

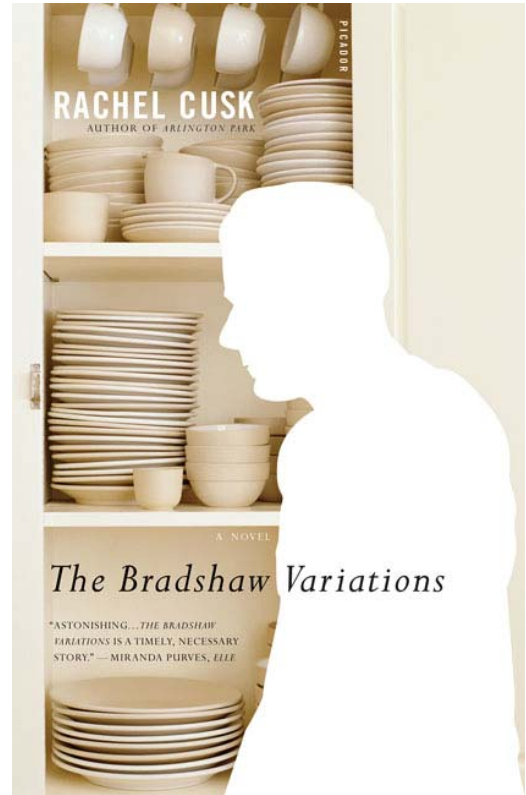
READING GROUP GUIDE

The Bradshaw Variations

A Novel

by Rachel Cusk

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About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Bradshaw Variations* 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 Bradshaw Variations*.

About the Book

Since quitting work to look after his eight-year-old daughter, Alexa, Thomas Bradshaw has found solace and nourishment in his daily piano study. But his parents and in-laws wonder why he has swapped roles with Tonie Swann, his intense, intellectual wife. And how can this be good for their daughter?

Tonie is increasingly seduced away from domestic life by the headier world of work, where long-forgotten memories of ambition are awakened. She finds herself outside their tight family circle, alive to previously unimaginable possibilities.

Over the course of a year full of crisis and revelation, we follow their fortunes, and *The Bradshaw Variations* shows Rachel Cusk to be a lyrically subversive writer at the height of her powers.

About the Author

Rachel Cusk was born in 1967. She is the author of the memoirs *A Life's Work: On Becoming a Mother* and *The Last Supper: A Summer in Italy*, and of six novels: *Saving Agnes*, which won the Whitbread First Novel Award; *The Temporary*; *The Country Life*, which won a Somerset Maugham Award; *The Lucky Ones*, which was shortlisted for the Whitbread Novel Award; *In the Fold*; and *Arlington Park*, which was shortlisted for the Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction. In 2003, Cusk was chosen as one of *Granta's* Best of Young British Novelists. She lives in Brighton, England.

Discussion Questions

1. What does the style and state of Tonie and Thomas's home say about them? Why are the differences between their home and Howard and Claudia's significant?
2. Why does Thomas think he has both special knowledge of Howard and yet does not understand him?
3. What gives Leo such feelings of "randomness" and discomfort at the gathering at their parents' home?
4. Why is Claudia so frustrated by Howard's illness? Is she lacking a vital sympathy for him?
5. How does the revelation of Thomas having left Clare for Tonie change your perspective on their relationship? Do you agree with Tonie that it is odd that Thomas claims never to think about Clare?
6. Both Tonie and Thomas's parents openly express disapproval of their new arrangement of Thomas at home and Tonie working. Is this rude, or just a natural generational reaction? How do their comments affect Thomas and Tonie?
7. Alexa often becomes a symbol of both purity and art, and is thus clung to by her parents. Does Tonie feel the loss of no longer being in "possession" of her daughter? Why does Thomas feel guiltily glad when she leaves for school?

8. Why does Thomas cry in front of his mother after he helps her move the boxes out of her house?
9. How would you characterize the relationship Claudia has with Lottie?
10. What do Thomas and Tonie's flirtations with other people reveal about their states of mind? What makes Tonie give in to Dieter?
11. What do you think about Olga's conclusions regarding the "normality" of love between a man and woman, that it means a "rigid . . . constricted, invisible life" (192)?
12. How would you describe Claudia's and Howard's reactions to Skittle's death? Why did the dog seem to add so much strain to their lives?
13. Are Tonie and Thomas guilty of anything, excluding their behavior on the day of Alexa's hospitalization?
14. The novel reads as a series of episodes, jumping between characters, viewpoints and time. Which character or episode made the greatest impression on you, and why?

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