

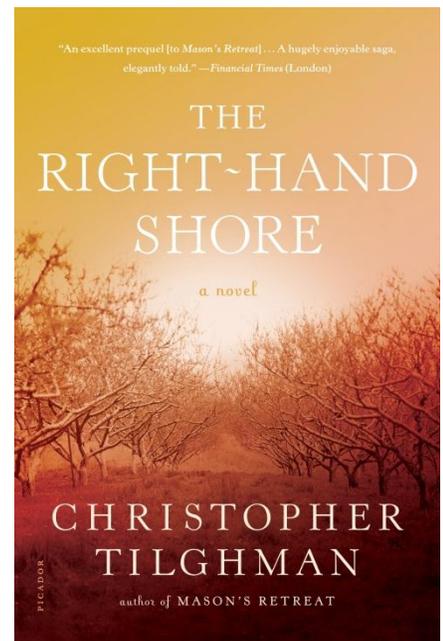
PICADOR

Reading Group Gold

The Right-Hand Shore

by Christopher Tilghman

1. What were your first impressions of Mary? How did your perception of her shift as you watched her life unfold?
2. When Ophelia's father decides to unburden himself of the risks of slaveholding, he divides his slaves into two groups. He manumits the ones he keeps, but he doesn't tell them; they continue serving him, not knowing they are free. He sells off the others at a discounted price to "the weasel-faced man from Virginia." How do the Duke's actions shape future generations of servants who work at the Retreat?
3. How does Ophelia's life with Wyatt compare to Mary's life as a single woman? How do both women contend with the preference for sons as heirs?
4. What does Randall and Thomas's friendship teach their families about race, and about the limits of devotion? How do Una and Abel try to prepare their children for the world beyond the Retreat?
5. What do Mary's years in France represent to her? What does Ophelia want her to grasp about the importance of ancestry and the ties between Europe and America?
6. While many of the Masons are expected to go through artificial courtship rituals resulting in marriage, Thomas and Beal find genuine love in secrecy. Yet Randall doesn't believe it's possible for them to have a mutually loving relationship; he thinks his sister will be exploited, just as Tabitha was exploited by Wyatt. How are Thomas and Beal able to prove Randall wrong, creating a true partnership in a society that doesn't view them as equals?
7. What role does Catholicism play in the lives of the Masons, socially and spiritually?
8. How does Maryland's history as a Civil War border state echo throughout the characters' lives? How are the Masons affected by living in a state that did not join the Confederacy?
9. Discuss the novel's title. What are the symbolic and literal differences between the Retreat and the realm of Baltimore to its west?



10. We learn early in the novel (or by reading *Mason's Retreat*) that the Retreat will fall into decline after Mary's death, with no one having "the slightest interest in saving it." Discuss the Retreat as if it were a character. Do you see it as a place of solace, or a place of destruction? Is it a good friend to those who inhabit it?
11. What is the significance of Mary's decision to convert the Retreat into a dairy farm?
12. Are the Frenches liberated or confined by the fact that they are not the Retreat's owners? In their minds, what is their place in the Masons' world?
13. The author describes Mary's adolescent attraction to Beal, and her later decision to break off her engagement to Oswald. What freedom does she find in solitude? What "family" does she create for herself later in life?
14. How did you interpret the closing conversation between Edward and Mary? Who, ultimately, is to blame for the murder? What was the effect of the preceding scene, in which Mary accidentally injures Robert Junior?
15. Discuss other works by Christopher Tilghman that you have read. How do the events revealed in *The Right-Hand Shore* shape Edward's experience in *Mason's Retreat*? What does Tilghman's other fiction help us understand about the nature of families?

About the Author

Christopher Tilghman is the author of two short story collections, *In a Father's Place* and *The Way People Run*, and two previous novels, *Mason's Retreat* and *Roads of the Heart*.



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