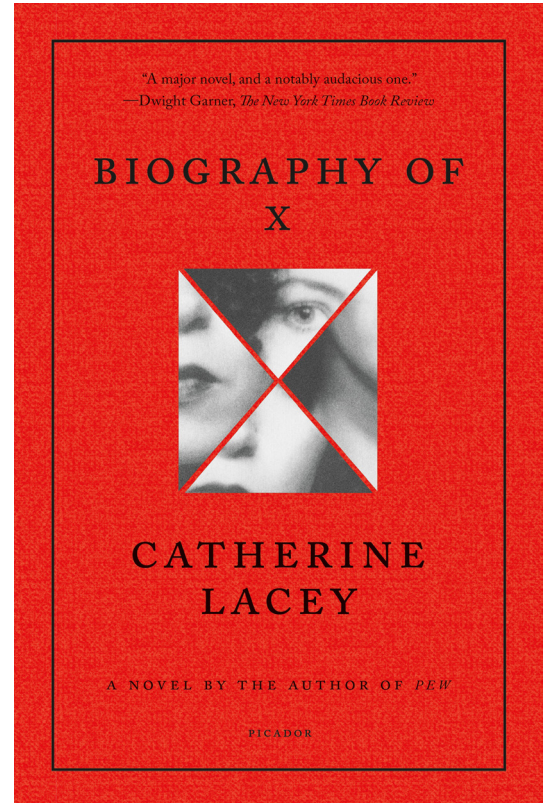


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Reading Group Gold

Biography of X

by Catherine Lacey



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This reading group guide for *Biography of X* includes discussion questions for enhancing your book club. The suggested questions are intended to help your reading group find new and interesting angles and topics for your discussion. We hope that these ideas will enrich your conversation and increase your enjoyment of the book.

Introduction

Pulsing with suspense and intellect while blending nonfiction and fiction, *Biography of X* is a roaring epic that plumbs the depths of grief, art, and love. In her most ambitious novel yet, Catherine Lacey pushes her craft to its highest level, introducing us to an unforgettable character who, in her tantalizing mystery, shows us the fallibility of the stories we craft for ourselves.

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QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In a *Guardian* review, Marcel Theroux called *Biography of X* “a lovingly made facsimile of a nonfiction book.” Discuss the structure of *Biography of X*. How does Lacey employ methods typically used in nonfiction? Why do you think she choose to approach her subject in this way? What’s the effect of doing so?
2. What did you think of CM? What do you think attracted her to X initially? Describe her relationship with X. Do you think their relationship works? Explain your answer.
3. What’s the effect of having images interspersed throughout the book? Did they enhance your understanding of the events described? If so, how? Were there other images that you would have liked to see? What were they?
4. Maureen Corrigan described *Biography of X* as “a Scheherazade-like sequence of stories.” What’s the effect of presenting X’s life in this way? How would you describe her? Do you think that CM ultimately got to the heart of who X was? Why or why not?
5. Lacey was praised by *The New Yorker* for “making uncomfortable connections between X’s fragile world and our own.” Did the inclusion of historical anecdotes and real figures change the way you thought of them or how you thought of X and her life? If so, how? Why do you think that Lacey chose to include fact and fiction within *Biography of X*?
6. Although X was widely recognized as a crucial creative force in her time, she largely kept her personal history and life story a secret, even from CM, her wife. Why do you think that X was so secretive about her life? Why do you think she was so furtive about her life story? Was there anything that CM discovered about X that was particularly surprising? If so, what made the discovery so explosive?
7. In a review for the *Los Angeles Times*, Jessica Ferri writes, “In its boldness of premise and execution, *Biography of X* goes above and beyond, under the river and through the woods. It flaunts world-building skills that the writers of HBO’s ‘Game of Thrones’ wish they’d had.” What did you think of the worlds that Lacey created? How was she able to make them seem so real? Would you have liked to spend more time in any of the worlds in *Biography of X*? Which ones and why?

Reading Group Gold

8. The relationship between X and CM often verges on toxic, particularly through instances of deception, manipulation, and the couple's imbalance of power. But can their relationship be broken down into "toxic" or "healthy"? How does CM's loyalty to her wife change over the course of the novel?
9. Lacey is from Mississippi, and her novels often reference or incorporate the culture of the American South, both positively and negatively. How does the South come across in the novel? How do the Southern characters come off compared to their Northern counterparts? How does knowing Lacey's home state change your understanding of the South within her novel? Is it a positive depiction?
10. Are there contemporary figures who remind you of X? How do you think X would've fit into our current world, particularly with the internet and social media?