

Winterton Blue

by Trezza Azzopardi



About the Book

A *New York Times* Best Book of 2007, the breathtaking third novel from Booker Prize finalist and national bestselling author Trezza Azzopardi is at once a powerful love story and an intricately plotted mystery that explores the staying power of family and memory, and the pull of unlikely but destined romance.

Discussion Guide

1. The power of the past over the present plays an extremely important role in this novel. Begin your discussion of the novel by considering its narrative structure, the way in which details of the characters' lives, past and present, are slowly spooled out to the reader. How effective is this? Consider the ways in which memories come unbidden into character's minds. Think about the importance of seemingly ordinary objects and the memories that lurk beneath their surface.
2. Discuss how the novel explores the idea of family. Consider the traditional concept of family, and recount ways in which the various characters search for this 'ideal' and whether they come up short. Talk about notions of love and duty as they relate to Anna and her move to Yarmouth and to Lewis in his desperate search for his mother. How does Rita fit in, and Vernon? How far do you agree with Manny's statement about family: 'I've got a son I don't want and a daughter who don't want me. I reckon that just about makes you family' (p. 244).
3. The bulk of the novel takes place against the backdrop of wind swept Yarmouth. How does this landscape reflect the characters' inner lives, and how does it affect change in them? Consider the remoteness of the Norfolk shore, the constant buffeting of the wind, and the presence of the ocean.
4. 'The memories he'd like to forget trail him like scavenging dogs; all the good moments are lost in his need to escape them' (p. 134). How far is this true of Lewis's life? Why does he want to 'be no one again' (p. 26) when he returns to London from Cardiff? Consider whether you think Lewis is aware that his constant running and hiding is not going to

help him?what about his statement that "You can't undo. You can't not see what you've seen" (p. 47).

5. In addition to being constantly on the move, Lewis hopes to keep the past at bay by maintaining control over the physical details of his life. He thinks that a "life without objects is easier to bear, because objects store memories, and memories are like quicksand" (p. 47). Discuss some of the ways in which Lewis attempts to achieve this kind of life. How successful is he? Why do you think he feels the need to be in control? How do his feelings for Anna fit into this?

6. While Lewis is paralyzed by an event that took place in his childhood and lives his life trying to hide from the past, Rita lives very much in the present. Yet there are chinks in the cheery surface of her life that point to a poignant past. Find examples of ways she holds onto the past, and consider her coping mechanisms in the face of difficulties.

7. Toward the end of the novel, after Anna's near-drowning, Rita reveals her strength as a mother. Was this surprising to you? Think about intimations earlier in the novel that suggested this strength of character. In one of the most moving scenes in the book, Rita gives Lewis her tourmaline ring and, in so doing, gives her blessing to his relationship with Anna. What do you think she sees in Lewis that enables her to do this?

8. When Anna goes to look after her mother she describes her situation as "noble and selfless daughter going to look after mad old widow in the middle of nowhere" (p. 68). How far would you agree with her assessment? Does Anna's sense of duty to her mother change and, if so, why? How well does Anna know her mother?

9. How do Anna and her mother undermine each other? Are they ever supportive of each other? What do we learn about them during their time in Crete together?how far would you say their relationship advances?

10. How does Anna's relationship with Lewis change her relationship with her mother and Vernon? Consider role reversals in Anna's relationship with her mother?who, ultimately, is looking after whom?

11. Drowning and the fear of drowning runs on many levels as a theme throughout the novel and culminates in Anna's intervention of Lewis's attempted drowning of Carl. Analyze the various characters' responses to water ? Rita, Anna, Lewis, Anna's father ? and talk about the importance of Anna's dreams about water. For Anna and Lewis what do water and drowning represent?

12. Throughout Lewis's memories of his childhood we learn many details about his brother, Wayne, and their mother. Describe his relationship with his brother, and with his mother. Consider whether he ever expresses feelings of anger toward his brother for the trouble he consistently landed them in, ending with the drowning. What about feelings toward his mother for making him responsible for his brother? What is the main source of guilt that Lewis still suffers? How could this have led him to try to exert control over the rest of his life?

13. Lewis's brother, Wayne, suffered from epilepsy, and several of his fits are described. Discuss how this illness contributes toward the theme of control/loss of control that dominates the book. What about Rita's little lapses of consciousness? And Anna only confiding in her mother about past boyfriends when she has had too much to drink? Find instances throughout the novel where mental anguish manifests itself through physical illness.

14. Manny plays a crucial role in helping Lewis to gain a certain sense of closure about his brother's death. What are your feelings toward Manny? What does he represent in the novel?

15. Compare Anna's relationship with her mother with Lewis's relationship with his. How are they both dominated by them? How does Anna's relationship change during the course of the novel? After meeting Anna, Lewis comes to a realization about why he went to see his mother "now, after Anna, he understands: it's because she would never come looking for him" (p. 164). What does he mean by this? Do you think, even though he never meets with his mother, that his relationship with her changes over the course of the novel?

16. When Anna first sees Lewis she sees in him "a look of desolation which couldn't be combed out or polished off. She understood in this second how they shared this quality" (p. 126). While the source of Lewis's entrenched sadness is easy to understand, Anna's is less easy to pinpoint. Analyze why Anna sees herself as desolate. What is she looking for and why is life always coming up short for her? What is the purpose of Brendan in the narrative, and consider the reasons why he remains only a platonic friend.

17. Lewis states that he is looking for "peace and presence, and what was left of his family; he wanted his history back" (p. 164). To what extent does Lewis achieve any of these aims by the end of the novel? What does it mean, to gain back one's history? What does it mean to Lewis? Talk about the importance of falling in love with Anna in helping Lewis to move on with his life away from his past? would he have been able to move forward without her?

18. At one point Brendan states "Give me bedlam over boredom any day" (p. 39). Explore the different characters in the light of this statement and examine how their search for one or the other determines their actions.

19. Anna's father/Rita's husband lingers over the novel as a strong but mysterious presence. Discuss Anna's relationship with him, and the effect of his death on her. Anna "keeps her memories of her father underwater" (p. 124)? what do you think she means by this and how does it relate to the theme of memory in the rest of the novel?

20. Consider Rita and Vernon's relationship. What do you think is the catalyst for Vernon's marriage proposal? Compare the ease of their relationship to that of Anna and Lewis's complicated affair.

21. The final image of the novel captures Anna and Lewis, perched above the ocean, warily allowing themselves to fall in love. Through this image what do you think the author hopes to convey about their relationship in particular and about love in general. What do you think the future holds for Anna and Lewis?

Author Bio

Trezza Azzopardi was born in Cardiff. She is a graduate of the Creative Writing School at the University of East Anglia. She is the author of **Remember Me** and **The Hiding Place**, a national bestseller and Booker Prize finalist, and lives in Norwich, England.

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