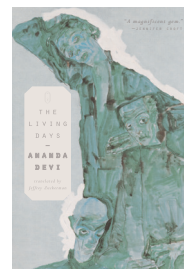


READING GROUP GUIDE

THE LIVING DAYS

by Ananda Devi, translated by Jeffrey Zuckerman

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1. The city of London is a key motif in *The Living Days*, portrayed as a site of renewal and reinvention but also alienation and hostility. How can we read Mary's physical, mental, and emotional states in relation to the city? How does the city mirror her condition, and how does it stand in opposition to it?
2. From clay figurines to living humans like Cub, Mary has a desire to control and shape these elements in her life. What do you think produces this need in Mary? Do you empathize with her?
3. Mary is emotionally attached to both Cub and Howard. However, Howard seems to represent an immaterial projection, while Cub is more concrete and real. How are Mary's perception of and desire for them different? How are they similar? What do these similarities and differences reflect about Mary?
4. The novel is unique in its depiction of romantic attraction between an old woman and a young boy. If the roles had been flipped (an old man and a young girl), would you have read and responded to the narrative differently? Why or why not?
5. Ananda Devi provides deep, intimate insight into the minds of Cub and Mary, especially their thoughts and emotions during their first few encounters. What do you think draws them to each other? How do they fulfill each other?
6. Throughout the novel, Cub is often disgusted by Mary: "The man deep within him sneered in disdain, even as he watched this pathetic, trembling, suffering thing" (54); "Feeling nauseated, he shut his eyes" (108). Yet he remains inexplicably captivated by her. Do you think Cub is actually romantically and sexually attracted to Mary? What is the nature of his emotions for her? What does he see her as?
7. Both Mary and Wanda seem to blur the lines between romantic and motherly love for Cub (72-73, 152). How does this complicate your understanding of the relationship between mother and son? Do you think Mary sees herself more as a love interest or motherly figure for Cub, or both?
8. During one of Mary's conversations with her hallucination of Howard, he gives her the option to erase parts of herself (100-101). Why do you think she chooses to erase her words?

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9. The gaze is a powerful, transformative tool in the novel: “Each night that she spent under his gaze brought a new sign of youth in the morning” (89); “Cub stopped seeing her as she had been and saw her as she was revealing herself to be” (109–10). Why is being visible and recognized so important for Mary? Do you relate to this desire? Is it universal?
10. Ultimately, *The Living Days* is a commentary on the twisted yet transcendent power of love. Has this novel changed your perspective on love? What limits (if any) should be placed on the recipient/object of one’s love?

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