

READING GROUP GUIDE

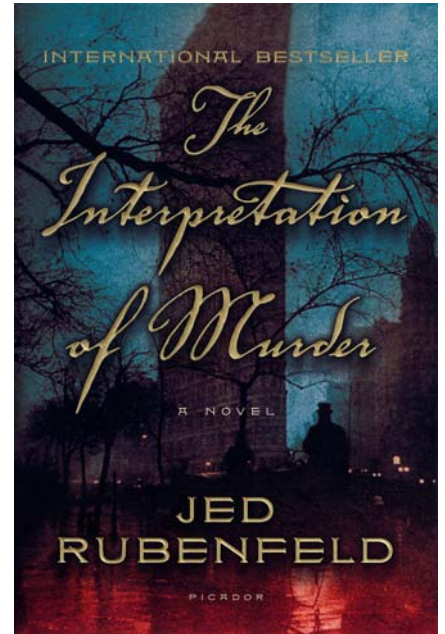
The Interpretation of Murder

A Novel

by Jed Rubenfeld

ISBN-10: 0-312-42705-0

ISBN-13: 978-0-312-42705-4



About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Interpretation of Murder* 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 Interpretation of Murder*.

About the Book

The Interpretation of Murder opens on a hot summer night in 1909 as Sigmund Freud disembarks in New York from a steamship. With Freud is his rival Carl Jung; waiting for him on the docks is a young physician named Stratham Younger, one of Freud's most devoted American supporters. So begins this story of what will be the great genius's first--and last--journey to America.

The morning after his arrival, a beautiful young woman is found dead in an apartment in one of the city's grand new skyscrapers, The Balmoral. The next day brings a similar crime in a townhouse on Gramercy Park. Only this time the young heiress, Nora Acton, escapes with her life--but with no memory of the attack. Asked to consult on the case, Dr. Younger calls on Freud to guide him through the girl's analysis. Their investigation, and the pursuit of the culprit, lead

throughout New York, from the luxurious ballrooms of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, to the skyscrapers rising on seemingly ever street corner, to the bottom of the East River, where laborers digging through the silt to build the foundation of the Manhattan Bridge.

Drawing on Freud's case histories, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and the historical details of a city on the brink of modernity, *The Interpretation of Murder* introduces a brilliant new storyteller who, in the words of *The New York Times*, "will be no ordinary pop cultural sensation."

"This baroque tale of egos and ids run rampant will be a welcome treat to fans of Caleb Carr's *The Alienist* ... Find a couch and prepare for a page-turning session."

—*Daily News*

"Fun and fantastic. You can look for the deeper meaning in Freud and Jung's lovers' quarrel, or you can just skip to the dirty parts."

—*GQ*

"Using a dizzying number of points of view and keeping the action taut, Rubenfeld leavens the intellectual heft with sly wit."

—*People*

"Readers who give this cerebral concoction even the slightest chance will be captivated by its myriad intrigues, its dubious cast of heroes and villains, and its palpable tension. . . . Proves once again that crime and literature need not be separate beasts."

—*Rocky Mountain News* (grade: A)

About the Author

Currently a professor of law at Yale University, **Jed Rubenfeld** is one of this country's foremost experts on constitutional law. He wrote his Princeton undergraduate thesis on Sigmund Freud and studied Shakespeare at Julliard. He lives in Connecticut.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the use of the title, *The Interpretation of Murder*.
2. The author's portrayal of women is noteworthy: Is Nora still a victim when she is empowered by a sympathetic listener? What are Clara's motives for the events in the novel? How is Betty the maid, Susie Merrill, and Greta depicted? Do these characters reflect the turn-of-the-century society, or do they represent a more timeless portrayal of women?
3. Dr. Stratham Younger, a thirty-three-year-old Harvard graduate who teaches at Clark University and who is the narrator of the book, insisted at age seventeen that all great art and scientific discoveries were made at or near the turn of a century (Michelangelo's *David*-1501; Cervantes's *Don Quixote*-1604; Beethoven's symphonies-1800; Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*-1900, etc.) Discuss this phenomenon.

4. Is Younger the right man for the job of trying to unravel the attempted murder of Nora? Discuss psychoanalysis versus interrogation.
5. Consider the role of class conflict in the book: Jung's feelings of shame over his obvious wealth; Jung versus Freud; Acton versus Banwell; Chong versus Leon; Malley and Betty, etc.
6. What role does psychological transference and sexual attraction play in the book?
7. Younger asks, "How can human beings be loved if we carry within such repugnant desires?" Freud thinks that Nora wants to sodomize her father. Is this ultimately true?
8. Discuss the author's mix of fact and fiction. How has this device been used in previous New York novels, such as *The Alienist*, *Ragtime*, *Dreamland: A Novel*, *Paradise Alley*, etc.
9. Younger is obsessed with solving the riddle of *Hamlet* in the book. Discuss his analysis of "to be or not to be" in terms of Freudian/Oedipal theories. What does Younger finally decide is the correct interpretation?
10. Younger says, "Some people feel a need to bring about the very thing that will most torment them." How does this describe the characters in the book?
11. When he boards the ship back to Europe, Freud says that "America is a mistake . . . A gigantic mistake." What does he mean?

For more information on Picador Reading Group Guides:

Call: 646-307-5629

Fax: 212-253-9627

E-mail: readinggroupguides@picadorusa.com

For a complete listing of reading group guides visit: www.picadorusa.com

Picador

What to Read Next[®]