *Everything Will Be Alright*, and *Accidents in the Home*. She lives in Cardiff, Wales.

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think happens in Suzie’s mind when the swan falls on her car? How does that event lead into all the changes in her behavior over the course of the novel—her interest in mysticism, her break with David?
2. “Even when [Kate] was a teenager, she’d always known that this thing, this falling into a new obsession, was something you did to yourself.” (pg. 79.) Do you think this is true of Kate? Is it true generally? Can we protect ourselves from these kind of feelings? Do they ever take hold without some willingness on our part?
3. How do the various characters rely on art, music and literature in their lives? How does the author use their tastes in art (or lack of them) to express other aspects of their personalities?
4. Why does the author include the short scene of David and Suzie’s first meeting (pp. 21-22)? Is there an understanding there, or a misunderstanding, that determines the course of their relationship?
5. What about David makes him attractive to Kate? What draws them together? Is it a genuine connection, or are they both seeking to escape their lives?
6. Is Kate’s cleverness a defense mechanism? Is it genuine?

7. What role does the house, Firenze, play in the novel? How do its history and its contents affect the characters' interactions, and particularly Kate's state of mind?
8. Were you surprised by Kate's ideas about politics (pp 222-224)? Do you think there is any validity to what she's saying here, or is she purely aiming to shock the other guests?
9. Late in the novel, David has a dream that leads directly to his realization that he wants to be with Kate (pp. 276-277). How does this happen? What does he see in the dream that alters his thinking? How do you interpret the dream?
10. What do you think David sees in traffic at the end of the novel (pg. 309)? Is it entirely a figment of his imagination? Is some supernatural force at work? What is the connection between this instance and the opening scene, in which the swan falls onto Suzie's car?
11. Do you think Menna, the fortune teller, is a fraud, capitalizing on Suzie's desire to believe, or does she truly have access to some special knowledge? Do you think that some people truly do possess those abilities?
12. Is Kate unfair to Jamie? Does she take advantage of him?

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