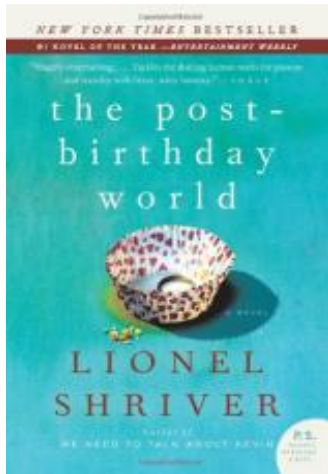


# The Post-Birthday World

by Lionel Shriver



## About the Book

American children's book illustrator Irina McGovern enjoys a secure, settled life in London with her smart, loyal, disciplined partner, Lawrence --- until the night she finds herself inexplicably drawn to kissing another man, a passionate, extravagant, top-ranked snooker player. Two competing alternate futures hinge on this single kiss, as Irina's decision --- to surrender to temptation or to preserve her seemingly safe partnership with Lawrence --- will have momentous consequences for her career, her friendships and familial relationships, and the texture of her daily life.

## Discussion Guide

1. In **The Post-Birthday World**, we get to see Irina lead two very different lives based on a choice she makes between two men. Have you ever wondered what your life would be like had you chosen a different path?
2. In each universe that Irina inhabits, she is drawn to the man she let go. Do we always want what we can't have? Why are the choices that we didn't make so appealing in retrospect?
3. In the characters of Lawrence and Ramsey, Irina is offered the choice between two opposites: where Lawrence is predictable, Ramsey is wild; where Ramsey is extravagant, Lawrence is disciplined. Do you think that by casting the men so differently Shriver is portraying general male stereotypes, or is there some truth in these characters? What are the pros and cons of each man as a partner? Do women prefer one type to another at different times in their lives? Why?
4. Is Irina the same person in her relationship with Lawrence as she is in her relationship with Ramsey? Do you think that the person you're with determines the person you are, or would you be the same person no matter with whom you're in a relationship?
5. Irina is happy and unhappy in both universes, with both men. Who do you think Irina is happiest with? If she had both

men before her and could see her different lives with each, which man would she choose? Which man would you choose to be with?

6. Irina is a self-sufficient and highly successful woman, yet throughout **The Post-Birthday World** she believes that her ultimate happiness will come from a man. Does Irina's recognition that she needs a man in her life characterize her as a throwback to a pre-feminist era, or can she need a man in her life and still be self-actualized?

7. Children are completely absent from this story. How does this affect the characters, their decisions, and their relationships?

8. How much of our choice about the person we end up in a relationship with has to do with fate and how much has to do with the decisions we make over the course of our lives? And are the decisions you might make in your 20s different from the choices you'd make in your 30s, 40s, or 50s?

## Author Bio

Lionel Shriver's fiction includes **THE MANDIBLES**; **PROPERTY**; the National Book Award finalist **SO MUCH FOR THAT**; the *New York Times* bestseller **THE POST-BIRTHDAY WORLD**; and the international bestseller **WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN**, adapted for a 2010 film starring Tilda Swinton. Her journalism has appeared in the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal* and many other publications. She's a regular columnist for the *Spectator* in Britain and *Harper's Magazine* in the US. She lives in London and Brooklyn, New York.

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**Publication Date:** February 26, 2008

**Genres:** Fiction

**Paperback:** 544 pages

**Publisher:** Harper Perennial

**ISBN-10:** 0061187895

**ISBN-13:** 9780061187896