

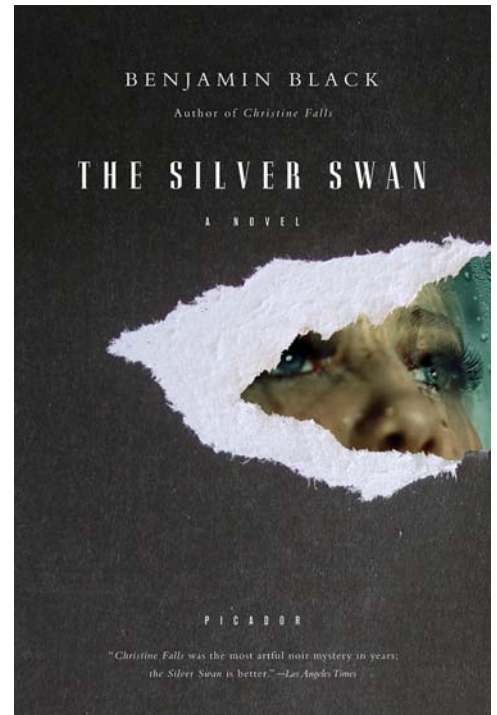
READING GROUP GUIDE

The Silver Swan A Novel

by *Benjamin Black*

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Silver Swan* 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 Silver Swan*.

About the Book

The inimitable Quirke returns in another spellbinding crime novel, in which a young woman's dubious suicide sets off a new string of hazards and deceptions

Two years have passed since the events of the bestselling *Christine Falls*, and much has changed for Quirke, the irascible, formerly hard-drinking Dublin pathologist. His beloved Sarah is dead, his surrogate father lies in a convent hospital paralyzed by a devastating stroke, and Phoebe, Quirke's long-denied daughter, has grown increasingly withdrawn and isolated.

With much to regret from his last inquisitive foray, Quirke ought to know better than to let his curiosity get the best of him. Yet when an almost forgotten acquaintance comes to him about his beautiful young wife's apparent suicide, Quirke's "old itch to cut into the quick of things, to delve into the dark of what was hidden" is roused again. As he begins to probe further into the shadowy circumstances of Deirdre Hunt's death, he discovers many things that might better have remained hidden, as well as grave danger to those he loves.

Haunting, masterfully written, and utterly mesmerizing in its nuance, *The Silver Swan* fully lives up to the promise of *Christine Falls* and firmly establishes Benjamin Black (a.k.a. John Banville) among the greatest of crime writers.

About the Author

Benjamin Black is the pen name of acclaimed author John Banville, who was born in Wexford, Ireland, in 1945. His novels have won numerous awards, most recently the Man Booker Prize in 2005 for *The Sea*. He lives in Dublin.

Discussion Questions

1. Describe Deirdre's interest in Hakeem Kreutz, as compared to her interest in Leslie White? What draws her to each of them?
2. "Why did he persist in coming here like this," Quirke wonders, about his visits to the Judge. "Surely no one would blame him if he stayed away altogether and left the dying man to his angry solitude." Why *does* Quirke continue visiting, considering all that has happened between them?
3. "Do nothing, his better judgment told him; stay on dry land. But he knew he would dive, headfirst, into the depths. Something in him yearned for the darkness down there." What is it in Quirke that pushes him towards the darkness? Does he find any relief in this story? Would he be better off ignoring this impulse?
4. Why do you think Kreutz's story of the girl brought back from the dead (p. 61) makes such an impression on Deirdre? How does it relate to what we learn about her life?
5. Describe the relationship between Quirke and Hackett? Do the two like each other? What do they have in common?
6. Why do you think Phoebe gets involved with Leslie White? What is she hoping will happen between them?
7. Do you think Deirdre loves Leslie? If not, how would you characterize her feelings for him?

8. What effect do you think Phoebe's complicated parentage (the discovery of her real father; the role of Malachy and Sarah) has on her behavior in the novel? Do you see any connection between those effects and the effect on Quirke of being an orphan?

9. Look at the exchange between Rose and Phoebe on p. 165, in which Phoebe tells Rose she admires her. What do you think she admires about Rose? And what does Rose mean when, in response, she says to Phoebe, "You certainly are your father's daughter."?

10. Do you think the relationship between Quirke and Kate is a healthy one? What brings them together? What do they get from each other?

11. Is Quirke a good father to Phoebe? How do you think he should be handling his role with her?

12. Why does Quirke fall off the wagon at the end of the story?

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