



Book Club in a Bag

Discussion Questions

“The High Mountains of Portugal” by Yann Martel

1. In “The High Mountains of Portugal” as in, say, “Life of Pi”, Yann Martel explores the discrepancy between reality and myth. How do you see this discrepancy play out in this novel? Talk about the ways in which what the eye sees differs from what the soul knows.
2. What is the title's significance? Consider the fact that Tomas arrives in Portugal to find a "treeless steppe" and Peter Tovy finds a "barren savannah." There's not a peak in sight for either man.
3. Why does Tomas decide to walk backward? Talk about this passage:

Walking backwards, his back to the world, his back to God, he is not grieving. He is objecting. Because when everything cherished by you in life has been taken away, what else is there to do but object??

Does this statement ring true, or is it misguided?

4. What are the consolations for profound loss and grief explored and hinted at by Yann Martel in “The High Mountains of Portugal”?
5. Of the three quests, which did you enjoy reading most?
6. What is the symbolic significance of the chimp in each of the stories? How are each of the men changed by the chimp?
7. How does Peter Tovy's life and story finally weave all three stories together? Or does it? Do you feel satisfied with the way the novel ends?
8. Do you enjoy Yann Martel's whimsy and his heavy dependence on metaphor? Or do you find his work difficult to grasp, perhaps even arcane? Does his use of symbolism and magical realism deepen your understanding of his themes...or confound you?

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