

Discussion Questions for *The Winter Soldier* by Daniel Mason

1. The novel begins with an epigraph from a 1918 French book on neurological and psychological injuries in war. What different meanings (contemporary and otherwise) can you think of for the word “affections”? How might these different meanings relate to the plot of the book?
2. While the story mostly follows Lucius following his entry into medicine, there are frequent flashbacks to childhood. Which important moments in Lucius’ childhood can you identify? How do they shape the person he becomes and the decisions that he makes?
3. Consider Lucius across the duration of the book. How do you see him changing during this period? How is he a different person when the book ends?
4. What might you say about Lucius’ friendships? What are they based on? Does this change as he gets older?
5. A number of images repeat themselves throughout the book. What is the role that they play, either in representing something from Lucius’ life, or the larger movements of history? You may wish to consider:
 - a. The *Grottenolm* (p 7, p 123). What aspects of this little creature recapitulate themes of the book (for example, you may wish to think about translucency, blindness, its association with childhood and innocence)
 - b. The myth of Cadmus and the dragon’s teeth (p 222, p 287)
 - c. The Uzhok meteorite (p 37, p 216)
 - d. The mermaid (p 20, p 252)
 - e. Hidden parents (p 9, p 82)
 - f. X-rays (p. 16 and onwards)
6. This is a book of wounds, from the physical to the mental. Considering the different wounded characters, what do you think is the role of visibility and invisibility? How do characters’ wounds shape not only their experiences, but their understanding of themselves?
7. The inset to the book depicts a winged hussar from an early 17th century illustration. While the events of the novel take place in World War 1, much of Lucius’ conception of war comes from his father romantic tales of chivalry. How do you think such stories shaped Lucius and the decisions he makes?
8. What are the different roles that medicine plays in Lucius’ life? How does his relationship to medicine and patients change over time? How is this revealed, for

example, by his interactions with the old Italian man with a brain tumor (p 13), Margarete's illness (p 152), or patients' families (p 225)?

9. Who do you think is the "the winter soldier" of the title?
10. What role does love play in the story? Do you feel that the ending represents an embrace, a transformation, or a relinquishing of love?
11. Towards the end of the novel, we read "But what he was seeking was forgiveness and atonement, and he couldn't think of any worthy offering to give." What role do themes of atonement and forgiveness play in the novel? Do you agree with Lucius at this point, does he have a "worthy offering" to give?
12. *Primum non nocere* (First, do no harm) is a fundamental principal of medicine, at one point (p 229), Lucius refers to his fateful decision as "his crime." Do you agree? What, in the context of the novel, does it mean to "do no harm"?