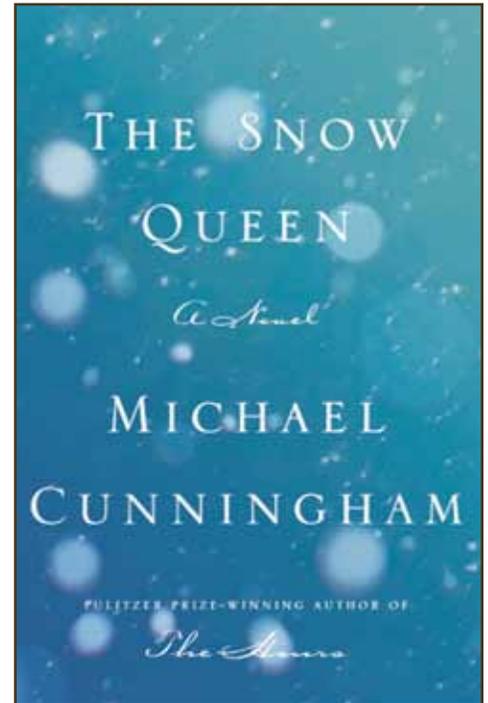


Reading Group Gold

The Snow Queen *A Novel* by Michael Cunningham



ISBN: 978-0-374-26632-5 / 272 pages

By turns heartwarming and heartrending, Michael Cunningham's *The Snow Queen* is a haunting exploration of the longings that seem to define us and the love that sustains us.

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 fifty-something boss at a vintage shop, savor a relationship with a seductive man in his twenties. Turning to a variety of comforts, from the spiritual to the pharmaceutical, the characters follow dynamic and divergent paths in their search for transcendence.

We hope that the following discussion topics will enrich your reading group's experience of this moving masterpiece by one of our greatest novelists.

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QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

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?

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13. How does *The Snow Queen* enhance the humanity explored in Michael Cunningham's previous novels?

PRAISE FOR *THE SNOW QUEEN*

"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." —Donna Seaman, *Booklist* (starred review)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Cunningham is the author of six novels, including *A Home at the End of the World*, *Flesh and Blood*, *The Hours* (winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award and the Pulitzer Prize), *Specimen Days*, and *By Nightfall*, as well as *Land's End: A Walk in Provincetown*. He lives in New York. For more information, visit www.michaelcunninghamwriter.com.

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