



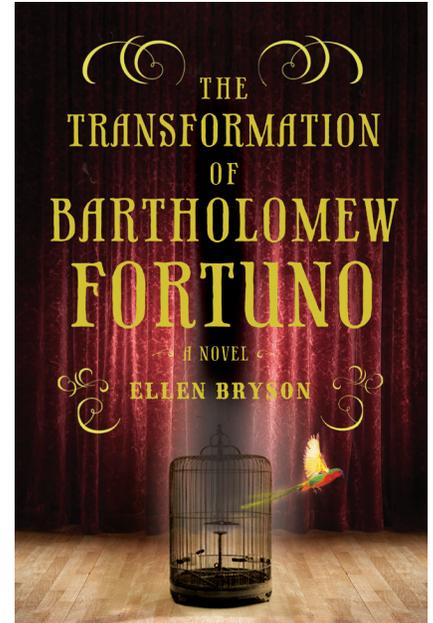
Reading Group Gold

The Transformation Of Bartholomew Fortuno

Ellen Bryson

Questions for Discussion

1. On the very first pages of the novel, Bartholomew notes that the Museum was “irresistible”: “Thousands before him had fallen for the gussied up old place, everyone from the city’s poorest paupers to the families of its Upper Ten – and once even a prince. They, too, had all been enticed by the Museum’s glitter.” What do you think it is that draws people from all walks of life to the museum? What is its allure?
2. Consider the time period of the novel, particularly with regard to Lincoln’s death and the end of the Civil War. How can the country’s transformation during this era be compared to Bartholomew’s own transformation? Do you think the two are juxtaposed intentionally? Why?
3. Bartholomew seems to think that his fellow prodigies’ bodies are in some ways indicative of their personalities – for example, he states “A man built like Alley was destined for violence.” Would you agree with his assessment? Consider Bartholomew’s own “gift.” Does Bartholomew think the same follows for those he considers “true” prodigies, like Iell? What about gaffs?
4. Bartholomew reiterates at several points throughout the novel that he performs in order to educate. What does he think he is teaching his audience? Do you think he really is teaching them anything? Why does it matter to him?
5. Historic New York is very much a part of the novel. What kind of atmosphere do the sights and sounds of the old city create? What role does the setting play in the book?
6. Would you say that Bartholomew is a reliable narrator? Why or why not? What would having an unreliable narrator lend to the story?
7. The question of whether Bartholomew’s unnatural thinness is something he has done to himself or something he cannot escape is a central concern of the novel. Early on,



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he maintains very strongly that he has “never had a choice.” Do you think he genuinely believes that at this point in time? Or do you think that even then he might have had some inclination that his thinness was of his own creation?

8. When Bartholomew is trying to convince Alley to help him get into Iell’s show, Alley says to him: “You know what your problem is, Fortunio? You ain’t learned what’s important yet.” Would you agree with Alley’s assessment? How is this demonstrated throughout the novel?

9. At one point, Bartholomew muses: “Wasn’t it natural, if one had no inherent control, to give in to one’s baser instincts?” What do you think? What do you think the book has to say on this matter?

10. Consider Bartholomew’s precious root. What is its effect on him? Were you surprised to learn that it did not have all of the magical powers Bartholomew ascribed to it? Do you think he would have been able to do all of the things he did if he didn’t believe that the root was what was causing him to act a certain way?

11. Think about the relationship between Bartholomew and Emma Swan. They seem to hate one another, but are they alike in some ways? How so? What do they dislike about one another? Do you think that some of the qualities they disdain in one another are actually things they dislike about themselves?

12. The theme of hunger permeates the novel. Are all of the characters hungry in one way or another? What do you think the novel is trying to say about hunger?

13. Matina is Bartholomew’s closest friend – maybe one of his only friends. Think about their relationship – how do you think Bartholomew really feels about her? Why does he treat her the way he does? Why does he reveal to Alley that they have been “intimate”?

14. What do you think about Iell? Do you find her to be a sympathetic character? Do you see why Bartholomew is drawn to her? What did you make of the novel’s final revelation regarding Iell? Did you suspect it? Were you surprised to discover that Matina thought as much all along? Why did it take Bartholomew so long to realize?

15. Are you hopeful for Bartholomew’s future after the end of the book? What about Matina and Alley? Iell?