
BACK BAY · READERS' PICK

READING GROUP GUIDE

TIGERS IN
RED
WEATHER

A NOVEL

LIZA KLAUSSMANN

A CONVERSATION WITH LIZA KLAUSSMANN

Liza Klausmann sits down with Antonina Jedrzejczak
of *Vogue.com*

What led you to write this book?

I had always wanted to be a novelist and finally got around to being serious about it when I moved to London to do a master's degree in creative writing in 2008. In terms of the idea for the book, my grandmother, who died really quickly after I moved to London, was a very complicated person. Nick is definitely not her, but my grandmother partially inspired the character—the idea of someone complicated who can at once be glamorous and lovely to one person and be totally suppressive to someone else.

What attracted you to writing about these three decades, starting in the forties, right after the Second World War, and ending in the late sixties, before you were born?

In a lot of ways, it was this idea of people trying to be individuals post–World War II, when you were not really supposed to be individualistic. The world was supposed to have been made whole—everyone was better and put on a happy face. It was a great time period to

put characters like these in motion because the social barriers against achieving any kind of individualism or human agency were so strong.

From a twelve-year-old girl discovering the thrills and disappointments of romance to an emotionally troubled young man, you chose to write from five very different perspectives. What was the draw to using that kind of narrative structure?

The different viewpoints were fun, actually. Writing a novel from just one vantage point could be tiresome and limiting, I think. The idea was that in a family there is not one universal truth, and the only way to approximate that is to put together all these subjective truths from different outlooks. I always think of it as a stained-glass window, sort of shoving in these different edges to make something that looks whole, but is still quite broken up.

Your great-great-great-grandfather was Herman Melville. Do you feel that his literary legacy has influenced the way you approached this book and your writing in general?

I wouldn't say that writer to writer he has influenced me. Clearly, we're miles apart, since he's a literary genius and I'm not purporting to be one; but I think in a kind of roundabout way he has influenced me in the sense that when you have someone that well known in your ancestry, your whole family comes to revere whatever it is that they have done. So I have a family that just devours books.

It's said that Melville drew inspiration for Moby-Dick from the whaling communities on Martha's Vineyard, a place where you spent much of your childhood, return to regularly, and is the setting for your book. Why did this story take place there?

Apparently, one of the big whaling captains here in Martha's Vineyard, Captain Valentine Pease, may have been the inspiration for Captain Ahab. He owned a house in Edgartown, where I am now, which Herman Melville's daughter, my great-great grandmother, bought. The house that I am in now was purchased by my grandparents in the seventies, so when I wrote *Tigers* I sort of made an amalgamation of all those houses. I have such idyllic childhood memories here that they were very easy to evoke it in my mind. On the other hand, it was such a great place to turn on its head, in the sense of showing the potential darkness and evil underneath the beautiful thing.

Summer as it is featured in the novel—hot, endless, and laden with secrets—is described in such detail that it's almost like its own character. Do you feel that the story could have worked as well set in any other season?

The choice of the heat was almost kind of subconscious! I was in London, and it was cold and rainy and I really missed American summers. The heat wave was a conscious point. It's an easy thing for people's temperatures to rise when it gets hot, and, in a way, it always makes for a good mystery element. I don't think there'd be nearly as much pleasure in drinking a gin and tonic in the middle of February!

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Does *Tigers in Red Weather* have a main character? If so, who do you think it is?
2. What does the murder represent in the novel? Does it have equal impact on all of the characters?
3. Is Nick a heroine or villain? Do you believe her assertion that she didn't have an affair with Tyler? Does she really love Daisy, or does she resent her?
4. What brings about Hughes's newfound feelings for Nick later in the novel? Is there a specific catalyst?
5. Hughes finds Ed's behavior disturbing throughout the novel, but it's not just the boy's actions he's threatened by. How does Ed's way of thinking, and the knowledge he's accumulated, threaten Hughes's relationships and his world?
6. Why is the first-person used only in Ed's section?
7. *Tigers in Red Weather* is divided into five sections, each focused

on a different character. Which sections did you enjoy most and least, and why? What do you think we're meant to feel about each of the characters? How does the author show us that something is off about Ed long before his first-person narration grants us a window into his psyche?

8. Why does Helena stay with Avery, despite her unhappiness?
9. Why is so much of Daisy's character told from a child's point of view? What does that say about her role in the novel?
10. On page 134, after witnessing Tyler and Peaches kiss, Daisy wishes she could be like Scarlett O'Hara, independent and free, and forget about Tyler, but she's also scared. When you were a child, who were your role models, literary or otherwise? What did they represent for you? Now that you're older, whom do you look up to?
11. If you ranked the characters from most to least moral, where do they stand?
12. What does the title of the book mean? How is the poem related to the story?
13. On page 298, Ed tries to explain to Hughes his hunch that people are "going about it all the wrong way." What do you think Ed means? Which people, and what would Ed approve of as the "right" way? Why does Ed's comment so unsettle Hughes?
14. On page 351, Nick says to Hughes, "It's the strangest thing, but I have this feeling . . . Like everything . . ." And Hughes replies, "Yes. Everything is." Complete Nick's sentence for her. What do

you imagine she's trying to say? Given the circumstances, is there any other way to interpret it? Why do you think the author chose to leave this vague, and how did it affect your experience as a reader?

15. What did you make of the ending of *Tigers in Red Weather*? Do you think Ed is rehabilitated?

LIZA KLAUSSMANN'S BOOKSHELF

Tender Is the Night, F. Scott Fitzgerald

For me, the longing expressed in this book is what gives it its power; things said and unsaid. The sense that Fitzgerald gives of the characters being only able to brush their fingertips against the magic, the glamour, the beauty, without being able to fully grasp it or own it, was a huge influence on me as a writer, and in particular the way I imagined the atmosphere in *Tigers in Red Weather*.

The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens

Wallace Stevens's poetry has had a profound effect on me, which is why my title is borrowed from one of his poems, "Disillusionment of Ten O'Clock." On a very basic level, I find his language and rhythms extremely beautiful and satisfying. I am also fascinated by the idea that the imagination is the primary tool for organizing and affecting the world around us.

***The Blind Assassin*, Margaret Atwood**

Margaret Atwood is a brilliant writer for so many reasons. But when I was writing *Tigers in Red Weather*, I was thinking a lot about the structure of *The Blind Assassin*—a story within a story, which forces the reader to question what is real, as well as who is actually narrating the tale.

The Ripley Novels, Patricia Highsmith

Ripley is one of the great antiheroes of modern fiction. A sort of gentleman serial killer. Highsmith's ability to make readers sympathize and align themselves with someone so fundamentally amoral and murderous is a brilliant feat.

***Blonde*, Joyce Carol Oates**

I find this huge novel amazing in Oates's use of mimesis. The structure, as well as the language, perfectly mimics the inner world and thoughts of the characters. Oates has said that a lot of the time, the characters' voices run through her head like ticker tape, which is so clear in *Blonde*.

***Play It As It Lays*, Joan Didion**

A fabulously pared-down novel, which portrays this flat inner life, the world of someone who has become detached from his or her own reality. It hugely influenced the way I think about suffering, the way emotional deprivation can manifest itself through withdrawal from one's own life.

***Dombey and Son*, Charles Dickens**

I love this book for all the reasons one loves Dickens: for its mixture of deep sadness and humor, the highly imaginative characterization, its associative language, and its page-turning quality.

***Peyton Place*, Grace Metalious**

This is melodrama at its best: potboiling, pulpy, and voyeuristic. I'm also fascinated by the tragic/melodramatic story of Grace Metalious's own life.

***The Sun Also Rises*, Ernest Hemingway**

Hemingway is a master of implication, and *The Sun Also Rises* is my favorite example of this; it's a bold, brave thing not to feel compelled to answer all the questions for the reader.

CHARACTER PLAYLISTS FOR *TIGERS IN RED WEATHER*

Nick, “Anything Goes”

1. “I’m Gonna Move to the Outskirts of Town”—Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five
2. “Les nuits d’une demoiselle”—Colette Renard
3. “Southern Rain”—Cowboy Junkies
4. “The Nearness of You”—Jo Stafford
- 4a. “I Gotta Right to Sing the Blues”—Louis Armstrong
5. “Almost Like Being in Love”—Frank Sinatra
6. “Sittin’ Here Drinkin’”—Muddy Waters
7. “Hallelujah”—Jeff Buckley
8. “A String of Pearls”—Glenn Miller Orchestra
9. “Song to the Siren”—This Mortal Coil
10. “Love in Vain”—Robert Johnson
11. “Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea”—Mel Tormé
12. “Songbird”—Fleetwood Mac
13. “How Sweet You Are”—Jo Stafford
14. “Anything Goes”—Cole Porter
15. “In the Mood”—Glenn Miller Orchestra
16. “Don’t Get Around Much Anymore”—Duke Ellington
17. “Tiger Rag”—Louis Armstrong

Daisy and Hughes, “He Will Break Your Heart”

1. “Ain’t That a Shame” —Fats Domino
2. “Come Go with Me” —The Del-Vikings
3. “Fly Me to the Moon” —Julie London
4. “Get a Job” —The Silhouettes
5. “He Will Break Your Heart” —Jerry Butler and the

Impressions

6. “Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me” —Mel Carter
7. “I Can Dream, Can’t I?” —The Andrew Sisters
8. “I’ve Got You Under My Skin” —Frank Sinatra
9. “It’s Just a Matter of Time” —Brook Benton
10. “Johnny B. Goode” —Chuck Berry
11. “Just One Look” —Doris Troy
12. “Kansas City” —Wilbert Harrison
13. “Love Potion No. 9” —The Clovers
14. “Manhattan” —Ella Fitzgerald
15. “Moon River” —Henry Mancini
16. “On the Street Where You Live” —Vic Damone
17. “P.S. I Love You” —Frank Sinatra
18. “Poison Ivy” —The Coasters
19. “Shangri-La” —Peggy Lee
20. “Since I Don’t Have You” —The Skyliners
21. “Sleepwalk” —Santo and Johnny
22. “Smoke Gets in Your Eyes” —The Platters
23. “Tears on My Pillow” —Little Anthony and the Imperials
24. “There Goes My Baby” —The Drifters

Helena, “Brown-Eyed Girl”

1. “Ode to Billie Joe” —Bobbie Gentry
2. “Reflections” —Diana Ross and the Supremes

3. *Moonlight* Sonata—Beethoven
4. “Expressway to Your Heart”—Soul Survivors
5. “Somethin’ Stupid”—Frank Sinatra and Nancy Sinatra
6. “Never My Love”—The Association
7. “The Letter”—The Box Tops
8. “Brown Eyed Girl”—Van Morrison
9. “Dancing in the Moonlight”—King Harvest
10. “Midnight Confessions”—The Grass Roots
11. “Red Red Wine”—Neil Diamond
12. “Spanish Harlem”—Aretha Franklin
13. “Sweet Jane”—The Velvet Underground
14. “Time of the Season”—The Zombies
15. “God Only Knows”—The Beach Boys

Ed, “A Whiter Shade of Pale”

1. “Light My Fire”—The Doors
2. “A Whiter Shade of Pale”—Procol Harum
3. “For What It’s Worth”—Buffalo Springfield
4. “She’s a Rainbow”—The Rolling Stones
5. “I Can See for Miles”—The Who
6. “To Love Somebody”—The Bee Gees
7. “I Think We’re Alone Now”—Tommy James and the Shondells
8. “Ruby Tuesday”—The Rolling Stones
9. “All You Need Is Love”—The Beatles

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