

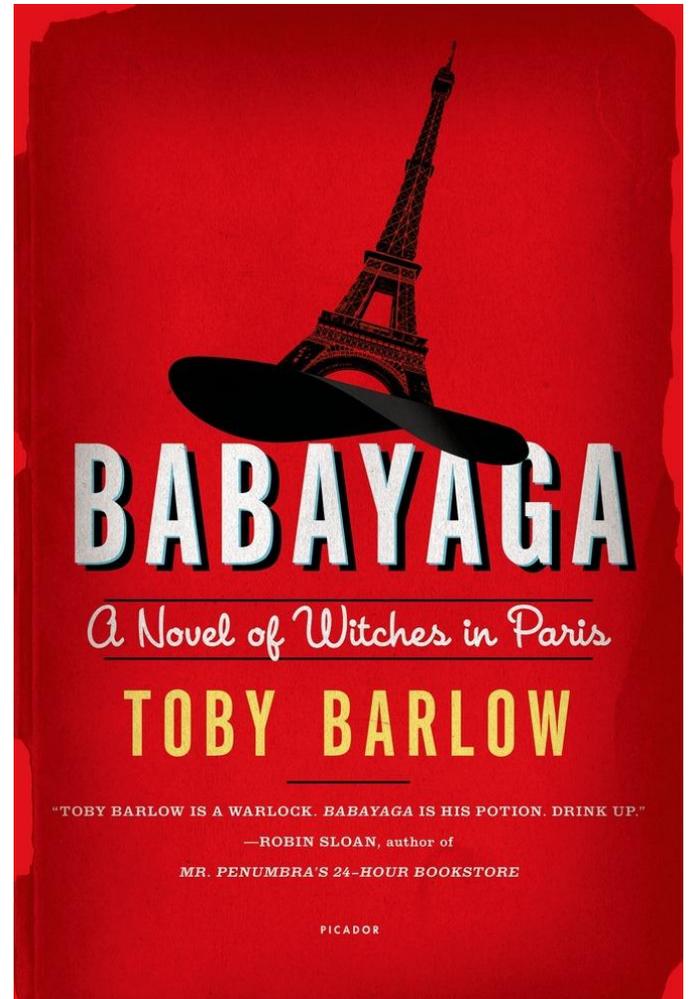
PICADOR

Reading Group Gold

Babayaga

by Toby Barlow

1. What is Elga's underlying motivation for wanting to be rid of Zoya? Do you think she really believes Zoya wanted to betray her?
2. What makes Zoya choose Will as her next lover/victim?
3. What is ironic about Vidot believing that "any fool could seduce, but it took a true intellect to know and love his partner. Women... were absolute and thrilling mysteries" (35)?
4. Does Vidot's reaction to being turned into a flea surprise you at all? What about his attitude toward his wife after discovering her affair? What do you believe the prospects are for their relationship after the book's conclusion?
5. What makes Will trust and follow Oliver, who betrays him early on, as opposed to going back to his longer-known associate Brandon to try to clear up the situation with the files? Is Will drawn to chaos, or does he believe he's doing the right thing?
6. What does Zoya teach Will about his own profession, advertising? How are their respective "professions" similar?
7. Will and his old client's perspectives on why women's hands tend to be cold (e.g. to make her too weak to fight off a mate) are echoed later by Zoya/Elga's very different viewpoint (that the blood is working in her brain to keep her one step ahead of enemies). In what ways do men and women severely misunderstand and presume the worst about one another in this story?
8. Does discovering Elga's past make you sympathetic toward her? How much revenge do you think she is entitled to? How can one measure the appropriate retribution for any oppressed individual or group?
9. What were your impressions of the witches' song interludes?
10. Is Noelle better off as a witch-in-training than she was before Elga discovered her? Do you think Zoya and Noelle will break the cycle of unjust violence?



11. Zoya muses that “coward was often only another name for survivor (88).” Is survival itself an admirable endeavor, or is it empty without any other purpose? How is the witches’ compulsion to survive similar to the self-serving desire of Will and Oliver to preserve their Parisian lifestyles?

12. Is Will cursed, or is he lucky to have crossed paths with Zoya? What about vice-versa?

About the Author

Toby Barlow is the author of *Sharp Teeth*. He lives in Detroit.



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Reading group guide written by Heather Kirkpatrick