



The Headmaster's Wife

Thomas Christopher Greene

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READING GROUP GUIDE

About the book:

An immensely talented writer whose work has been described as “incandescent” (Kirkus) and “poetic” (Booklist), Thomas Christopher Greene pens a haunting and deeply affecting portrait of one couple at their best and worst.

Inspired by a personal loss, Greene explores the way that tragedy and time assail one man’s memories of his life and loves. Like his father before him, Arthur Winthrop is the Headmaster of Vermont’s elite Lancaster School. It is the place he feels has given him his life, but is also the site of his undoing as events spiral out of his control. Found wandering naked in Central Park, he begins to tell his story to the police, but his memories collide into one another, and the true nature of things, a narrative of love, of marriage, of family and of a tragedy Arthur does not know how to address emerges. Luminous and atmospheric, bringing to life the tight-knit enclave of a quintessential New England boarding school, the novel is part mystery, part love story and an exploration of the ties of place and family. Beautifully written and compulsively readable, *The Headmaster’s Wife* stands as a moving elegy to the power of love as an antidote to grief.

Discussion Questions

1. What did you think were the central themes of the book, and how did they resonate with you?
2. The novel explores the taboo subject of a teacher—student affair. What did you think of the author’s handling of this?
3. ‘Maybe, I think, this is what love is.’ There are several varieties of love portrayed in the book: passionate affairs, marriage and parental love. Discuss the depiction of love in all of its forms.



4. The river is described as 'timeless and uncaring'. Explore the symbolic resonance of water in the book and what it means to the characters.
5. How did your opinion of the headmaster and his wife change throughout the course of the novel? Did you understand them more having encountered both points of view?
6. 'Time is malleable. Memory fails. Memory changes.' Discuss the representation of time and memory throughout the pages of the book.
7. What do you think the structure of the novel brought to your reading experience? Did the narrative switch surprise you?
8. Ethan's death has a profound effect upon his parents' lives. Explore the theme of loss and grief in the book.
9. What did you think of the author's representation of the boarding-school culture at Lancaster? Has it altered any of the views you currently hold?
10. Were you satisfied with the ending of the novel? Which character did you sympathize with most, and why?

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