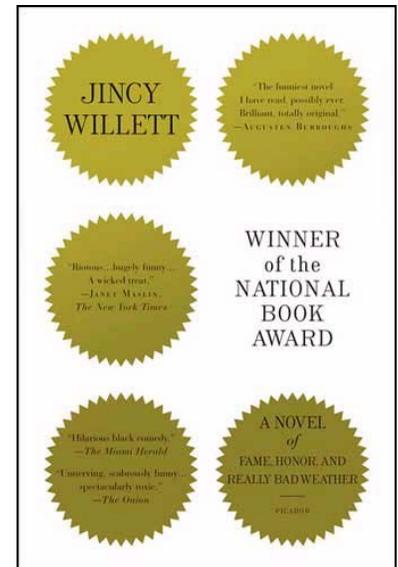


READING GROUP GUIDE

Winner of the National Book Award

by Jincy Willett

ISBN: 0-312-42423-X



About the Book

In Jincy Willett's darkly comic debut novel, *Winner of the National Book Award*, the acclaimed story writer of *Jenny and the Jaws of Life* (which David Sedaris called "the funniest collection of stories I've ever read") now takes us on an unforgettable journey through the conniving literary community of Frome, Rhode Island. We meet librarian Doracs Mather, lover of books and abstainer of sex, and her mail-delivering twin sister Abigail, a woman of insatiable appetites. When schlock novelist Conrad Lowe comes into their life, intent on seduction, the sisters' lives are changed forever. And so begins an utterly original and painfully hilarious tale of hurricanes, hunger and learning when to say *yes* and *no*. The following questions are designed to enhance your reading experience of the novel and enliven group discussion of its many themes.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the role that place plays in the novel. What do you think of Willett's characterizations of Rhode Island and its people? Might her descriptions apply to any other locales? Why? What characteristics of where you live might be ripe for satire?
2. On page 28, Willett writes, "even though every human being has an inalienable right to be judged by his own actions, it does seem to me that every American but the Yankee comes from some still-living subculture which gives him a starting point to do with as he will." Do you agree? Is there anything topical about her depiction of regional and cultural pride? Is she being facetious, serious or both? Explain.

3. In what ways are Dorcas and Abigail both complementary and opposites? Why do you think Willett makes them twins? If you have a twin or sibling, did you identify with their relationship? Why?
4. What aspects of the literary community and publishing business is Willett satirizing through the characters of Guy DeVilbliss and Conrad Lowe? Similarly, on pages 12 and 13, Willett pokes fun at book jacket blurbs. What makes these quotes funny? Have you ever bought a book based on such blurbs? Why?
5. What did you find amusing about the world that Willett constructs? Are there any scenes that particularly made you laugh? Why? How would you describe Willett's humor and style? Does her style suggest any other writers you've read? Explain.
6. On page 53, Dorcas says that for her mother, an avid reader like herself, "the fictional world was an extension of the real, and in no way a substitute from it, or refuge from it." Do you agree? Can you relate to Dorcas' obsession with reading? Discuss why you read.
7. Why do you think Dorcas and Abigail are attracted to Conrad Lowe? What makes their attraction funny? What makes it tragic? Have you or anyone you've known ever been blind to another's flaws because of love or lust? Explain.
8. Discuss Willett's depiction of the female body in the book. What connection does she seem to be making between female eating disorders and misogyny?
9. Discuss the structure of the novel. What literary devices does Willett employ to move the story forward? What is both original and traditional about her storytelling techniques?
10. On page 255, Dorcas decries postmodernist's disdain for character, "carrying on as if the human personality were some trivial thing, but it's *not*, it's everything." What do you think she means by this? Do you think Willett agrees? Why?
11. What do you think Dorcas means when she says that "panic frees us, to look about more openly at one another" (p. 6)? How does this observation apply specifically to the story and its ending? Might it also apply to life in general?
12. By the novel's conclusion, Dorcas realizes that you need both "yes" and "no." Discuss what you think she means and how this realization pertains to both her and Abigail.

About the Author

Jincy Willett is a Rhode Island writer living in San Diego, California, and the author of the collection *Jenny and the Jaws of Life*, a St. Martin's Griffin paperback.

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