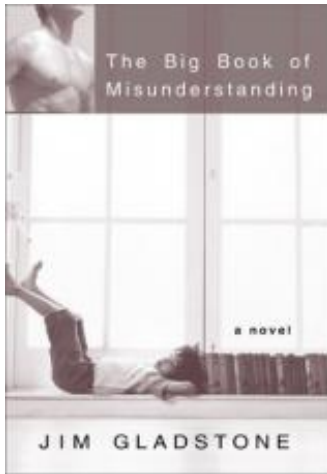


The Big Book of Misunderstanding

by Jim Gladstone



About the Book

The Big Book of Misunderstanding is a refreshingly candid novel that combines the emotional depth of Sue Miller with the comic verve of Stephen MacCauley. The story opens as Joshua Royalton - 22-years-old, gay, and an aspiring children's book writer - briefly contemplates suicide, asking himself the question:

"Do I have to end my life to end my childhood?"

To come up with his answer, Josh leads readers on a tumultuous jaunt through his family history. The Royaltons, Josh explains, are "like Norman Rockwell run amok, so wholesome it's perverse." Rendering the feverish - and often hilarious - imagination of a troubled youngster's mind with pitch-perfect accuracy, Jim Gladstone takes readers on a wild ride through pop cultural touchstones of the 1970s and 1980s while maintaining a sense of emotional intimacy that will keep readers highly invested in the developing lives of the Royalton family.

The Big Book of Misunderstanding is about the members of a family who insist on figuring out how to love each other despite their differences? and despite the indelible similarities they sometimes wish they didn't share.

Discussion Guide

1. **The Big Book of Misunderstanding** has been described as "the story of one family's collective adolescence." How does each member of the Royalton family "grow up" or become more mature over the course of the novel?
2. In the novel's second scene, Josh recalls a hallucination from a childhood bout of fever. At the end of the book, when he awakens in his father's house, Josh metaphorically refers to his time in the Elbow Bends as "a fever dream." Discuss the relationship between Josh's childhood fantasy and the months he lives in the Elbow Bends?

3. Josh and his brother Lewis deal with their father using remarkably different strategies. How are each of the boys successful and unsuccessful in their approaches?
4. It has often been said that as children become adults, they unconsciously model themselves on their parents. To what extent do Josh and Lewis seem similar to - and different from - Harris and Becca by the novel's end?
5. Compare Josh's romantic relationships with Meredith, Vincent and Eugenio. Which relationship do you think affects Josh the most within the book? Which relationship do you think would end up having the most impact on Josh in the future, beyond the end of **The Big Book of Misunderstanding**?
6. As a youngster, Josh frequently compares his own family life to that of the Cleyskil family. On the other hand, one of the Cleyskil children refers to Harris Royalton as "a great dad" in comparison to his own father. Josh and Lewis are also intrigued by the Spanner family. What are the differences and appeals of these three households?
7. What does Harris Royalton value most throughout the novel, and why? How does this affect his ability to meet the rest of his family's needs? Do the other members of the Royalton family have different values than Harris?
8. Josh's namesake grandfather is a major presence throughout the novel. Why does Josh generate a significant fantasy life around this man he barely knew? Discuss Josh's imaginings about his grandfather in relation to Josh's struggles with Harris?
9. In addition to being about finding one's identity within a family, **The Big Book of Misunderstanding** is about finding one's voice as a writer. What is the significance of Josh's fascination with children's books? What is the role of Josh's blank book throughout the novel and how does this change in the final scene?

Author Bio

Jim Gladstone is a Philadelphia native currently living in Paris, is a creative consultant and writer. His wide-ranging cultural commentary and criticism has appeared in publications including *The New York Times Book Review*, *Billboard*, *SPIN*, *Lambda Book Report*, and a host of major daily newspapers including *The Chicago Tribune*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *The Atlanta Constitution*. His fiction and personal essays have been anthologized and published in several literary magazines.

He has moderated and served on panels at national literary gatherings including Outwrite, The Lambda Literary Festival and Bouchercon and created writing seminars for students at every level, from elementary schoolers to post-grad adults.

Gladstone's writing has also graced tampon packages, encouraged the consumption of fresh turkey products, and been declaimed by the world's most popular red and yellow spokescandies.

Educated at Yale College, the University of Pennsylvania, and the Prague Seminars, Gladstone's checkered past includes stints as a devoted bookseller, library staff member, radio commentator, writing teacher, and leotard-clad Playboy Club dancer.

Critical Praise

"THIS IS A SHARP BOOK, full of sad-funny feelings. Starting from the candy wrappers, toy parts, and over-loved stuffed animals scattered on childhood's floor, Gladstone traces a young man's journey to self-sensitivity, with hilarious and painful turns along the way."

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