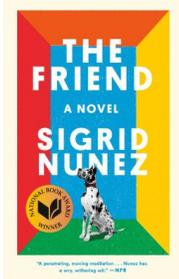


Books by the Stack



The Friend by Sigrid Nunez

Becoming the guardian of her late best friend's enormous Great Dane, a grieving woman is evicted from her no-pets apartment and forges a deep bond with the equally distraught animal in ways that initially disturb her friends.

Why you'll like it: *Psychological fiction. Introspective. Leisurely paced. Melancholy. Unconventional.*

About the Author: Sigrid Nunez is the author of the novels *Salvation City*, *The Last of Her Kind*, *A Feather on the Breath of God*, and *For Rouenna*, among others. She is also the author of *Sempre Susan: A Memoir of Susan Sontag*. She has been the recipient of several awards, including a Whiting Award, the Rome Prize in Literature, and a Berlin Prize Fellowship. Nunez lives in New York City.

Questions for Discussion

1. How is the narrator's love for her friend different from that of a wife, of which he'd had three? For years till his death, even after an early affair as student/teacher, the narrator considered him her dearest friend. Why?
2. Talk about ways in which Apollo provides comfort to the narrator. Consider, for instance, how she describes the fact that "having a huge warm body pressed along the length of your spine is an amazing comfort." What experience with dogs (and cats) have you had in terms of their uncanny ability to recognize our moods and, consciously or not, offer solace?
3. *Follow-up to Question 2:* How does the narrator comfort Apollo (above and beyond providing food and shelter)?
4. What do you think of the friend, a womanizer who slept with his students, including herself? Were his actions ethical, especially if there is equal attraction? He once said, that "the classroom was the most erotic place in the world. To deny this was puerile." Does he have a point? Why do students fall for teachers? What's the dynamic?
5. Thinking of J.M. Coetzee's character in *Disgrace*, the narrator wonders about castration as a "fix" for her friend who, with such frequency, engaged in "disgusting...antics of a dirty old man." Any thoughts?
6. Why do her own students disappoint the narrator? What are the views some espouse in their papers?
7. "If reading really does increase empathy, as we are constantly being told that it does, it appears that writing takes some away." Why does the narrator feel this way about her fellow writers?
8. There is little in *The Friend* when it comes to drama; it's primarily a study of character and an exploration of ideas. Would more action have made a difference to you in terms of how you experienced the book?

Nunez also includes a large number of quotations and stories from the works of the writers. Are they well integrated into the novel? Did you enjoy them ... or find them distracting?

(Questions provided by LitLovers)



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